

## Ethical issues in training future literary translators

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### Abstract

The article is dedicated to consideration of ethical issues in training translators, revealing pedagogical opportunities for developing future literary translators' ethics. Literary translation was chosen as an object of our investigation because the ethical questions within this kind of translation are not elaborated enough and becoming more controversial ones which cause many problems for translation trainee and trainer. Based on these views we've searched and analyzed how the ethical issues are built into the curriculum of Kazakhstani Translation Studies departments, whether students are acquainted with new tendencies of professional ethics or do they continue to perceive numerous code of ethics and behavior presented by some authorities and translation associations as indisputable truth, are they provided with critical thinking strategies on ethical issues and what are potentials for developing reflection skills in ethical training for Kazakhstani literary translation.

Keywords: accuracy, competence, controversial issues, ethics, literary translation, reliability, curriculum.

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## 1. Introduction

In spite of numerous intensive researches on literary translation since ancient time till present day it continues to be the less developed in translation studies, especially the ethical issues. Very little attention is given to the ethics of literary translator in the code of ethics and code of conduct, developed by translation associations and some scholars, if there are any they mostly concern the questions of authorship, what rights the translators have regarding translations as intellectual property. But the last decade was marked with the broad and sustained discussions of many postulates and principles of translator's ethics such as translators' invisibility, impartiality, neutrality, accuracy, faithfulness, ideological correctness, non-engagement, reliability, responsibility and others challenged by many scholars. As a result, translator's ethics became the most controversial issue in modern translation studies and brought a confusion as for a future translator so for an educator in choosing the true path in professional training, because of necessity of choice between two contradicting positions: invisibility or visibility; non-engagement or engagement; impartiality, neutrality or acceptable degree of freedom in translation process.

## 2. Theoretical background

The reconsideration, changing and modification of translators' ethics to our mind have been done from different points:

- The society of each concrete historical period according to its culture and ideology, its level of knowledge of translation process changed its attitude toward the translation activity and translator's personality;
- The development of translation quality criteria based on objective principles;
- The translator's own personal attitude toward translation, awareness of his role and functions in society.

The first point we could easily observe on example of the impact of ideology on translation service in former Soviet Union and as Alekseeva (2004) has noticed there appeared a notion as "ideologically consistent translation", and translators were defined as "fighters of ideological front". These statements turned out that the translator had to be a professional one not in translation process but in ideology of the governing society. But it's very important to mention here the statement of Pym "Source texts and non-translational ideologies must thus live beyond the space in which a professional ethics can be developed" (2010).

Modern translators mustn't always apply to absolute ethical principles but try to resolve the problems of professional ethics themselves based upon their moral and world view, intercultural competence, because some ethical principles could be accepted by one cultural community and refused by other one.

However many ethical principles of the translator continue to be reconsidered and criticized now, for instance, Robinson (1991; 2007) discussing the translator's ethics from external and internal points of view underlines its contradictions "...it is unethical for the translator to distort the meaning of the source text. But from the user's (external) point of view: there are many cases when the translator is explicitly asked to "distort" the meaning of the source text in specific ways, as when adapting a text for television, a children's book, or an advertising campaign. From the translator's internal point of view, the ethics of translation is more complicated still: "What is the translator to do, for example, when asked to translate a text that s/he finds offensive? Or, to put that differently, how does the translator proceed when professional ethics (loyalty to the person paying for the translation) clash with personal ethics (one's own political and moral beliefs)? What does the feminist translator do when asked to translate a blatantly sexist text? What does the liberal translator do when asked to translate a neo-Nazi text? What does the environmentalist translator do when asked to translate an advertising campaign for an environmentally irresponsible chemical company?" (Robinson, 2007).

In this context a problem of translator's visibility or invisibility are discussed very vigorously all over the world and the unquestionable concept of translator's invisibility is being exposed to doubt, especially by west scholars (Hatim, 2001; Vennuty, 2008). The concept of translator's visibility or invisibility are presented mostly by two approaches: objective (translation process) and subjective (translator's attitude toward translation).

