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Incorporating Ethics-Awareness Competence in China Translator-Training Programme

Jie Wang^{1*} Yuanyuan Li²

¹Teaching Assistant, Queens University Belfast, Northern Ireland

²Lecturer, Huaiyin Normal University, China

Corresponding Author: Jie Wang, E-mail: jwang13@qub.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the imperative of embedding ethics-awareness competence in translator-training programmes in China, and illustrates the components and methodology that such training involves. Although ethical issues have been approached from a variety of perspectives in the wider discipline of Translation Studies in China, discussion about the role of ethics-awareness in professional translation practice has tended to centre on the perceived qualities of loyalty or fidelity to the source text rather than exploring ethics as a value-based professional system. Moreover, there has been little discussion as to how ethics-awareness might be presented in the translator-training curriculum. This paper adopts a more reflective and critical stance towards ethical issues, and in particular as to how ethics might be taught through the application of “identity-state-explain” model under social constructivism. There are different interpretations between ethics and experience, while this paper will evaluate the perspectives of deontologists and consequentialists, discussing ethics in order both to present a practice-based discussion that draws upon ethics as an abstract system that is concerned to shape and control behaviours. Everything discussed here has a real-world value, calling as it does for a different approach to translator-training than has hitherto been adopted. The paper will also seek to make a series of pedagogic recommendations that bring together real-world concerns with the enhanced professionalization of the role of the translator in today’s technological landscape. This competence is undeniably about text and how text is used, but professional translators also have to think for themselves what ethics might mean in different situations, to assess whether an activist stance may or may not be appropriate, and how the subject of translation itself is being publicly represented.

1.INTRODUCTION

In the last number of decades, translation industry in China has gone through tremendous development in response to the conditions underpinning China’s continued emergence onto the international stage, economically, politically, and culturally (Ren, 2003). However, professional practice in China has continued to develop in a chaotically random and unregulated way. Translation providers vary greatly in scale, management and cost, one of the central problems being that there are no stringent entry requirements into the profession in place; quality appraisal and monitoring systems are not yet established, and poor translations - in terms of accuracy, fitness for purpose, and cultural and intercultural awareness- flood the market. Therefore, the time is proper and ripe for translators to begin to be trained to meet the demands of this complex new

marketplace in which translation must be flexible, effective and of high ethically professional quality. However, discussion of ethics has been overtaken by other issues in translation training field although ethical issues have been approached from a variety of angles in translation studies. Only recent years have witnessed some rapid and far-reaching changes in addressing questions of ethics in the academic literature on translation and interpreting (Berman 2000, Koskinen 2000, Chesterman 2001, Goodwin 2010, Baker and Maier 2011, Inghilleri 2012, Pym 2016, amongst others). Although, with very few exceptions, this interest has not been reflected in the curricula for training translators in any sustainable way, the situation is now likely to change rapidly for a number of reasons, the most important of which concern the following: increased accountability; increased engagement by professional translators

with issues of ethics and a growing willingness among them to exercise moral judgement (Banks, 2013). It is a discussion concerned to bring translators' roles and ethics back into the socio-professional sphere, strengthening translators' in terms of what they profess as practitioners, rather than simply accounting for their behaviour. Much needs to be done to raise translator status and to establish the industry as maturely professional. Moreover, another critical ethical dimension emerges in this rapidly developing technological era, when the range of activities in which translators engage is continually developing and expanding, translators' ethics may need to be repositioned within a wider set. The simple conclusion here is that the most effective solution is to develop translators' ethics-awareness competence within a programme aimed at comprehensive professionalisation, so that in the final analysis translators may be accepted as fully-fledged professional practitioners. Very few, if any, training programmes incorporate explicit teaching on ethics in Chinese translation curricula in spite of consensus elsewhere that translator professionalism and ethical training go hand in hand. The corresponding paucity of research has led to the fact that the inculcation of a sophisticated translators' ethics-awareness, linked to a good working sense of contractual rights and obligations as well as responsibilities, is only now beginning to emerge in inclusive translator-training programmes in China – although not to the exclusion that this paper will also explore.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the “ethical turn” has emerged and undergone significant development in contemporary Western Translation Studies (Chesterman 1997; Pym 2001; Kenny 2011), less attention has been paid to it by translation researchers and trainers in China (Li 2013: 22; Zhong 2016: 203-220). Trainers need to introduce theories on translation ethics initially. Here, possible theories might include those of Chesterman, who has attempted to develop a code of translator ethics (Chesterman 1997: 150), as well introducing trainees to deontological codes and consequentialist evaluations. Other theories such as Pym's acknowledgment of positive intervention (2012) can be progressively introduced so that trainees become aware of their own interventionist rights and possibilities. Once again, trainee choice – and therefore ethical position – is seen as diverse in terms of possible solutions, and always contingent upon the nature of the specific translation event.

