

## ГРАНИЦЫ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ ЭТИКИ ПЕРЕВОДЧИКА

## LIMITS OF PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATOR'S ETHICS

*Статья направлена на то, чтобы определить различие между профессиональной и персональной этикой в области перевода. Автором статьи в научный обиход вводится термин «этический барьер». В статье представлен обзор различных теорий, касающихся этики перевода как вида профессиональной этики, и содержится исчерпывающее ее описание. Статья носит дискуссионный характер и направлена на то, чтобы положить начало научной дискуссии на данную тему.*

**Ключевые слова:** перевод, этика перевода, профессиональная этика, персональная этика, идеология в переводе.

*The paper aims to provide distinction between professional and personal ethics in the area of translation and defines the proposed term ethical barriering. It also discusses various theories regarding the ethics of translation within the framework of the professional ethics. This paper does not offer a comprehensive description of the professional ethics. Its goal is rather to stir up the debate.*

**Keywords:** translation, ethics of translation, professional ethics, personal ethics, ideology in translation.

The term “ethics of translation” has been widely used in Translation Studies. However, its meaning may seem a bit obscure as it is used in various contexts and for various purposes. The aim of this paper is to try and define professional translation ethics and to give an idea of its purpose, to explain why it should be used, how it can be used, and how it shouldn't be used. The aim of this paper is not to fully explore the possibilities of the definition of the professional ethics of translation, but rather to ponder on its limitations and emphasize some of the contemporary concepts of the translation ethics, which tries to superimpose personal ethics into the area of professional ethics and to explain the mutual relations between professional ethics and personal ethics in the area of translation.

### 1. The Role of Professional Translation Ethics

Chesterman [4] distinguishes macro-ethics and micro-ethics. Macro-ethics deals with the wider social implication such as the role and rights of translators in the society, their working conditions and fees. These include various principles of translators' associations or the recommended

minimal prices for translations as well as stating the names of translators in their works at more visible places by which social situation and cultural capital of translators can be improved. Micro-ethics is concerned with the translation process itself, translation strategies, etc. He also defines four values of translation ethics corresponding to the four norms – Clarity/Expectancy norm, Truth/Relation norm, Trust/Accountability norm, Understanding/Communication norm.

*Clarity* corresponds to “expectancy norm” – various expectancies being those of target readers or clients. Of course, the level of interpretation is very subjective and individual and influenced by a great number of factors such as ideology, literary education, etc.

Value *Truth* concerns the relation between two texts. The fact that translation has some kind of relation to an already existing text is stressed. Such value corresponds to the Relation norm and basically excludes excessive intervention into the original text – and deems pseudotranslations and second-hand pseudotranslations unethical – although it does not define “excessiveness”. The truth value of the text is also important in regard to the reality, i.e. a text should mirror the reality as objectively as it can.

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*Trust* corresponds to the Accountability norm. This value is related to the fact that there has to be a trust on various levels – trust that the translation is worth doing, faith in readers trusting that reading of the translation is worth it and trust between various parties working on the publishing process.

The last value, *Understanding*, is related to the Communication norm. The easiest way to define this value is to state that translators should try to minimize misunderstanding as well as minimize the number of readers who will be excluded from understanding for various reasons. Chesterman [6] finds this value to be of the highest importance for translators and all others values – including loyalty to the author, client or target readers – are subordinated to it.

A. Pym [16] stresses the responsibility of translators for the intercultural relations – translators create a third space between these two cultures and this space shapes intercultural relations. For him the goal of cross-cultural communication is “... mutual benefit deriving from cooperation, and the ethical goal of translation is to further intercultural cooperation between parties who are “Other” to each other...” [6, p. 141].

However, not every goal of interlingual communication is to improve mutual relations as there are translations which criticize e.g. political/social situation of the original country. Sakai [17] believes that translations do not increase cooperation and mutual understanding, they rather create further borders between the participants of the communication. He thinks that translation in fact creates borders and he coins this phenomenon bordering. Be it one way or the other, it is important to bear in mind the translators’ role in intercultural communication as a decision-maker. Every decision-maker has to make choices based on various ethical issues.

Sometimes, when we want to define something, it can be easier to define what it is not. F. R. Jones [9] compares the role of translators to the role of ambassadors – they are never neutral and they influence intercultural relations. He worked as a translator during the Civil War in Yugoslavia. Here, he encountered a specific problem; to translate or not to translate works of high literary quality neglecting the possible fact that they can support the rise of nationalism [notwithstanding that these works are e.g. older revisions of Serbian authors and so they are not directly connected to the War situation and could be written many years before the actual war conflict]. Here, translators have two choices. Either they choose to ignore social situation of the reception process and take into account only the literary quality – *Hellenistic approach* – or the other way around – *Realpolitik approach*. (Tymoczko [21]

states that in the peace-time, translations are really very peripheral, but in war-times they acquire a central role, as they are used for various ideological purposes.) Such a decision can change according to many variables; the feeling of loyalty they have towards the target culture, the original author or the ordering party, ideology, power structures and loyalty of a translator also take its toll. Nevertheless, both professional decisions – to translate or not to translate – may be considered correct. Jones [9] uses J. Derrida’s term *Décision* to better understand such a process. *Décision* is an act necessarily including a dilemma and only in such situations we – human beings – decide in its purest sense, because we do not have any prescribed “right” answer and our decision is not the result of a calculable process. Both approaches are ethical from the point of view of TS Professional Ethics, otherwise, translators’ role is only to apply calculable process.