A rather different view of translation ethics was presented a bit earlier by Chesterman (1997),

based not on the concept of typical duty or right, given in code of ethics but on that of value, because duties and rights are secondary notions, they depend on notions of value, which therefore primary. The author's view is supported with deontic logic on three levels of concepts: praxeological, normative and axiological. Deontic actions are governed by norms, and norms are governed by values. Thus, translation activity is governed by four fundamental kinds of norms: expectancy norm, the relation norm, the communicative norm, the accountability norm and each of these norms is governed by a primarily ethical value: clarity, truth, trust and understanding. Clarity is a value pertaining to the quality of a text itself. Truth is a value pertaining to the relation between two texts, source and target. The third value, underlying the accountability norm, pertains to a relation between people: trust. More over the value of trust to Chesterman's point of view is directly relevant to the translator's visibility, and visibility seems more important than invisibility. The fourth value, underlying communication norm – understanding, like trust has also to do with relation between people. The four values: clarity, truth, trust and understanding thus to Chesterman's mind suggest a basis for fairly comprehensive translation ethics.

Other distinguished scholars Baker & Maier (2011) stress upon the urgent need to engage more systematically with ethical issues in the context of translator and interpreter training, particularly in view of recent technological, social, political and professional development. The authors argue that "accountability" being a key ethical issue means for translators an increased responsibility for the consequences of their behaviour not only before their clients or the authors of the source texts but before the wider community whom they belong. Increased accountability in its turn has led to increased visibility and hence greater pressure on the profession as a whole to demonstrate that it is cognizant of its impact on society. The traditional professional ethos of neutrality and non-engagement can leave many practitioners with a sense of unease or disorientations and further blinds them to the consequences of their actions.

Thus, in order to systemize all mentioned above controversial ethical issues the future translators need to have a profound understanding of professional ethics, receive an experience of implementing ethical strategies properly in translation process and be able to justify them in advance during their study at university.

### **3. Method**

The curriculums of Translation Studies department were taken for analysis, whether they contain a course of translation ethics or not, also the syllabuses of some disciplines concerning the translation activity were studied in order to reveal their potentials in developing future translators' ethical knowledge and skills, if there are any what kind they are, traditional or innovative, the way of perceiving students the controversial character of translation ethics. The study focuses on the future translators' training for using ethical issues in the sphere of literary translation through different reflective and creative activities.

### **4. Potentials of Kazakhstani Translation Studies Department's Curriculum**

Having literary translation is an object of our investigation we've analyzed the potentials for providing future translators with critical thinking strategies in this genre of translation. We understand that it's impossible to train learners of bachelor program for literary translation in accordance with all requirements, and we quite agree with D. Gouadec (2007) who states that literary translation often requires particular talents, a natural gift on the part of the translator in terms of style, sensitivity, creativeness and aesthetic feeling. But anyway we were puzzled with a question: what are potentials for developing reflection skills in ethical training of future literary translators within the curriculum of bachelor degree program as a fundamental for their further independent professional development in this sphere.

As for Kazakhstani system of translation education there is no specialization on literary translation within bachelor degree program as in other countries, for instance in Canada, that's why training for literary translation, just for its basis is provided by some chapters or paragraphs in the following disciplines: "Fundamentals of translation professional service" (introduction, aim and objectives of literary translation), "Theory of translation" (specifics of literary translation), "Written translation" (practice of translation of some literary texts) and by introducing a single elective course on literary translation as "Practice of literary translation". In spite of these opportunities the need for

developing literary translation in Kazakhstan is great for national cultural spiritual identification in the conditions of globalization in the world.

Discussing the issues of professional ethics in Kazakhstani literary translation it's necessary to touch upon the specifics of literary translation development in the country. Being a dominated culture in the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstani translators transferred literature mostly from Russian language into Kazakh one. Only by the end of 1950-s there was the turn to translate national fiction from Kazakh language into Russian and later on into other languages, and their number was very few. The translations into English were done only through Russian language, which became as a mediator between Kazakh and English languages. So, the translation mistakes, just ethical ones of literary translator concerning accuracy, faithfulness, ideological correctness, reliability, responsibility could be doubled or tripled while the process of translation process. The process of translation of original text at early periods was conducted on the base of word for word translation for providing accuracy which in practice didn't meet all the criteria of quality of translation because of ignorance of conceptual stylistic and ethno-linguistic features of original national culture and reality, non-adequate transfer of national symbols, markers and realities, ways of life. The other problems of literary translation are marked by ideological colouring of original texts, which didn't give a real picture of events to a reader as it was in the first version of translation of Mukhtar Auevov's work "The Path of Abai" done by A. Nikolskaya, L. Sobolev, T. Nurtazina, and in the second version done by A. Kim. These disparities are found in translations from Kazakh into Russian language and you may imagine how inadequate they may be in translation from Russian into English and other foreign languages. As an example, Kazakhstani scholar Zhaksylykov (2013) having analyzed the literary translation and literary process on the base of analysis of Mukhtar O.Auevov's work "Kokserek" translated by A. Pantielev has revealed many cases of inadequacies, explained by inaccessible degree of translator's freedom, resulted in unjustified additions, changes, personal interpretations, missing and shortening of some places. He found that translator missed nine pages from original text and this was an excessive freedom from translator's part. This is the case of inaccuracy and the lack of accountability of translator who should be responsible not only before the author as claimed in many codes of ethics but before the whole society and humanity which wouldn't be able, thanks to translator's ethical mistake, to learn about the content of nine missed pages from the original text, which may be a culmination part of the whole story. Such bright examples motivate the future translators reflect over their translation strategies carefully and critically, search for the best decision in a concrete situation, and to be ready to prove their position.

