**The Discursive (Re‑)construction of Translational Ethics**

Annjo K. Greenall

Department of Language and Literature

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

annjo.k.greenall@ntnu.no

*Abstract*

This article proposes a descriptive approach to translational ethics, one that takes a bird’s-eye view of the participants, processes and contents of the many discourses that influence how translational agents think and act. It sketches a model that takes into account the various voices that take part in the discursive (re‑)construction of ideas about translational ethics, the communicative spaces they inhabit, and some of the ideas currently in circulation among institutions, scholars, source-text authors, translators, journalists, and ‘regular’ recipients. Bakhtinian discourse theory helps us see how these ideas on ethics intersect, diverge, emerge, and re-emerge slightly altered in different contexts. Looking at the complexity of the discursive edifice that is erected through the constant negotiations of the different participants in the discourse, the article suggests that it is not obvious who translational agents are most likely to listen to. On the other hand, it is not obvious that translational agents should be expected to bow to *any* one authority in the matter: the inevitably conflicting pressures from various corners of this edifice suggest that critical awareness of the differing opinions should be fostered, allowing translational agents to develop their *own* voice.

*Keywords*: Translational ethics, Bakhtin, discourse, dialogism, voice

Who are the contributors to ideas about translational ethics, and how and where do these ideas arise? And who and what are translational agents listening most closely to? Questions such as these invite an unambiguously descriptive perspective within the academic sub-field of translation and ethics, which until recently has been dominated by an unabashedly top-down promotion of specific ethical principles vis-à-vis translators. A descriptive perspective on translational ethics is critical because the non-involved outlook it brings can help make sense of a highly complex picture. First of all, it allows us to see more clearly that translational associations, networks, commissioners, and scholars are not the only producers or promoters of ideas about ethics: translational agents themselves also take part in this process, as well as those at the receiving end of translations, and all of these may have different agendas, which sometimes creates conflicting ideas and demands. It also allows us to see more clearly that ethics is a discursive phenomenon where ideas overlap yet diverge and always evolve in response to changing historical, cultural, and societal circumstances. Applying a bird’s-eye perspective to the agents involved and their discursive (re‑)construction of ideas about ethics supports, as I hope to show, the emerging view that rather than merely adopting a predetermined set of principles advocated by some authority or another, translational agents should strive to develop a critical awareness of ethical issues in order to make enlightened decisions within each of the great variety of situations they will find themselves in (see, e.g., Abdallah, 2011; Baker & Maier, 2011; Drugan & Tipton, 2017b; Inghilleri, 2008).

Taking the dialogical discourse theory of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1986) as my point of departure, my aim here is to outline a model of the elements involved in the discursive (re‑)construction of translational ethics. I will chart the various voices that take part in re‑cycling ideas about ethics, locate them in terms of the communicative spaces they inhabit (books and articles, translators’ prefaces, printed newspapers, online chat forums, and more), and sketch some of their proposals and views on ethics, thus illustrating how ideas re-emerge in various communicative spaces and are modified and altered as they enter new contexts. In doing this, I wish to advocate a descriptive meta-perspective on ethical thinking within the translational field at large – a form of meta-ethics, if you will (Koskinen, 2000, p. 11) – as well as suggest a possible starting point for further studies of the formation and spread of ideas about translational ethics.

Although my aim is to present a general overview of contributors and contributions to the discourse on translational ethics, I will emphasize the voices of journalists, readers, and other agents who have been neglected or given little attention so far in this context, as illustrated by recent Norwegian examples. The article ends with some brief thoughts on who practitioners are most likely to listen to, and whether they in any case ought to listen to anyone in particular.

1. **Bakhtin, Dialogue, Voices and Polyphony**

For the purposes of this article, I define ethics quite widely as discursively (re‑)constructed global or local ideas regarding good, correct, or appropriate translational behaviour that translators and other translational agents should abide by. Note that while some scholarly work focuses more narrowly on *translators’* behaviour (e.g. Pym, 2012), I specifically speak of *translational* behaviour in order to capture the fact that many different agents are involved in the production of translations (see e.g. Alvstad, Greenall, Jansen, & Taivalkoski-Shilov, 2017b), and that discourses on ethics increasingly take into consideration the fact that ethics should be a concern for all of these participants (Abdallah, 2011; Alvstad, Greenall, Jansen, & Taivalkoski-Shilov, 2017a, p. 4; Drugan & Tipton, 2017b, p. 122; Koskinen, 2000; Pym, 2003).

