

Towards a Flipped Translation Classroom: Introducing and Enhancing Ethics in Translation Training

Jia-chen CHUO

English Taught Program in International Business
Shih Chien University, Taiwan
No.70, Dazhi St., Zhongshan Dist., Taipei City 104
Taiwan

Abstract

Translation education in Taiwan has gained momentum in recent years, first in graduate institutes and later at the undergraduate level. However, exclusive focus on the linguistic side of translation will result in an inactive classroom, in which one-way prescriptive inculcation becomes the main objective. As a result, the flipped classroom has become a trend in education in Taiwan and I propose that the ethical issues of translation be included in the curricula from an early stage. If ethics becomes a part of basic training programs, the students will become more aware and better acquainted with their new professional responsibilities. My purpose is to first to examine the dominant translation pedagogy in current translation classrooms in Taiwan and then to propose an emphasis on ethical issues confronting translators who practice the profession in workplaces that are gradually becoming globalized.

Key Words: translation pedagogy, translator ethics, globalized translation.

1. Introduction

Some time ago, after we had read about the Katherine Gun¹ case in my translation ethics class, I asked my graduate students whether they would have leaked the information as Katherine had done. One student replied “no” without hesitation. “We read about the ethical codes inculcated by major international translation institutes, and they all list ‘confidentiality’ as one of the most crucial,” she said. I was startled by her immediate and intuitive answer. Her response also prompted me to think that we might have started using the ethical code of confidentiality as an excuse, as we did with that of being faithful to the original, for producing bad word-for-word translation.

Although ethics and codes of conduct in this profession have long been recognized and emphasized, most of those to whom translators demonstrate their loyalty are the clients, or those giving the commission, the authors and the readers. Early translation scholars, theorists and even translators themselves, both in the west and the east, emphasized loyalty to the source text. Any deviation from the source was deemed unethical. Such a simple perspective on translation ethics should definitely be challenged in our globalized world where civilizations meet and conflict of all kinds arises. The new emphasis on translation ethics will also affect the way teaching is conducted in the translation classroom.

Graduate programs in translation studies started to bloom in Taiwan in the late 1980s. Translation and interpretation (T&I) institutes were established to train professional translators and interpreters. Before that, translation had been viewed as one of the ways to hone English writing skills and as a way to check mastery of the language. The influence of traditional “grammar-translation” teaching remains strong and most translation classrooms are still teacher-centered and inactive.

1 Katharine Gun was a translator working for British Intelligence who was arrested for treason because she had leaked secret documents to the press which revealed illegal spying on UN countries carried out by the US and Britain.

Following the claim by Mona Baker and Carol Maier (2011) that the “responsibility of translators and interpreters [should] extend beyond clients to include the wider community to which they belong” (2011, p. 1), I propose the addition of reflective teaching of translation at the undergraduate level, so that the student will become aware, at an early stage, of their role as an amateur translator or would-be translator in the society to which they belong. Students need to realize that their translation decisions will affect other people and they are not, as traditionally accepted, “neutral and non-engaged” (Ibid., p. 3). The issue of ethics will become irrelevant if translators and interpreters do not appreciate that their work will have “significant immediate or long-term impact...on other humans” (Johannesen, 1983, p. 1). Translators and interpreters are no longer invisible agents.

2. *Ethics in Translation Studies*

It is unfair to say that translation ethics has not received enough historical attention. In fact, we may say that the history of translation can be understood as the history of translation ethics (Van Wyke, 2013). Examples of ethics in speech can be found in western rhetoric as well as eastern philosophy. When it comes to interpersonal communication, Dag Hammarskjöld, a former Secretary General of the UN once said, “To misuse the word is to show contempt for man. It undermines the bridges and poisons the wells” (cited in Johannesen 1983, p. 8). While being faithful to the original is believed to be the proper way to translate, being considered “ethical,” translators and interpreters may seek to repress themselves as much as possible and “invisibility” becomes the price they pay for being ethical. A long history of “the ethics of sameness” (Van Wyke, 2013) casts its shadow on many codes of conduct in this profession. However, because human interaction becomes more and more complicated, we can no longer naively think that translation, produced by human beings, can be bias-free or that complete neutrality is attainable.