Thus, the application of ethical issues in the practice of literary translation could be possible in the case of deep comparative and contrastive analysis of original text, its word-for-word translation and existing variants of translation on the lessons of practice of literary translation.

The study of Kazakhstani educational experience, especially concerning the ethical training of future translators has revealed that there is no special discipline designed for professional ethics; mostly it has been integrated into the content of the following disciplines as "Introduction to translation major", "Fundamentals of translation professional service", "Theory and practice of translation".

The information concerning the ethical issues in the syllabuses of analyzed disciplines is very superficial and mostly is represented by the code of ethics and code of conduct, which taught and learned by students as unquestionable set of rules for implementation. The introduction of ethics in training future translators, the orientation in this field, getting acquainted with existing general principles of translator's moral and behaviour is done mostly within the framework of the discipline "Fundamentals of translation professional service" on the 2d year of study, the period when many theoretical principles seem to be very abstract for students' perception. The code of ethics and code of conduct is mostly provided without exceptional cases from real practice, contradicting to the presented set of official ethical rules and in such way not developing students' reflective ethical knowledge and skills.

In this period, the students mostly acquire ethical knowledge while lecture or seminar lessons, not being involved in different reflective and creative activities on using and justifying their ethical decisions. It would be nice to use the following activities as case studies, classroom debates, critical essay, project research, and portfolio. Some of these activities were described in the article of Mona Baker & Carol Maier (2011), we added two more activities: project research, portfolio as more useful for developing learners' critical thinking strategies and reflective skills.

Case studies can be very effective classroom technique in considering a specific situation of implementing ethical issue in translation. Case studies may require, for example, the Kazakhstani students to answer an open-ended question, such as "What would you do if you are given to translate the text about Kazakhstan which doesn't correspond to reality, for instance, the movie

“Borat: Cultural learning of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan” and suggest to students to work out potential decisions to a given problematic question. The importance of the Case studies is included in that the students are practically involved in real problem decision and thanks to it are able to come to theoretical conclusion themselves.

Critical essay may be used by teachers as technique of developing students’ critical thinking skills of ethics implementation on the basis of analysis translating, for example, culturally sensitive texts, and such kind of work requires profound knowledge of discussed subject on the part of students, for example, the translation of Kazakh literature, as Mukhtar O. Auezov’s work “The path of Abai” into English language.

So, the project research work is particularly valuable for searching decisions to some ethical problem, for instance, visibility or non-visibility, engagement or non-engagement of translator on the base of comparison and analysis of known translation of some literary works: short story or novel. These works should also be familiar and very interesting to students. The students should be able to understand the reasons of existing two different controversial views on visibility and non-visibility, provide bright examples, express their opinions and strategies of translation. The project research requires developing learners’ research skills and skills of integrating knowledge of translation process, specifics of literary translation, and knowledge of social, cultural and linguistic issues of source language and adequate ways of its rendering into target language. The aim of any project is aimed at working out some recommendations to put into practice. It would be very advantageous for future translators to make up a portfolio whether it is reflective, problematic & research or devoted to a definite topic; it helps them independently reflect on different complicated ethical situations during their training at university and periods of internships.

## 5. Conclusion

It’s necessary to provide the future translators with critical thinking strategies on professional ethics implementation through all the course of their study at the university and it must be understood and taught as an integral and challenging element of each discipline in their curriculum, on the close interrelation of theoretical, practical and research based activities. All literary texts taken by instructors for translation analysis should consider in obligatory way the implementation and justifying ethical issues, only in these cases it’s possible to combine theory and practice of ethical training. The ethical training of the literary translators should be carried out in accordance with its specifics, because the goal of literary translation is different from goal of scientific & technique translation, and many changes or additions introduced in the literary text may be in some cases justified by necessity of adequate description of literary image.

There is a need for systemizing and working out recommendations on professional ethics of literary translators, which would be the subject of future research.

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