Importance of the necessity to have a choice can be also found in Toury’s [20] three types of norms – *initial*, *preliminary* and *operational*. Initial norms fall into the field of translation ethics and Toury [20] gives two different choices – the choice between “adequate translation” and “acceptable translation” (See also Levý [13] Illusionistic and anti-illusionistic translation. It’s interesting that Venuti would label Illusionistic translation unethical) [20, p. 56–58] – without prescribing which of these is the “right” one. This is because the decision itself lies in the hands of translators and translators have to bear the consequences.

L. Venuti’s Ethics of difference can be viewed at as rather disputable. He defines Ethics of difference as follows: “*Translating motivated by an ethics of difference seeks to inform domestic readers of foreign philosophies, but also to provoke them into new thinking*” [23, p. 115] and its goal is to form heterogeneity of cultures. Many theoreticians and translators agree with the foreignizing strategy in translations. (S. Sontag [19] and A. S. Sibeiro [18] believe that to domesticate a foreign-language translation means to strip it of the most precious elements; or rather translators should not domesticate text to such extent, as they would assimilate the differences. This is evident mainly in those languages that translate very little. As a result, they use domestication – because the target audience is not used to foreign texts – and the reaction of theoreticians seems natural.) However, there is a problem with defining the translation process as being conditioned by the “heterogeneity”. (On the other hand, we do find L. Venuti’s [24] point about the translation representing resistance towards pre-dominant norms of

target society stimulating.) The ethics of difference is quite difficult to define as macro or micro-ethics, because they comply with both types of ethics.

In terms of micro-ethics – ethics on the level of translation process itself – Chesterman [6] defines the most important values as **commitment** and **striving for excellence**. These values can be considered to be the glue which binds translators to the values or issues mentioned earlier. In order to translate ethically, responsibly and adequately, one does have to strive for it and has to commit to the professional discipline.

Chesterman [4] further distinguishes between professional ethics and personal (An individual has the choice of changing his personal ethics but not the professional ethics.) ethics and personal ethics is not included in professional ethics as it “*is a matter of their (translators) own ethical principles – whether they use it (understanding of a particular source text) in order to cooperate, for good or evil, or whatever* [4, s. 152]. By such a definition, theories of some American translation scholar (Similar opinion can be found in the works of Tymoczko [22, p. 442–461], Lefevere [11] who call for heterogeneity.) are disputable to some extent as they present political goals and are based on political preferences and similar postulates based on such arguments can be misused e.g. for the purposes of censorship.

Therefore, professional ethics are mutual values of translators and theoreticians of TS and they should represent the entity of TS as a profession and as a discipline by the aforementioned commitment to the profession without super-imposing personal ethics.

In order to better differentiate professional and personal ethics, let us look on the proposed relationship between personal and professional ethics of translation.

## 2. Personal and Professional Ethics of Translation

Following diagram explains the proposed “ideal” mutual relations and processes between personal and professional ethics.

This diagram shows the interrelations of both types of ethics and also their impact on the text – and impact of the text – on the translation process, or rather on the personal ethics of a translator.

There are [at least] four types of interrelation:

1. Professional ethics influences the translation process of a particular text.

*Translator has got an offer, let us say: to translate Nietzsche’s philosophical novel, accepts it if it corresponds with the guidelines of Professional ethics – reasonable fee, time, etc.*

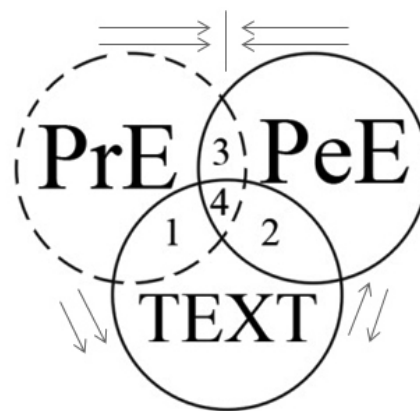


Fig. 1. Mutual impact and resistance of professional and personal ethics on the translation process (PrE – Professional ethics [I’ve not given Professional ethics clearly defined boundaries as Professional ethics can and has to change according to the socio-cultural situations and according to the current issues at stake. An example is shown in the last chapter of this paper.], PeE – Personal ethics)

2. Personal ethics influences the translation process and at the same time the original text shapes personal ethics.

*After reading, the translator can choose not to translate – if the text is in conflict with their personal beliefs. The final interpretation will differ according to the translator’s training, knowledge base, socio-cultural conditions and the time lag of the original text and of the interpretation process. On the other hand, the source text may influence translators’ personal beliefs that shape their personal ethics.*

3. Personal ethics [sometimes unconsciously] influences Professional ethics and Professional ethics [should] resist these influences and create a barrier that prevents the Personal ethics to enter the sphere of Professional ethics. At the same time, Personal ethics co-forms a barrier which prevents Professional ethics to enter the sphere of Personal ethics.