The reason the researcher propose ‘ethics-awareness competence’ is in response to the situation of current

of ethical considerations. The growing demand for the application of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools as a means to speed up the translation process and reduce its costs has been transforming the way texts are approached, apprehended and, of course, produced. As a result, ethical issues, such as remuneration disparities, accountability, ownership, and quality issues of the end product (Drugan 2013) arising from the repositioning of the translator in an increasingly challenging technological environment have emerged widely in discussion, with the result that classroom training must necessarily approach these issues within the contexts in which they occur.

translator training and of practical professional translation experience. In simple terms, ethics-awareness is a sense of responsibility towards the impact, purpose, rights and methods of the work that translators bring to their relationships with authors, clients and publishers (Kruger and Crots 2014: 152-153). On a practical level, on the one hand, a large number of translations in China have recently been exposed as fraudulent and spurious (Mu and Yang 2012). Due to low rates of pay, unscrupulous translators tend to translate at an astonishing speed. This means that although crudely-rendered translations save translators' time, they do the general practice of translation a disservice in the eyes of the public by leaving readers with the impression that readability and comprehension lie outside the capabilities of translation. On a business level, on the other hand, the translation market in China is still unregulated (Sun 2017: 121-124). Pricing varies greatly as a result of fierce competition, whereby regional difference in pricing is particularly remarkable. It is believed that at least one million people are providing translation services in China, but only a small portion of them hold professional qualifications (China Language Service Industry Report: 2018); therefore, the quality of translation varies significantly. My personal experiences demonstrate this phenomenon – in the form of two projects I was recently offered: one was a 630-page medical translation monograph scheduled to be published after translation, while I was only allowed 40 days to work on it at a flat-rate of 15,000 RMB (roughly £1704) and the other case was the translation of a 6,930,000 character online novel at a pro-rata rate of 40 RMB (£5) per 1000 words. I informed these commissioners that my professionalism, experience and doctoral studies in translation merited a higher rate, with the result that both of these projects were then offered to other translators, prepared to work cheaper (and impossibly fast) without requiring any royalty statements. The fact of the marketplace is that

poor remuneration makes less-professional translators both blind to the weaknesses of the contract they have signed and oblivious to the guarantee of translator copyright. Translators will only be careful and judicious once they have been able to assert their own professionalism and receive professional rates of pay. In terms of enhancing trainee translators' copyright awareness within this cut-throat marketplace, current Chinese copyright law reserves for the author the exclusive right to copy and circulate work; this strictly limits the translator's control of the translated text, resulting not merely in an economic disadvantage to the translator but in the continuing cultural marginality of translation (as Venuti noted also of translation in the West: 1995: 24), which is the hallmark of today's Chinese translation market (Yinquan 2008). The impoverishment of translators' self-awareness of their rights and responsibilities impacts hugely on trainee translators' ethical decisions.

Not only has ethics a key role to play in the context of specific translation projects, but in the West ethics has for some time now been considered as essential to the wider professionalisation of translation (see Chesterman 2000; Pym 2001) - although, as we have noted, few scholars have taken it as a component of translator competence. Chesterman (2000: 15-27), as a scholar notably committed to such an enterprise, proposed a regulation of the ethical elements or norms of translation by characterising four models of ethics: truth (representation), loyalty (service), understanding (communication), and trust (norm-based). Even though this classification has much to recommend it and has been widely accepted, it has disadvantages in that these ethical models are drawn from different ethical dimensions and reflect a range of responsibilities. As a result, the four levels do not share mutual constraints; this means that the pursuit of one aspect of supposed ethics or values may be unavoidable at the cost of another value, or the failure to realise other ones. The different scopes and limitations of application mean that translators still have to exercise choice. Effectively, the sort of contingency that pervades the terrain of translation has been ignored, or at least overridden. One example of this is when translators attempt to reduce possible misunderstandings among the parties who are involved in what we might term the translation event, with the result that they almost unconsciously adapt or rewrite the source texts in order to guarantee the maximum comprehension of intended meaning. In this circumstance, communication has been achieved and the 'understanding norm' of traditional translator practice has been obeyed, but it has been achieved only at the sacrifice of a loyalty to difference, complexity and genuine interpretation.

