

ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY OF TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

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Abstract

The ethical responsibility of translators and interpreters has become increasingly important in the modern globalized world. Translators and interpreters do not simply transfer words from one language into another; they also mediate cultures, values, and sensitive information. Their work affects diplomacy, healthcare, law, education, media, and international communication. This article investigates the ethical obligations of translators and interpreters through a qualitative review of recent academic literature published within the last five years. The study focuses on the principles of accuracy, confidentiality, neutrality, cultural sensitivity, and professional competence. It also analyzes the ethical challenges created by artificial intelligence and machine translation technologies. The findings demonstrate that ethical decision-making is essential for maintaining trust, fairness, and intercultural understanding. The article concludes that translators and interpreters must continuously develop ethical awareness and professional accountability in order to respond effectively to the changing demands of multilingual societies.

Key words: translation ethics, interpreting ethics, confidentiality, neutrality, cultural mediation, machine translation, professional responsibility.

INTRODUCTION. Translation and interpreting are essential components of communication in multicultural and multilingual societies. Globalization, migration, international trade, and digital communication have significantly increased the need for professional translators and interpreters. These professionals are responsible not only for linguistic transfer but also for preserving meaning, cultural context, and communicative intent.

Ethics plays a central role in translation and interpreting because errors or bias may lead to serious consequences. In medical settings, mistranslation can endanger patients' lives, while in legal contexts inaccurate interpretation may influence judicial outcomes (Gray & Hilder, 2021). Furthermore, interpreters often work in emotionally sensitive

environments involving refugees, criminal investigations, or political negotiations, where professional ethics become particularly important (Kalishchuk, 2023).

Recent technological developments have also transformed the profession. Artificial intelligence and machine translation systems have improved translation speed but created new ethical concerns regarding privacy, reliability, and bias (Kimera et al., 2024). Consequently, ethical responsibility has become one of the most debated issues in translation studies.

The purpose of this article is to examine the ethical responsibilities of translators and interpreters and analyze how modern professional challenges affect ethical decision-making.

Accuracy and fidelity. Accuracy is one of the most fundamental ethical obligations of translators and interpreters. Professionals are expected to reproduce meaning faithfully without distortion, omission, or manipulation. According to Gray and Hilder (2021), inaccurate interpreting in healthcare settings may negatively affect patient safety and medical decision-making.

For example, if a medical interpreter incorrectly translates information about medication dosage or symptoms, the patient may receive improper treatment. Similarly, in legal interpreting, even slight modifications in tone or wording may influence judicial interpretation of testimony.

However, maintaining accuracy is not always straightforward. Translators frequently encounter idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and ambiguous language that cannot be translated literally. Goler and Mack (2024) argue that interpreters often experience ethical tension between literal translation and ensuring meaningful communication. Therefore, ethical translation requires both linguistic precision and contextual understanding.

In literary translation, fidelity may also involve preserving the emotional and stylistic qualities of the original text. Excessive adaptation may distort the author's intent, while strict literalism may reduce readability. Ethical responsibility therefore requires balance between faithfulness and communicative effectiveness.

Confidentiality and professional trust. Confidentiality is another major ethical principle in translation and interpreting. Translators and interpreters frequently work with sensitive legal, medical, political, and commercial information. Ethical standards require professionals to protect privacy and avoid unauthorized disclosure of information.

Gray and Hilder (2021) emphasize that confidentiality is especially important in healthcare communication because interpreters often gain access to highly personal

information. If interpreters share confidential details, patient trust and professional credibility may be damaged.

For instance, court interpreters may encounter classified legal information, while business translators often work with confidential corporate documents. Disclosure of such materials could result in financial, legal, or political consequences.

The expansion of online interpreting platforms and AI-assisted translation technologies has introduced additional concerns regarding digital privacy and data security. Kimera et al. (2024) note that machine translation systems may store or process sensitive information, creating ethical risks related to surveillance and unauthorized data access. Consequently, translators and interpreters must remain cautious when using digital tools and ensure that confidentiality standards are maintained in both traditional and online environments.

Neutrality and impartiality. Neutrality and impartiality are central ethical expectations in interpreting practice. Professional interpreters are generally expected to avoid influencing communication or expressing personal opinions. This principle is especially important in legal and diplomatic settings.

For example, court interpreters must translate testimony accurately regardless of their personal attitudes toward the defendant or victim. Any attempt to modify or soften statements may compromise fairness in judicial proceedings.