Peter Newmark (2009) believed that around 2000, an ethical and aesthetic stage arose in the development of translation studies. In his view, translation is noble and truth-seeking. “The pursuit of the truth is the translator’s supreme obligation,” Newmark said (ibid, p. 35). Translators should be honest and present a translation that does not mislead the reader. Newmark further granted translators license to correct original text, or to give an explanation in a preface, if factual mistakes and misleading ideas are spotted. Newmark’s views on translation have pushed translators into the foreground and translators are now assuming an identity “outside the text, first by commenting on the text and her interpretation in a preface and... in footnotes, ensuring that mis-statements, prejudiced language, illogical conclusions, and irrelevancies...are clearly shown up” (Ibid, p. 34). The reason for such a demonstration of translator identity is to show that they are responsible for their own text.

Translators have long been treated as mediators or neutral messengers and because they only “speak on behalf of another” (Baker & Chesterman, 2008, p. 15) or “speak the words of another” (Pym, 2012, p. 37), we tend to think that they should not be liable for what they convey. Whether these messengers should be considered responsible for the message they carry across is much discussed in Anthony Pym’s *On Translator Ethics*. Mona Baker reminds us to think about the essence of such mediation:

Does this mean we do not intervene in this “mediation”? Do we just repeat the words we heard or read verbatim, or do we interpret them from a particular vantage point and report them (selectively, to varying degrees) in a manner that is sensitive to contextual factors, including our own sense of what is appropriate or inappropriate, and what is ethical or unethical? (Baker & Chesterman, 2008, p. 15)

To be completely neutral without personal interpretation is impossible. In the 1960s, two contemporary rhetoric theorists Richard M Weaver and Kenneth Burke had already contended that it is not possible to use language in completely neutral and objective manner and Weaver believes that when we “utter words.....we have given impulse to other people to look at the world, or some small part of it, in our way” (Johannesen, 1986, p. 4). Only a machine can translate verbatim “without selecting and deselecting elements of what was said, and without weighting the importance and significance of some themes and comments” (Baker & Chesterman, 2008, p. 16). We should realize that traditional translation perspective of faithfulness can only be viewed in a relative sense.

Joanna Drugan and Chris Megone (2011) also called for attention to ethics when designing curricula for T&I programs, because the new generation is living in a globalized world in which barriers are low and conflict and clashes are commonplace. To avoid ethnocentric values, translation students need to know that they are not only dealing with language. They are actually dealing with a cultural other.

3. Typical Curricula in a Taiwan Undergraduate Translation Class

In Joanna Drugan and Chris Megone's survey of translation programs in the UK, they found that "few institutions mention ethics as part of student core training" (2011). A cursory glance at the development of Taiwan's translation education in the undergraduate curricula will show that a similar situation exists. The first graduate-level translation institute was established in 1988 at Fu Jen Catholic University. Now there are seven graduate institutes or MA programs and two undergraduate translation departments in Taiwan, in addition to numerous translation courses and modules in other English language departments.

Most courses in the T&I institutes aim at building up the professional translation ability of a novice to acquaint themselves with the kind of real text they will need to deal with once they enter the job market. Courses such as Business Translation, Medical Translation, Legal Translation, and others, are commonly offered by the professional T&I institutes. In recent years, translation software, such as TRADOS, SDLX, machine translation, will also be introduced to help translation students better navigate their way as new professionals.

In 1994, a call was made for reform of the Taiwan educational system. The consensus at that time was that more universities were needed to increase the quality of human resources. The number of college students increased from 173,000 in 1984 to 1.12 million by 2007, reaching the highest level on record (Chou, 2008). As a reaction to this expansion, the government did not build more universities. Instead, junior and vocational colleges were encouraged to upgrade and become universities. In these practice-oriented college-turned universities, many new applied language departments were established, as distinct from the traditional academic literary and linguistically focused foreign language departments.

Almost at the same time, the idea of adding "translating skill" to the original four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, began to gain currency. The "translating ability" was called into attention in foreign language learning once again, after decry against grammar and translation teaching of foreign languages. Long before the official establishment of the first T&I graduate institute in Taiwan in 1988, translation and interpretation courses had already been available at most of the English departments in the country. Most of the T&I teaching at that time focused on traditional grammar/translation, treating translation as a transmission between two linguistic systems, and ignoring the cultural and social implications of the two diverse languages. Typically, translation teachers assign a text to be translated as homework and correct the work after it has been submitted. Although there are also discussions in the classroom, I have observed that most of them center on how to make it a better translation and the choice of the most suitable words to use. With the cultural turn in translation studies, it is important that cultural and societal aspects be incorporated into translation teaching.