In contrast to this norm-based ethics, Pym interpreted ethics from a content-based perspective (Pym 2012: 165). In translator ethics, he argues, any principles should ideally derive from the activity itself - in other words, it is consequential on translation choices and responses to the specificity of the task. A content-based ethics might try to decide, for instance, what one should not translate. For example, translating Lois Burdett's *Shakespeare for Kids*, trainee translators need to be clear what to keep in and what to leave out in terms of content. This ethical issue can be challenging as some descriptions of treachery, murder, and conflict need to be adequately conveyed, but at the same time, the retellings have to be carefully gauged to suit the very different moral and language universes of the target Chinese child audience - in other words, what might be deemed unethical adaptation or simplification is, in fact, a necessary and valuable part of the translation process. None of this is to gainsay the ethical commitment of translation to representing the other fairly and equitably - condensed in Berman's point that "the ethical act consists in recognising and receiving the Other as an Other" (Berman 2004: 132) - nor does it counteract the key awareness of the ethics of representation, of bearing witness, of speaking of the Other to the self, which we have already described as a key aspect of the translator's core ethical position. However, even within the constraints of ensuring fitness for purpose, the trainee translator can be taught to understand that this does not necessarily entail a reduction of the impact of the foreign but rather of ensuring that readers have access to the foreign in ways that are not unnecessarily alienating. The translation of Burdett's retelling of Shakespeare for English-speaking children, accordingly, is characterised by a tendency to continue toning down the sexual elements while the mechanics of violence are omitted altogether (see *Tales from Shakespeare: Children's Classics* [Chinese Edition]: 2011). What the translation acknowledges is the fact that Chinese society is much more sexually conservative in terms of children's education, while violence is routinely erased from the teaching of history and literature.

In contradistinction to what we might term consequentialist ethics, Chesterman discusses ethics in terms of value and virtue (Chesterman 2001: 139-154). Deontological ethics, as we might think of this, provides a standpoint for evaluating actions themselves, requiring the trainee translator in question to reflect on their own moral identity according to their codes of conduct for instance, while singly-conceived consequentialism might well degenerate into mere moral relativism, without taking into account a huge range of extra-textual information and considerations - for example, the right to freedom of expression in

certain difficult cross-cultural situations. There is an interesting tension here that our trainees really should consider – the fact that there very often arises a marked inconsistency between philosophical ethics ideally considered and the demands of professional practice. Such consideration, of course, gives rise to the sort of debate favoured by educational constructivism (Kiraly 2014, as the cornerstone philosophy of any responsive curriculum). The implication for future training is to familiarise trainees with the idea that morally engaged translators are always aware of the context in which they are working, fully conscious of their own positionality in the process. Therefore, ethics-awareness competence - including responsibility-awareness competence and decision-making competence - will from the outset be woven into practice-based learning and theoretical discussion and should always be incorporated as a teaching and learning activity throughout all aspects of the training process.

Of course, from the translator's point of view, being responsible is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it lays down a moral requisite and in some way limits the freedom of the translator; on the other hand, it benefits the translator in the long run since it is important for the professional image and reputation of the translator, and for the translation profession as a whole. In the training process, the trainee translator should be responsible and accountable for the decisions s/he makes in translation and willing to accept the consequences of those decisions, irrespective of whether they are positive or negative in terms of perceived manipulation or activism, as we have noted above. In some sense, they should also acknowledge their betrayal to the original text, but the truth is, such betrayal takes place at word-level rather than meaning-level and such 'betrayals' at lexical level have their own merit at times. In Taiwan, for example, translators traditionally mediate words that they fear might cause offence among their readership. 'The poor' in mainland China is usually translated as "穷人" (pronounced as qiong ren), simply meaning people who have little money and not many possessions. In most Taiwanese translations, "the poor" has been endowed with a more easily acceptable name, that is "待富者" (pronounced as dai fu zhe), meaning wealthy-to-be, which supposes that everyone lives with opportunity and hope. This ethical choice, which some might see as the result of a capitalist conception of poverty and wealth, signifies that the translator has taken the self-respect of the translated subject fully into consideration, but it also shows that s/he is responsible for the receiving readership as s/he is concerned by the possible consequences or impact of lexical choices. In other words, there is no single

ethical stance on the part of translators that may be deduced from any one circumstance in which choice is demanded. Pym reinforces the acknowledgment of positive intervention (2001: 129-138) in decision-making process. That is, translator trainees need to know how to analyse various contexts, situations as well as alternative possibilities contingent on different cultural settings in the target text and intervene appropriately in the target text in order to make it more creative and to improve its accessibility. This intervening act, in Pym's view (*ibid*), derives from the translator's conscious refusal of inappropriateness concerning all the parties involved within the uses of a specific text rather than reflecting his or her individual tastes or preferences.

