

Study on the Ethics Problems Between Translation Service Providers and Consumers*

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Abstract—This thesis seeks to study the ethnics of the translation industry, taking into consideration the complex ethical relationships between various participants of the economic activity of translation service. Particular attention is given to the ethical relationship between service providers and consumers.

Keywords—ethics problems; service providers; consumers; translation assignment; translation strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

Different from the activity of translation which is a textual and intercultural process, translation service is an economic activity where the production, distribution and consumption of translation and auxiliary goods and services occur between different agents. The agents involved in this activity can be roughly divided into translation service providers and translation service consumers. They can be individuals, businesses, organizations or governments. The purpose of this activity is to satisfy the needs of both parties. The commodity exchange in the activity is translation and other auxiliary products such as glossary and translation memory database. During the exchange, the two parties agree to the value of the translation and its auxiliary produces, usually expressed by an agreed price and other forms of reward. The relation between translation service providers and consumers involves complex, ethic issue.

II. TRANSLATION SERVICE AS AN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

As an economic activity, translation service not only demonstrates economic relations, but also has its own ethic relations. In a translation service, there are complex relations between a translation service provider and its clients, employees, partners, fellow translation service providers and the whole society. The issue of ethics is important in dealing with each of these relations. However, the frequently discussed ethical principles for translation like equivalence and accuracy, Translation the Foreign as Foreign can hardly cover the complex ethic relations mentioned above. So what should be the core ethical principle for an economic service

activity like translation service?

Wei Jianguo proposes that in a market-based service exchange, the interdependent and mutually beneficial relationship between the participants of a commodity exchange constitutes the ethnic norm (Wei 2012; 124). The means mutual benefit, rather than generating interests for just one party, should be the ethical priority for both parties involved in the activity. To fully understand this, we need to go back to the origin of economic service and to dig into its nature. Translation service and other service activities derived from a division of labor in society and the ensuing private ownership of various kinds of commodities such as translation. What we produce can only satisfy a small part of our own wants, so we needs to exchange our own goods and services for those that we are short of but cannot make by ourselves. In a market-based economy, this exchange is essentially different from gratuitous assistance, charity or help between family members, as the economist Hayck points out, “Life in society necessarily means that we are dependent for the satisfaction of most of our needs on the services of some of our fellows... The benefits and opportunities which our fellows offer to us will be available only when we satisfy their conditions” (Hayek 2011: 203). Therefore, in such a service activity, no one is the sole receiver or provider, both parties give and take at the same time.

This activity can be fulfilled only if both can gain interest from it and agree to the conditions of the exchange. Otherwise, if one party perceives the effort they put into the activity outweighs the benefits and that it is more reasonable to work with another partner or not to have the services activity, this exchange fails and their economic relationship will break up. So to meet our own demand, we need to give out something in the first place. On the country, unethical dealing involves unfair exchanges that favor only one party. For example, a bad translation enables the provider to profit, but may spoil the client’s business negotiation or blemish the client’s image or dissatisfy the end users and reduce the client’s revenue. On the other hand, translators who cannot get their names printed on the book cover of their translations are denied the social recognition and corresponding economic returns they merit. Therefore, the participants of a service activity should not just give priority

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to their own wants and interests, but view mutual benefit as the ultimate ethical goal of the activity.

III. ETHICS OF TRANSLATION SERVICE PROVIDERS

Now that mutual benefits are the ethical principle, an ethical translation service should be one that meets the needs and interests of both the translation service provider and consumer or client. Then the next question is what the needs and interests of the provider and client are. One the part of the client, this seems to be clear an excellent translation and auxiliary goods and services are what they want from the provider. On the other hand, the provider expects rewards that reflect the value of their labor.

A. Excellent Translation

The benefit desired by the clients seems clear and simple enough: an excellent translation and auxiliary products and services. But when we start to ask what an excellent translation is, the answers are varied and dazzling. In fact, this question is at the core of most theories on ethics of translation. Thus, we have scholars telling us an ethical translation is one that is "equivalent", or that respects the other, or that fulfills its intended purpose, or that empowers women, etc. Chesterman summarizes the majority of these into four models of translation ethic: ethic of representation, ethics of service, ethics of communication and norm-based ethics. However, in this thesis, a discussion of ethics of the translation industry, an ethical translation can hardly be defined in terms of equivalence which is a fiction that disregards the social context of the translation, or the dualistic fidelity to target vs. source which simply does not reflect the complex reality of translation, or empowerment and improvement of the target language which, though noble and heady, are of little concern in the commercial world of translation service. In the model of ethics, translation is a commodity offered to a client, so its Excellency cannot be discussed without taking the client and client's needs into consideration.

