

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.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Abbreviation	viii
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Why ethics?	1
1.2 Why the ethics of reciprocity?	9
1.3 Research questions and research scope	15
1.3.1 Research questions	15
1.3.2 Research scope	17
1.4 Methodological considerations	20
1.4.1 Integrated interdisciplinary work	20
1.4.2 Cross-cultural perspective	20
1.4.3 Case studies	22
1.4.4 Epistemology and my stance	22
1.5 Structure of the dissertation	23
Chapter 2 ETHICS, TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATION ETHICS	25
2.1 Ethics for this study	25
2.1.1 Definition and typology of ethics	25
2.1.2 Some key issues with respect to ethics	31
2.1.3 Ethics for this study: harm and benefits	36
2.2 Translation for this study	37
2.2.1 Definition and conceptualisation of translation	37
2.2.2 Translator: agency, pivotal agent and responsibility	42
2.2.3 Translation as a profession and its discontent	47
2.3 Translation ethics	51
2.3.1 Major models in the West	53
2.3.2 Major views and models in China	75
2.3.3 Defining translation ethics	84
Chapter 3 ETHICS OF RECIPROCITY	87
3.1 Reciprocity as a concept, a practice and a virtue	88

3.1.1 Reciprocity as a concept	88
3.1.2 Reciprocity as a norm and practice	91
3.1.3 Reciprocity as a value and virtue	96
3.2 Ricoeurian Reciprocity	98
3.2.1 Threefold reciprocity	99
3.2.2 Reciprocity of autonomy and vulnerability	103
3.2.3 Reciprocity between the universal and the contextual/historical	105
3.3 Confucian Reciprocity (<i>shuzhong</i> 恕忠, <i>wulun</i> 五倫, <i>junzi</i> 君子)	106
3.3.1 <i>Shuzhong</i> in Confucian reciprocity	108
3.3.2 <i>Wulun</i> in Confucian reciprocity	111
3.3.3 <i>Junzi</i> and <i>junzi bu qi</i> in Confucian reciprocity	113
3.4 Ethics of <i>reciprocity cross-culturally integrated</i>	116
Chapter 4 ETHICS OF RECIPROCITY IN TRANSLATION	117
4.1 Reciprocity in translation	118
4.1.1 Reciprocity between languages and between texts in translation	118
4.1.2 Reciprocity between individual persons in translation	121
4.1.3 Reciprocity between nations and between cultures in translation	123
4.2 Reciprocity and three relations concerning translation	125
4.2.1 Three key passive entities	125
4.2.2 Three major active parties	141
4.2.3 Three relations	143
4.3 Ethics of reciprocity in translation	144
4.3.1 Harm and mutual benefits concerning a translation project	144
4.3.2 Reciprocity resulting from not-translating, ‘equivalent’ and manipulated translation concerning a translation project	152
4.3.3 Ethics of reciprocity as a dynamic integrated multi-layered model	164
Chapter 5 ETHICS OF RECIPROCITY IN TRANSLATION TESTED	179
5.1 Cases of ethical reciprocity in translation	182
5.1.1 Ethics of reciprocity tested to the translation of literary text	183

5.1.2 Ethics of reciprocity tested to the translation of semi-literary text	187
5.1.3 Ethics of reciprocity tested to the translation of non-literary text	193
5.2 Cases of ethical non-reciprocity in translation	195
5.2.1 Ethical non-reciprocity in translation of literary text	196
5.2.2 Ethical non-reciprocity in translation of semi-literary text	207
5.2.3 Ethical non-reciprocity in translation of non-literary text	208
5.3 Cases where reciprocity is not relevant	211
5.3.1 Translation projects of literary text	211
5.3.2 Translation projects of semi-literary text	214
5.3.3 Translation projects of non-literary text	214
Chapter 6 CONCLUSION	219
6.1 The landscape of translation ethics	219
6.2 The ethics of reciprocity in translation as a valid model of ethics in translation	223
6.3 Constraints or limitation of the study	228
6.4 Potential for further research	229
Appendices	231
Bibliography	232
Curriculum Vitae	262