DOCTORAL THESIS

The ethics of reciprocity in translation: the development of a cross-cultural approach

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Abstract

As a highly complex area, translation ethics involves issues of texts, languages and cultures as well as individuals, collectivities and larger communities like nations. Good and evil can be done to them by translation and translators. Though efforts to undertake translation ethics have been intensive, a critical examination of the existent models and views finds that they are not comprehensive or effective enough to address the complex issues involved.

The dissertation attempts to overcome this insufficiency by striving to formulate a more comprehensive model, a model with greater explanatory power, named the 'Ethics of Reciprocity in Translation' model. Reciprocity presupposes pairs of entities and parties while any translation project involves such pairs. In a translation project, there is the translator the agent, translating the process and translation the product, and the model of 'Ethics of Reciprocity in Translation' sees the undertakings of translation from the perspective of harm and benefits incurred in and by translation to the pairs of entities and parties involved in or affected by a translation project, covering all these three dimensions.

Taking into account the general approaches to ethics in the West, i.e. virtue ethics, deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics, aimed respectively at the agent, the act and the consequence, the study draws on Ricoeurian and Confucian concepts of reciprocity as the theoretical foundation for the development of the model. Ricoeurian reciprocity is employed for its theoretical strength in stressing reciprocity between equal parties while Confucian reciprocity is strong for its position on reciprocity between unequal parties, since translation tends to involve both equal parties and unequal participants. Confucian reciprocity is given more prominence because it does not preclude the possibility of a *junzi*-type role (*junzi*=君子/*gentleman[-like]*) on the part of the agents to work for larger missions or higher values even between unequal inter-actants for a higher reciprocity.

The study argues that the ethics of reciprocity in translation centres on a translation project, whereby active parties such as individual persons, collectivities and nations, and passive entities including texts, languages and cultures ought not to be harmed but rather mutually benefited. They constitute the content of the ethical reciprocity. To achieve such reciprocity, translators and other agents are faced with three general alternatives: not-translating, 'equivalent' translation and manipulated translation, depending on the text type and quality as well as the value the translation project aims to establish. The model thus developed is therefore dynamic, integrated and multi-layered, combining *virtue ethics* and *principle ethics* to cover a wider scope of whether to, what to and how to translate.

This model of 'ethics of reciprocity in translation' is tested to three sets of cases for its validity and possibilities: cases of ethical reciprocity in translation, cases of ethical non-reciprocity in translation and cases where the model is not relevant. In each set, three examples of literary, semi-literary and non-literary texts are analysed respectively. Though not intended to apply in all translation projects, the model would hopefully make a valid and comprehensive one on the ethics of translation in general contexts.

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