B. Acceptance or Refuse of a Translation Assignment

All actions start with some motive, which is of some ethnical significance by itself. For Kant, "it is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will"(Kant 1996). Here, a good will is one committed only to make decision that the person holds to be morally worthy. Kant believes a good will, as the only virtue that is good without any qualification, is enough in itself. Even if it achieves nothing in the end, a good will still shines by itself, like a jewel, as usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add anything to its worth nor take anything away from it (Kant 1996:8). In China, ancient scholars like Mencius and Dong Zhongshu also stress the importance of motive in evaluating the moral values of an action. Of course, motive alone is not sufficient in judging whether an action is ethical or not, just as the result of an action is not enough in this aspect, either. By accident, a good effect may result from a disgrace motive while a good motive may end up with a disastrous result. So both motive and effect should be taken into consideration

when we are discussing ethics. That being said, motive is still a crucial factor in ethical terms. Therefore, before we discuss how we should do anything like providing a translation service, we should first ask the question of why we should or should not do it. Pym also believes the question of why a translation is carried out should precede the question of how to translate, as he points out if you can say why you should translate, the strategies and methods should follow from there, and in many cases, it is probably better not to translate.

C. Translation Quality and Translation Strategy

After a provider decides to accept a translation project, it is responsible for the quality and final effect of the translation. The intended end product of the translation service and the means that the provider will take to achieve this goal should depend first and foremost on the client's demand. This means the quality, format and delivery time of the translation should correspond to the client's planed, like when, where, under what condition, for what purpose and for whom. Accordingly, the translation strategies used in the translation process should also depend on this to create the needed quality, format and delivery time. That is to say, there should not be a universal quality, format or translation strategy for all translation assignment. They should be situational and flexible to fulfill the client's unique needs. Thus also means that the provider may not always strive to give a high-quality translation that carefully handles every detail of the original text at the cost of great efforts and time investment. The client may simply need a rough translation of the material, or a summary of the gist of the material, and quite probably he is only going to pay a small amount of money for the task. If the provider still creates an expensive translation of excellent quality of everything, it is a waste of time, labor and money for both sides. In his discussion of professional translation, Daniel Gouadec has given us examples of what a translation might be like.

The translator might need to omit a section of the sources document, summarize thirty pages in ten lines or so, add a section to provide information that is not present in the original document but is known by the translator to be vital for end user, provide a five-age translation for a two-page source document or vice versa, or recognize a whole set of documents, etc. (Gouadec 2007:8). These translations might not be "good translation" in the translation sense, but they might be the most efficient and cost-effective for both the service provider and the client, and thus they might be the most ethnical option. In fact, Gouadec recognizes that "zero defect quality", a seemingly ideal for translators, is usually achieved after four or five closes revisions to weed out all imperfections, as such a high cost that "zero defect quality" in translation remains something of an economically unreasonable objective (Gouadec 2007:18). It is unreasonable not just for the service provider, but the accordingly high price of the translation also increases the cost for the client and/or the end user. On the rare occasions when such a quality is indeed needed, the providers should definitely put into all his efforts to achieve it, but in most cases, the ideal of perfect translation of everything might be

neither achievable nor ethical. Therefore, setting a proper goal for the translation assignment before starting is important in both economic and ethical terms.

D. Value-added Products and Services

Different from the traditional way of translating written material from one language to another, today's translation services is much diversified, encompassing a variety of activities of translation, interpreting, localization, subtitling and dubbing. Therefore, the end product of the service is not simply some sheets of paper with the translated text on them, but may include subtitles and dubbing that are inserted into a video, translated website, edited and printed user manuals so on. When creating such products, translation is only part of the work. The task may also necessitate some editing. Desktop publishing or installing translated the material on the support medium like a website or DVD. The products offered to the client may include the end product in its required format only, or the end product together with some semi-finished material like the original translated text and codes.

The application of translation technology also generates other types of auxiliary products in translation service. The development and application of translation memory, machine translation and technology for terminology mining and management has changed the way that translation service providers carry out their task. It has also generated linguistic assets including terminology, translation memory database, technical writing style, translation style guide and so on. By reutilizing these linguistic assets and digital resources, both the provider and the client can create more accurate and consistent material in the translation service and reduce their cost in designing, translating, localizing and releasing the end products. (Cui 2012:65). So in many cases, the client would purchase the end products along with the linguistic assets for future use, especially the terminology glossary and translation memory database.

IV. ETHICS OF TRANSLATION SERVICE CONSUMERS

In an ethical and mutually beneficial relationship between translation service providers and consumers, providers have the moral duty to offer excellent translations and auxiliary products and services that can facilitate cross-cultural cooperation. Meanwhile, clients need to offer translation service providers rewards equivalent to the value of their labor and ensure a proper working condition.

A. Working Conditions

Decent working condition is not just an indication of respect for the provider. It is also indispensable for the successful fulfillment of the translation task. Without an umbrella, the interpreter could only scribble on a soaked notebook and interpret from notes distorted with raindrops. A small umbrella perhaps would have improved the interpreter's working performance under that circumstance. Likewise, proper seating for an interpreter who needs to take notes ceaselessly and several minutes' break for an

interpreter who has interpreted for quite some time will do good to both parties.

