Training Ethical Translators and Interpreters

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Abstract
A code of ethics for translation and interpreting is important in guiding translation and interpreting practice in the real world. It is designed to protect the interests of both translators and interpreters as well as clients of translation and interpreting services. Many professional associations of translators and interpreters around the world have set down codes of ethics for their members to follow, and such codes have also become an important component of translator and interpreter training programs. However, it has been found that the principles outlined in these codes of ethics sometimes fail to reflect in real-life practice or to provide satisfactory solutions to real problems due to different requirements of various parties involved in the process. This dilemma is reflected in translation and interpreting programs. Graduates of such programs at times find themselves unsure of how to act ethically. This has raised two important issues, i.e., how useful the existing codes of ethics are, and how to train students to develop the ability to act ethically in the real world. This paper particularly targets the link between the transfer of ethical knowledge in training programs and practical issues encountered in the translation and interpreting market in Australia, where there is an established code of ethics laid down by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT). The research is based on a questionnaire and follow-up interviews with graduates of translation and interpreting programs who are now working as professional translators and interpreters. The findings suggest that the current code of ethics remains useful in guiding the translation and interpreting practice in general. However, there are real-life situations that contradict certain principles in the code of ethics or that are not adequately addressed in them. The ethical content of the curriculum should therefore be designed to incorporate case studies, role plays and forums based on real-life examples. Teaching about the ethical aspects of translation and interpreting should enable students to develop the ability to act ethically based on the relevant code of ethics.

Keywords
code of ethics, code of conduct, code of practice

1. Introduction

A code of ethics for translation and interpreting is believed to be important in guiding translation and interpreting practice. The purpose of such a code is to protect the interests of both translators and interpreters and the clients of translation and interpreting services. In order to enable translators and interpreters to perform ethically, many professional associations of translators and interpreters around the world, both international and local, have laid down codes of ethics for their members to follow. Examples include the Association Internationale des Interpretes de Conference (AIIC) (2010), the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) (2010)
and the American Translators Association (ATA) (2010). Other associations that have a code of ethics include Association of Translators and Interpreters of Alberta (ATIA) (2010), Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ) (2010), South African Translators’ Institute (2010) and Institute of Translation and Interpreting (2010). According to Mikkelson (2000/01: 50), “virtually every professional association of interpreters has a code of conduct that its members are expected to follow”. While most of these codes of ethics cover issues relevant to translation and interpreting practice such as confidentiality, competence, accuracy, impartiality, professional liability, integrity, qualifications, professional development and employment, which may be expressed in different terms and details in a specific code of ethics.

These codes of ethics provide important guidelines for translators and interpreters and have played a significant role in protecting both clients’ rights and the interests of translators and interpreters, and enhancing the professional standards of translation and interpreting. However, with the continued growth of the translation and interpreting profession and increased globalisation, the principles stipulated in existing codes of ethics have at times not been comprehensive enough to cover specific translation and interpreting practices and have sometimes contradicted real market expectations (e.g., Hale 2007: 129-134; Hale & Luzardo 1997; Foley 2006; Pym 2001; Chesterman 2001). Graduates of translation and interpreting programs have also reported that what they have been taught in class about a code of ethics has sometimes failed to provide satisfactory solutions to practical issues in the real world (cf. Section 3 of this paper).

It has become apparent that translators and interpreters should learn to act ethically and show good judgment when confronted with real issues in the market. From the perspective of a translation and interpreting program, apart from conveying the established principles that are contained in the code of ethics, it is essential that practical needs and situations be taken into account and taught in order to enable students to develop the ability to act ethically in their future work. This paper will focus on the link between the transfer of ethical knowledge in training programs and the practical issues encountered in the translation and interpreting market, as well as issues relating to how to train translators and interpreters who have the ability to act ethically and skilfully in the real world. The research is based on the findings of a questionnaire and interviews with 46 graduates of different translation and interpreting programs in Australia. Although the study was conducted in Australia, the issues identified in this research and their implications would also have referential value to the teaching of codes of ethics elsewhere in the world.