Nevertheless, neutrality is often difficult to maintain in practice. Kalishchuk (2023) explains that interpreters working in emotionally charged situations may experience ethical stress when professional obligations conflict with personal moral values.

Ethical dilemmas become particularly visible in situations involving hate speech, political propaganda, or discrimination. Translators may question whether they should translate materials they personally consider harmful or unethical. Some scholars argue that translators have social responsibility beyond linguistic neutrality, particularly when their work may contribute to injustice or misinformation (Drugan, 2022).

Therefore, modern translation ethics increasingly recognizes that neutrality is not always absolute and that ethical judgment may require careful contextual evaluation.

Cultural sensitivity and ethical mediation. Translation and interpreting involve not only language transfer but also cultural mediation.

Ethical translators and interpreters must understand cultural differences and avoid reinforcing stereotypes or cultural misunderstanding.

For example, some expressions acceptable in one culture may be offensive or inappropriate in another. Medical interpreters often need to explain culturally specific beliefs regarding illness, treatment, or gender roles in order to ensure effective communication between healthcare professionals and patients.

Cultural sensitivity is particularly important in multilingual societies where interpreters facilitate communication between institutions and minority communities. Ethical mediation may help reduce discrimination and promote inclusion.

However, interpreters must balance cultural explanation with professional neutrality. Excessive intervention may shift the interpreter's role from linguistic mediator to active participant in communication. Consequently, ethical professionalism requires careful judgment regarding when clarification is necessary and when it becomes inappropriate.

Emotional and ethical stress. Recent research demonstrates that translators and interpreters frequently experience emotional and ethical stress. Kalishchuk (2023) defines ethical stress as psychological pressure resulting from conflicts between professional obligations and personal values.

Interpreters working with refugees, asylum seekers, victims of violence, or terminally ill patients are often exposed to traumatic narratives. Continuous exposure to emotionally difficult situations may contribute to burnout, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion.

For example, interpreters assisting refugees during asylum interviews may experience moral conflict if they believe institutional policies are unfair or discriminatory. Similarly, medical interpreters may feel emotional distress when translating information regarding severe illness or death.

These findings suggest that ethical responsibility is closely connected to emotional resilience. Professional organizations should therefore provide interpreters and translators with psychological support and ethical training in order to reduce occupational stress.

Artificial intelligence and translation ethics. Artificial intelligence has significantly transformed translation practices in recent years. Machine translation systems such as neural translation technologies can produce rapid and inexpensive translations, but they also create serious ethical concerns.

According to Kimera et al. (2024), AI-based translation systems may reproduce social bias, mistranslate culturally sensitive expressions, and mishandle confidential information. Automated systems often lack human understanding of context, irony, emotion, and cultural nuance.

For example, machine translation may incorrectly translate legal terminology or produce offensive interpretations of culturally sensitive language. Such mistakes can create misunderstandings and damage intercultural communication.

Furthermore, machine translation technologies raise concerns regarding professional accountability. When AI systems produce inaccurate translations, it may be unclear

who bears responsibility for the consequences. Human translators therefore remain ethically responsible for verifying and correcting machine-generated content.

Recent discussions in translation studies also suggest that AI should support rather than replace professional translators. Human ethical judgment, cultural competence, and contextual understanding continue to be essential qualities that technology cannot fully replicate (Mager et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION. The ethical responsibility of translators and interpreters extends far beyond linguistic competence. Translators and interpreters play a critical role in facilitating communication across cultures, institutions, and societies. Their work influences legal justice, healthcare quality, diplomacy, education, and intercultural understanding.

This study demonstrates that ethical principles such as accuracy, confidentiality, neutrality, cultural sensitivity, and professional competence remain fundamental to translation and interpreting practice. At the same time, globalization, emotional pressure, and technological innovation have made ethical decision-making increasingly complex.

The analysis also reveals that translators and interpreters frequently face moral dilemmas involving personal beliefs, professional obligations, and social responsibility. Artificial intelligence has introduced additional ethical risks related to bias, privacy, and reliability, emphasizing the continuing importance of human oversight and ethical judgment.

Therefore, translator and interpreter education should place greater emphasis on ethics training, psychological resilience, and responsible technology use. Professional organizations must also strengthen ethical guidelines and provide support systems for practitioners working in emotionally demanding environments.

Ultimately, ethical integrity is essential for maintaining public trust in translation and interpreting professions. Without ethical responsibility, accurate and meaningful intercultural communication cannot be achieved.

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