However, as we have already noted, the core ethical responsibility of trainees resides in their sense of loyalty to difference, so that the most critical point during the decision-making process for trainees depends on their ability to accept and transmit difference. Deliberate elimination of difference for the purpose of maximised equivalence not only neglects the relationship between translator and author, source text and target text, but also does a crucial disservice to translation which is considered an intercultural activity. In the final analysis, whether s/he chooses the restitutive justice of expressing the condition and qualities of Otherness in the new text is an ethical decision that needs to be made, but in order to make this decision with any sense of meaningfulness, the translator must be aware of the parameters of that decision. Returning to the training process itself, trainee translators need to know that the precondition of translation is the recognition of discrepancy between different cultures and different languages during decision-making process, between which unconditional equivalence is impossible. As an ethical regime, translation traffics as much in difference as in conceptions of sameness.

In today's technological landscape, translator may encounter remuneration loss with CAT tools, terminology memory for example. As Biau Gil and Pym (2006) highlight, whenever translators are provided with a terminology database, clients expect automatic compliance with the terminology and phraseology of the segment pairs included in that database, so that translation costs are kept to a minimum. To put it simply, companies encourage translators to seek as many 'translation matches' or 'translated segments' as possible (Murphy 2000). A key problem arising from this increasingly common workplace phenomenon is that translators are paid only for what clients consider to be translation work *per se*, that is for segments that have not yet been

translated, or for chunks or segments for which matches cannot be located - even though there is no standard method of working out the percentage match for any single translation. This is the result of the instrumental view that implies that all matches will keep the same meaning they had in previous texts and, for that, revision and adaptation of these words or segments are not worth being remunerated for. However, not all matches are exactly consistent with the original texts and some 'fuzzy' matches may require significant editing (Sharon 2007). In fact, even full matches may suggest inappropriate translation solutions if the overall context has changed, as of course it frequently does. This consideration relating to discounted payment for full and fuzzy matches is now significantly impacting on the Chinese translation market. Assuming that previously translated text segments should not be double charged, many end clients have demanded percentage reductions for leveraged texts - which may make sense providing that translators enjoy sufficiently improved productivity to compensate for this lost income. In terms of the training classroom, there is a clear argument for embedding discussions as to whether or not it is appropriate to abate clients' payments for reappeared texts stored in a previous database, and accordingly how to negotiate translation rates. Another ethical problem, concerning another grey area, so to speak, is that of authorisation of copyright in CAT. In any CAT terminology database, those ready-to-use translated chunks are always translations of translations, or adaptations of translations without any clear beginning or defined end. The challenge here is to determine who should authorise ownership when translators change previously existing phraseology in their own translation texts with the assistance of translation memory; the legal position here is hugely complex. The reason is that some chunks of information are constantly updated and re-labelled in accordance with different text purposes, which means that there is no final text, but a constant flow of provisional texts undergoing updates, rearrangement, re-sizing and user-adaptation based on a large database of content in constant change. These are ethical questions that escape the parameters of traditional copyright agreements, and the relevant legal frameworks vary from country to country. Regrettably, the translation profession in China, is not taking this into account adequately, and therefore lags behind the ever-accelerating pace of technological development. It becomes correspondingly crucial that Chinese translators, about to enter the profession, should both understand this situation and, more importantly, develop a sector-wide response to it.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology underpinning this competence training is to consider the classroom as an open space for reflection on ethical issues and refraining from prescribing or even recommending particular ethical paths; in turn this clearly makes the issue of assessment more problematic. A practical method is the "identity-state-explain" model (NAATI 2016): it involves practice texts of 100 to 150 words in length, where trainees are required to examine translation ethics in the following dimensions: translator identity, translators' personal motivations, ethical principles, and preferred translation strategies. The source text is also discussed and analysed to ascertain difficulties and effects of the text, the translatable or untranslatable qualities of the text, and the social contexts within which all the above operate (see especially Pym 2007; Zauberga 2000). These cases, rich in ethical complexity, will contribute to developing trainees' ethics-awareness competence in terms of decision making, and help to equip translator trainees with the skills to reason about such matters. In this way the complex interaction between apparent deontological positions and consequentialist strategies is highlighted, informing students not only of the needs, wishes and rights of the client, but also of the potential impact of their decisions on a wide range of constituencies and participants (see Bassnett, 2013 on accountability in this sense); importantly, the central notions of appropriateness and fitness for purpose of translated texts are brought into constant play. Moreover, this model is under social constructivists' classroom environment, in which trainees are responsible for their own learning and translation decisions, through constant reflection and interaction while employing first-hand situated experiences, authentic materials as well as ethical-involved translation projects. According to this collaborative classroom, the role of the trainer is to encourage the exchange of perspectives between students, colleagues and working professionals; it is thus not a one-way transmission but a process of sharing perspectives. For example, in discussion of deontological and consequentialists' view, discussions in class must be encouraged, exploring questions such as, for instance, should trainees consider their ethical roles as situated and enacted or as responding to pre-established norms? Is such a deontological code possible? What would the implications of a wholly consequentialist code be? Do the contingent and ever changing circumstances of translation practice make any deontology impossible? Sharing ideas between trainees may help trainees bring real world translation dilemmas into their translation practice.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion provides some examples - where ethics plays a central role - in order to illustrate the “identity-state-explain” model. Let us consider the Chinese translation of Hoffmann’s *Struwwelpeter*, with its emphasis on the gruesome. This book is geared to a young (and therefore one has to assume, impressionable) audience, with the consequence that translators must be alert to its depiction of bullying, and descriptions of violence in their translating process. In this particular instance, trainers can address the ethics of cutting references or descriptions in order to make this book more acceptable to a target Chinese readership (of between eight and ten years of age). Trainees can provide their justifications for, for example, their decisions to add explanatory footnotes or provide extra-textual dimensions or trimming in order to mitigate the impact of some of Hoffmann’s horror. What is important here is the discussion surrounding strategies of intervention in the interests of ensuring that a particularly difficult text (in cultural terms) meets the reading and learning requirements of a young Chinese audience for whom violence is traditionally presented in a much less psychologically real way. Following from this, trainers might encourage trainees to comment on their readings of sensitive texts (from the Chinese perspective); for example, LGBT-friendly books such as *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell (2007), which tells the story of two penguin dads and their daughter Tango. Trainees need to consider the socially controversial issue in China, that is, the general public’s limited tolerance of LGBT, as well as their possible role in insinuating the need for change. How to translate the penguin dads (Roy and Silo) in terms of the universe of experience of the Chinese target audience (nine to eleven-year-olds) is centrally concerned not only with assessing what the target readership knows but also how it might make use of some sensitive words offered in the source text. After stating their translation decisions, trainees need to explain how they balance deontologist and consequentialist positions.