The focus on translating ability in foreign language teaching appeared after criticism of communicative language teaching (CLT), which had become popular after 2001. After years of practice, English teachers started to find that reading comprehension and writing were compromised in a classroom where oral practice was stressed. Researchers observed that people in Taiwan, where English is not, yet an official second language, use English more in reading (getting information written in English) and the introduction of foreign information through translation. It was clear that English language students actually needed more reading and translation skills, communicative skill in English was really only needed by those who traveled and studied abroad (Liao, 2007). It is probably because of such awareness in language departments that translation was re-introduced in the foreign language classrooms and curricula.

In the traditional teacher-centered classroom, one-way inculcation has resulted in over-emphasis on the linguistic aspect of translation. Students take T & I courses to increase their competence in English. Lee & Liao (2012) discovered a natural resistance to theory and history courses which the students believed to be unnecessary, preferring those that provide professional knowledge and boost language ability, such as public speaking and Chinese courses. Ethical issues can be unrealistic and impractical unless real cases, such as those practicing translators encounter every day, are involved. Joanna Drugan and Chris Megone (2011, p. 194) also suggested that "well-designed ethical case studies will help students by providing quasi-experiential situations in which they can develop key skills of good judgment." It is time for students and instructors to realize that in a real situation, a translator in our globalized environment cannot use "an authoritarian list of do's and don'ts" to make decisions (Baker & Maier, 2011, p. 4).

Peter Newmark explains that the fourth stage of translation theory, arising around 2000, is the ethical and aesthetic stage. He believes that translation is “a noble and truth-seeking profession” (2009, p. 21). Translators should not mislead or deceive readers. If the original text to be translated violates any part of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (and amendments), which Newmark sees as “the keystone of social and individual ethics today,” then the translator should draw attention to this fact in a preface or a footnote (ibid). The consequence of addressing linguistic aspects only is that students gradually come to believe that translation and interpretation is about language and nothing else. However, a lot more than mere language is going on in the process of translation and interpretation. Before undertaking a translation or interpretation project, the translator or interpreter needs to make some critical and ethical choices. Should one translate or interpret for a client for whom one has no respect? Should one translate material that is against their own beliefs? Is there only one way to address such questions... take the job or leave it?

While classroom activities designed with communicative translation teaching in mind will activate the traditional translation classroom and ensure that knowledge gained through team work and self-motivation will persist, this is still not enough in terms of translation teaching. Mona Baker and Carol Maier (2011) observed an overall resistance to theory, especially in students just entering a T&I program. The students simply failed to see the connection between theory and practice. This is when a T&I instructor should introduce real-life scenarios and authentic case studies to get students interested in theoretical aspects such as ethics. They argue that “engagement with ethical issues can motivate students and demonstrate the importance of theory and reflective, critical reasoning” (ibid., p. 8).

Baker & Maier (2011) remind us of three important issues that need to be addressed when translation ethics are introduced into practical training programs: conceptual tools, potential strategies and teaching tools. It is important to provide students with conceptual tools, such as theory and the terminology and methods used, so they can appreciate the implications of translation decisions. In addition to conceptual tools, it is also crucial that instructors ensure that students can identify potential strategies. An environment should also be created in which students can rehearse their decisions. Baker & Maier also listed classroom activities, such as debating, writing a critical essay, role playing and keeping student diaries to internalize the implications of these real-life issues.

4. Proposed Case Studies for T&I Classrooms in Taiwan

Baker believes it is necessary for translators to be self-reflective so that when they have the power of interpretation, they will not do it “from a privileged position” (Baker & Chesterman, 2008, p. 11). Such self-awareness does not come from traditional prescriptive methods but from “finding a way of **reflecting** on how one arrives at deciding what is ethical in any given situation” (emphasis mine) (Ibid., p. 12). The purpose of reflection being to invoke “a more engaged, committed translation practice” (Ibid., p. 12).

Below, I have proposed two possible issues for students to discuss to raise their awareness of the new role of translators and interpreters in a globalized community.