*Personally, the translator may disagree with particular ideas of the original text, but in this case, professional ethics has to form boundaries which prevent this disagreement to influence the outcome. E.g. the translator can’t change the ideas of lebensraum whether they disagree with it or not. At the same time, professional ethics cannot “command” personal ethics – they cannot force the translator to use particular translation strategies or to disregard the text because of the predominant values held by the writers who formed the professional ethics.*

4. The translation process is finally influenced by the fusion of conscious explicit professional ethics and both conscious and unconscious personal ethics.

*The result of these relations should make translators check whether their Personal ethics doesn't enter the sphere of Professional ethics and this fusion of both types of ethics results in particular translation strategies used during the translation process.*

The interrelation which should be stressed is number 3. Process taking place here will be hereafter referred to as “ethical barriering”. (And also functions both on conscious and unconscious levels.) If we want to state clear limitations of proper professional translation ethics, ethical barriering could be a key term. Such barriering states the limits of professional translation ethics as well as its goal within the TS. Let us elaborate on it further.

### 3. Ethical barriering in action

The simplest definition of personal ethics is that of externally expressed relations to a particular ideology, culture or values. Here, the word “externally” plays a crucial role, as it distinguishes omnipresent ideology derived from the socio-cultural habitus from personal opinions.

In this case, L. Venuti's [23] ethics of difference, strictly in the sense of conscious search for the foreign and an urge to realize the different innate ideology and the culturally-predisposed personal poetics in the text, can be understood as part of the professional ethics. However, it is rather disputable to define the goal of ethics as “heterogeneity of cultures”. Prescriptive attitude is inconvenient in the area of a social activity such as the translation process. Paradoxically, the goal of heterogeneity is by supposed to be achieved by homogenous strategy of translation.

Translation plays an important role in cultural relations. It creates an image of foreign and “*this image very often plays a formative role in the translation phenomenon, and the translation in turn may have an initiating, formative or transforming effect on the emerging or already existing image of the other* [10, p. 145].” In other words, a translator is directly or indirectly led by the existing image of the other during/before the translation process and also forms and alters this image.

E.g. the aforementioned case of Jones [9, p. 720] and his pondering on the question “to translate or not to translate” texts which could escalate the war situation has is a question of personal preferences and therefore personal ethics. To impose this question of decision into the professional ethics would not be a good idea as the entity formed by translators and translation theoreticians would have to superimpose personal preferences into scientific discipline.

Pym's [16] call for mutual benefit also can't comprise the professional ethics of translation, as

there are translations with almost the opposite goal and they can't be condemned professionally unethical as their only misdemeanor is the personal preference – until they manipulate facts. In other words, professional ethics shouldn't include guidelines of the only “lawful” literary canon. To put it simply, the key ethical value for the purpose of this argument is *Truth* [4]. Truth in the sense of personal ethics includes personal preferences and values of a translator. If a translator translates texts, which include disputable facts, unorthodox interpretations of facts – that are not wrong or purposefully altered, e.g. in the case of propaganda – such translations cannot be considered professionally unethical as it is the question of a translator's personal ethics and the aforementioned ethical barriering has to take place, if any kind of professional ethics tries to superimpose one particular interpretation.

The amount of texts translated on the web and the counter-information on every subject is mind-boggling. Propaganda of various ideological groups has never been so aggressive and although the socio-economic role of a translator has already transformed from *homo translator* (relatively autonomous human being) to *homo oeconomicus* (maximization of profit) [15, p. 341], resulting in very pragmatic nature of translators, ethics of translation can still fulfil a guideline for translators who try to do their best – the aforementioned commitment to the profession should be stressed once again. Of course, almost no text is ideologically-free as it includes dominant prevalent norms of the writers and their respective cultures, but such norms shouldn't be explicitly expressed in any written form of the professional ethics as they diminish the essence of the profession – mutual understanding.

### Conclusion

These are the proposed limitations of professional ethics. The most important values in our take on the ethics of translation are *Understanding* and *Truth*, which are also the most important limitations of the professional ethics of translation.

To put it in simple terms – according to Chesterman [4] the decision to translate a particular text is based solely on their personal statements and any “entity” of TS can't influence their decision. As stated in the beginning, the aim of this paper is not to give a comprehensive take on the rather complex and wide issue of the ethics of translation. It is, rather, to point out some disputable definitions of the ethics of translation which intervene into the area of personal ethics. This paper does not offer a comprehensive description of the professional ethics. Its goal is rather to stir up the debate.

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