Another factor needs to be mentioned here: time. Time is an important restraint for a translation assignment, but there are always clients who want the translation back within very short time or who send the original text to the provider days or even weeks after the deadline as agreed upon. Sometimes the client does so because he or she does not know what is really involved in translation, and thus cannot properly schedule the time needed for a thorough translation job. Sometimes the client him-or herself can't schedule his or her own work properly and then passes off the pressure of a looming deadline to the provider (Epstein 2007). Whatever the reason, this will cause a lot of stress for the provider, upset the provider's original schedule which might be quite tight in busy seasons, and perhaps jeopardize the quality of the work. Sometimes a provider may not have the time to do projects that come too late or choose to refuse assignments from a client who is "always late". In q word, this is a lose situation for both. To strive for an ethical situation that is mutually beneficial, the client first needs to give a reasonable amount of time for the translation service provider to finish its work. When the schedule is settled, the client needs to respect the time and effort of the provider and stick to the schedule. When a client cannot do so, it should at least inform the service provider of the situation and work out a solution with the provider.

Securing a good working condition is not just the moral duty of the client alone. Translation service providers also have the obligation to request an umbrella, proper seating, a short break, reasonable time and on-time arrival of the original documents. They may need to explain to the clients the reasons for such requests and inform them of the need before the start of the assignment. Providers cannot make concessions one after another and wait for the outsiders to know the rules by themselves. As Epstein remarks, sometime translation service providers need to "educate" their customers about what translation really is, how much time it will take and why it is worthwhile to pay for professional services (Epstein 2006).

B. Payment

One problem in the translation industry is that the overall price for translation is relatively low compared to the value of intellectual work involved. To a large extent, this is due to most clients' or the public's lack of understanding of the practice of translation. Many people still believe translating is derivative, thus less creative and a lot easier than writing. However, many translators have expressed their objections to this prevailing view, claiming instead that translating requires hard intellectual work. For example, the writer and translator Zhu Guangqian once writes, "Translating is not an easy task. From my own experience, it is much harder to translate a book than to write one". (Zhu 2009:530). He believes for one thing, it is very difficult to truly understand the source text, which requires a high proficiency in the source language and the ability to understand the meaning behind the words and between the lines. For another, it is

even harder to translate it, which requires a great mastery of the target language as well (ibid).

Zhu points out some difficulties of translating, but these are only part of it. Apart from language proficiency, a deep understanding of the two cultures involved is also necessary. Plus, translators of non-literary texts, who usually work with materials from a certain field or industry such as construction, automobile and law, also need to have background knowledge of the fields. Otherwise, the translation might be incomprehensible for the end users or even bring serious negative consequences. As for interpreting, good interpreters in most cases have received formal training in interpretation and have acquired years of working experience. Therefore, the notion of many people that anyone with a certain proficiency in two languages can translation and interpret to their satisfaction is untenable at all. Translating is a profession that requires great ability, training, experience and a high sense of responsibility. It is no less complex than any other professions like doctor, lawyer, carpenter and nurse. There is a value to this expertise. The society as a whole has yet to recognize this value and respect it.

C. Copyright and Other Rewards

Money is one way of showing the value of the work of translation service providers. Service providers, especially translators also have other rewards to defend. Peng Ping points out, translators need to become visible through fighting for their rights in selecting which source text to translate, getting their names printed on the cover, copyright page and even the spine of their published translations, in appearing in the promotion material of a translation and in adding preface or after words to a translated book (Peng 2013:142). Most of the rights mentioned here are granted to an author of a work without doubt, but translators are usually denied them. Venuti recognizes a major reason for this marginality of translators: the offense of translation against the prevailing concept of authorship (Venuti 1995:31). "Whereas authorship is generally defined as originality, self-expression in a unique text, translation is derivative, neither self-expression nor unique: it imitates another text" (ibid). This view of translation has a long history and contributes to the invisibility of the profession.

To turn form invisible to visible is not easy for translators. Publishing houses, copyright tradition, readers, and even some translation teachers, and higher institutions are not fully aware of the distinctive value of the practice. All the translators and translation service providers should take it seriously and fight for the rewards they merit actively. Each time when an individual take an active action, he or she is not just fighting for him-or herself, but for the benefit or all translation service providers and for image of the whole profession.

V. CONCLUSION

The article aims to explore the ethic relation between translation service providers and their clients. A general ethical principle that governs this relation is proposed. Under this pimple, several more specific ethic issues are discussed,

including acceptance and refusal of a translation assignment, the merits of an ethical translation, continual improvement of professional competence, work conditions, payment and so on. This research employs four methodologies to explore ethic of the translation industry. The present study is a disciplinary attempt that integrates translation studies, applied ethics, sociology and economics. With a descriptive method, this research seeks to observe, describes and explain the ethical principle and ethical problems that already exist in the current industry. At the same time, a number of documents concerning the translation industries and translation ethics of different countries are analyzed and compared from a critical point of view.

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