Case study 1: Elite interpreters and interpreters for the disadvantaged

Nowadays, when students think of translators or interpreters, the image of Nicole Kidman in the movie *The Interpreter* (2005) will come to mind. They look smart and work for the United Nations or in the President’s Office. Such images are frequently seen in newspapers in Taiwan and China. Modern interpreters are usually depicted as young, beautiful, or handsome for men, elegant, smart, and calm. Words used to describe their job well done are always “神” (divine work), somewhat echoing the similar term “神の領域” (God’s work) to describe sense-for-sense translation in Japanese. The ability of these government interpreters are sometimes exaggerated as One Who Knows All. They are very often reported as never making mistakes. Our translation students should be aware that under such exposure there are also many translators risking their very lives.

In reality, these glorious translators and interpreters do not represent a complete picture. Western media, such as *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, and *The Independent*, to name just a few, have regular reports and stories from translators and interpreters working under the direst conditions in places like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. People in Taiwan have enjoyed a relatively peaceful life for several decades. They do not face the threat of imminent death experienced by people in war zones all around the world. Students can gain a new perspective of their profession by comparing their situation in Taiwan with the ever present dangers faced by translators and interpreters in a war zone.

While the tension between Muslim extremists and the general population in neighboring areas becomes more and more intense, there are people working as interpreters for the US who risk their lives on a daily basis. In a 2005 news report, the Associate Press claimed that “translating Arabic for the US military in Iraq” was “one of the most dangerous civilian jobs” in the world.² These Iraqi translators do this dangerous job in the slight hope of a better life in the future, or a chance to leave these dangerous zones. They face not only all the dangers of battle, but also death at the hands of extremists who see them as collaborators. In 2008, the use of masks by interpreters, used to prevent them from being recognized, was banned by the US military. Tarps, as they were called, were no longer allowed to wear them when working. Although they might be alternatively called “civilian interpreters,” “fixers,” or “military linguists,” they all face the same danger: their language ability is life threatening. The interpreters are amongst the most wanted, “more than the Americans, more than anyone” (London, 2008).

This explains why interpreters in war zones usually wear masks, to prevent their being identified by the extremists in their own country. Any mistake could put them and their families in mortal danger. There are many stories about Iraqi interpreters being abducted, tortured and slain. Many of them gain their knowledge of English in a most unusual way. The overall atmosphere in these areas is antipathetic towards foreigners and instead of the kind of formal English education we get, these Iraqi translators have learned English from American movies and songs. Some have even learned English by secretly listening to BBC broadcasts (Packer, 2007).



A masked Iraqi interpreter (Photograph by James Nachtwey).



A TV broadcast about a young man interpreting for the first female President-elect in Taiwan³, (picture by ETtoday).



Zhang Lu (1978-), diplomat and interpreter for former Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, is famous for her fluent and quick translation of lines from a classical poem quoted by Wen⁴.

2 Associated Press (2005). Translators dying by the dozens in Iraq. Retrieved from http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-05-21-translator-deaths_x.htm

3 Picture retrieved from <http://www.ettoday.net/news/20160117/632583.htm> (2016/04/30)

4 Picture retrieved from <http://www.nownews.com/n/2010/03/16/746969> (2016/04/01).

Case study 2: Tong-she and Interpreters

Throughout its history, Taiwan has been occupied and even colonized by people from several other countries. This has contributed to the tolerance shown by the Taiwanese to others from different ethnic backgrounds who have come to the island in many migrations over the years. Translation and interpretation has been needed for a very long time. However, different terms used to describe people providing such services explain the implications behind the use of these terms.

In the 1990s, the government opened the gates to foreigners, especially from other Southeast Asian countries. The number of foreign workers in Taiwan underwent dramatic growth between 1996 and 2000. The latest statistics from the National Immigration Agency showed that by the end of 2015, there were around 801,000 foreigners (roughly 3.5% of total population) in Taiwan, amongst which 82% were from Southeast Asian countries. These include foreign contract workers.

Despite this increase in the foreign population, the Taiwanese government reacted rather slowly to the needs of foreigners who spoke Southeast Asian languages like Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, and Malay, to mention just a few. This lack of language services had a very negative effect on the human rights of foreigners from Southeast Asia in Taiwan, especially when workers and their wives became involved with the Law with respect to domestic violence, abuse, illegal entry, and so on.