It is worthwhile to mention that, ethics-awareness competence is not taught in a separate module; instead, it is embedded throughout. This paper rejects the idea of offering ethics training as an additional optional module since this teaching approach is at danger of allowing trainees to consider ethics as divorced from good professional judgment. After embedding this awareness throughout the translation curriculum, trainers should expect to achieve the following objectives: firstly, training should aim to provide trainees with the conceptual tools that allow them to reason critically about the implications of any

translation decision. This means engaging with some of the theoretical literature on ethics that can provide a means of reflecting on the pros and cons of particular ways of justifying behaviour or translation solutions (Baker 2011). Secondly, trainers should enable trainees to identify a range of potential strategies that may be deployed to deal with ethically difficult or compromising situations, such as the switch from the first to the third person pronoun in interpreting, or translation issues arising from sensitive, political or religious texts. And thirdly, trainers develop a set of pedagogical tools that can be used to create an environment in which trainees can make situated ethical decisions, rehearse the implications of such decisions, and learn from this experience. Activities within and outside the classroom can be designed to provide all three opportunities.

5. CONCLUSION

The learning outcome of ethics-awareness competence training is that trainees engage more systematically with ethical issues in the context of their translation practice, particularly in view of recent technological, social, political and professional developments that are yet to be explored in the literature in terms of ethical implications. Therefore, as in other areas of the programme, they move gradually towards the world of work through practical, real-life translation tasks. But most crucially, the translator is not encouraged to see ethics as an independent reality but rather as emerging from and informing a set of decisions and choices that engineers a relationship between here and there, now and then. Any ethical-awareness competence, in pedagogical terms, is centrally concerned to suggest a framework of expectations for the profession and industry in terms of ethical principles, values, and standards of conduct to specifically guide Chinese translation practitioners. I have argued that trainees should be ethically engaged and aware not solely in terms of how recipients gain access to the text, but also in how that text represents the world of the Other to the located Self. However, professional ethics need to be introduced progressively, through the introduction and discussion of dilemmas that arise in concrete situations to ethics reinforcement in practical sessions, and finally the application of ethics in every stage of translation evaluation and research methods.

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5. ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

Jie Wang^{1*}, Doctor in Translator Training and Translator Competence, member of Translation and Interpreting Institute, research interests are intercultural competence, translator training, ethics, hermeneutics, localisation, etc.

Yuanyuan Li, lecturer in Huaiyin Normal University, her interests are in Pragmatics, ESL, Contrastive Linguistics and its application to translation.

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