Historically, interpreters in Taiwan were called “*tong-she*” (通事) or “*tong-yi*” (通譯). The term referred specifically to people who dealt with the aborigines in early times. Wu Feng (1699-1769) was one of them, and legend has it that he sacrificed himself to help stop head-hunting amongst the aborigines he had befriended. *Tong-she* is not a much respected job judging from the stipends they received. Tracing the etymology of the term back to ancient times, it can be seen that *tong-she* referred to those interpreters who worked in “remote areas,” opposed to those working in centers where there was authoritative power. The result was that *tong-she* connoted a low social status and it figured that the salary for such a position would not be set very high when it was formally established in the Qing Dynasty.

Use of the term *tong-she* lingered even after other more modern descriptions such as “*ko-yi-yuan*” (口譯員) had been introduced from Japan. Even after World War II, when *ko-yi-yuan* was in general used by the public, *tong-yi* did not disappear. It is still in official use in the Courts of Law where interpreters deal mainly with testimony from suspects and witnesses. However, the public refers to interpreters as *ko-yi-yuan*, and *tong-yi* is now confined to use in the courts.

Incidentally, interpreters working in the Law Courts in Taiwan do not receive the same respect they get in other workplaces, which is evident from a glimpse of the Regulatory Procedures for Court *Tong-yi*. Also, the qualifications required for court *tong-yi* are surprisingly low. An intermediate level in a foreign language will do. Among this court *tong-yi*, interpreters for new immigrants from Southeast Asian countries in Taiwan suffer most. According to Chen Yun-ping, who is an activist for the language rights of Southeast Asian migrants in Taiwan, *tong-yi* for new immigrants are usually poorly paid and treated very badly. In the past, the pay for these *tong-yi* was NT\$500 (around US\$15) each time they came to work. They were not paid by the hour. This has changed and they now get NT\$500 per case. Interpreters usually have to stay at the court many hours for this low payment. Worse still, they don't seem to have the right to say “no” to such offers. Many of them believe that they have to favor the police in their neighborhood because they depend on the goodwill of the police with respect to ARC and other identity documents. Some also worry about being recognized and fear revenge if they are thought to have helped the court in the conviction of their own people, and this puts them under great pressure.

Starting from the etymology of the terms that students take for granted, such discussion will enable students to think about the job and language discrimination in our society. Translators throughout Chinese history have been regarded as disloyal and untrustworthy and this had caused the disadvantaged position they now occupy. Even when translators and interpreters are badly needed, they still have a negative image and are regarded as potential liars. The role played by Nicole Kidman in *The Interpreter* is just one of the examples.

5. Conclusion

The traditional concept of ethics in translation studies has been very narrow and so restricted in meaning as to be simplified to “not to misrepresent the source text.” Such exclusive emphasis on linguistic faithfulness should be re-examined and expanded to fit globalized context.

It's time for us to become aware that "codes of professional conduct may actually include little or no ethics" (Drugan & Megone, 2011, p. 187). That kind of ethics may only be superficial and technical and certainly not humane and spiritual.

There has been debate since the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, about whether virtue can be taught or not. While Socrates believed that virtue is a pure intellectual idea, Plato and Aristotle argued that virtue should be practiced so one can learn from habituation. I believe that before virtue can be practiced by students it must first be introduced to them. This makes it necessary for T & I instructors to introduce the theoretical concept and then lend support by providing real situations for students to examine and study so they can practice strategy.

Peter Newmark (2009, p. 21) states that the ethical and aesthetic stage of translation theory is "dynamic," because "the moral truth progresses but the aesthetic truth is permanent." Ethical issues in translation and interpretation should not remain unchangeable because the world is changing, and no matter what the era, ethics will remain the essence of human existence. Because translators are in a privileged position (Cronin, 2006, p. 138), student's translators need to be trained in ethical and social awareness so that they fully understand that translation is a "humanitarian necessary" (Gill & Guzmán, 2011, p. 100).

Drugan and Megone (2011) have listed the aims of ethics training in translation programs. Students must be able to identify an ethical issue should such be encountered. They should be able to analyze the issue and form a plan of action. The aim of such training is the development of good ethical judgment. However, developing good ethical judgment is not simply a matter of getting better at selecting "the (right) answer," but of developing reasoning skills that enable the agent to justify those decisions (Ibid., p.189). Translators should move further to "find the right word" to fit the global and social situation, and not simply consider the linguistic context.

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