Branded ‘one of the most important theorists of discourse in the twentieth century’ by political theorist Andrew Robinson (2011, n.p.), Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986) is taken as the point of departure for the present model of the (re‑)construction of ethics in discourse. In Bakhtinian thought, discourse is polyphonic in the sense that all discursive elements, such as words, sentences, and entire texts, carry the voices of those who articulated them in previous contexts.[[1]](#footnote-1) These voice-carrying elements, when deployed, are placed in a relationship with other such elements: they are ‘dialogized’, and this is where meaning arises (anew).

All texts and discourses are polyphonic and dialogical in this sense, including, of course, those on translational ethics. This is why the typically unilateral focus within translation studies on what *other scholars* have said about ethical principles in translation is problematic: other agents have influenced or currently influence the discourse on ethics, too.

1. **Participants in Dialogues on Translational Ethics**

Considering the complexity of the Bakhtinian view of discourse, when I talk about participants’ voices and dialogue in the following, I am taking a huge, simplifying leap, insofar as I first and foremost focus *not* on the more or less easily discernible voices of the those who have imprinted their voices on the discursive elements in the past, or those who are indeed cited or quoted in the texts in question, but on the voices of those who speak in these texts as authors, in the everyday sense of this word. Next, I focus on how these authors’ directly or indirectly expressed views on ethics can be seen as being in dialogue with views on ethics expressed by other authors, in the same sense. Voices that will be considered in the following are those of scholars, representatives of institutions, source-text authors, and translators, as well as the voices of agents who are at the receiving end of translators’ efforts, such as journalists (including reviewers), as well as non- and semi-professional readers/consumers of translations. This covers a wide array of voices but is not necessarily an exhaustive list. The ethical ‘types’ identified here (see Table 1) are also not intended to provide a complete or accurate picture. Rather, the table is to be interpreted as a rough, simplifying map of a much, much more complicated terrain, the complexities of which I try to provide at least a sense of in the remainder of this article.

(Insert Table 1 here)

* 1. ***Academic Voices***

What follows here is a brief review – a reminder, so to speak – of a number of ethical principles that have been proposed and promoted in the academic literature, which I provide here in order to identify overlaps in concerns between this community and various non-academic communicative spaces. A useful starting point in this endeavour is Chesterman’s (2001) four-fold, value-based classification of previously proposed ethical principles. The first of his categories is *representation*, which comprises the age-old ethics of fidelity to the source text (largely left by the wayside in translation studies, but still strongly present in folk conceptions of how translators should translate), and the ethics of the non-suppression of the Other in target texts, be this cultures and ethnicities (cf. Berman, 1984; Bermann & Wood, 2005; Venuti, 1995) or gender and sexualities (cf. Spurlin, 2014). Chesterman’s second category is *service*, which is associated with the *skopos* branch of translation studies (cf. Holz-Mänttäri, 1984; Nord, 1991) and is concerned with such values as loyalty to agreements and contracts between clients and translators, efficiency, and timeliness in carrying out assigned tasks. The third category is *communication*, where emphasis is placed, according to Chesterman, on the ethical obligation of the translator to enable optimal communication as well as cooperation with the Other (cf. Levinas, 1982, 1987; Pym 1997, 2000, 2012). The fourth and final category is *norm-based ethics*, which, according to Chesterman (2001, p. 141) derives from descriptive translation studies (Toury, 1995) and which broadly speaking emphasizes translating according to the expectations of the commissioners and readers of translations. According to Chesterman, each of these models is insufficient on its own, and they partially overlap or contradict each other, which he sees as a weakness rather than an unavoidable, and perhaps also democratizing, result of discursive processes. Adding his own voice to the choir, Chesterman proposes an ethics of commitment (2001, p. 147), which takes as its point of departure the likely intentions of translators to do the best job they can in any situation (which, in fact, points towards later developments in thought on translational ethics, where flexibility and ability to perform informed improvisations in different situations are emphasized).

Moving on to proposed ethical principles that fall partly or fully outside Chesterman’s categories, Baker and Maier (2011) present a principle which is in some ways an extension of the ethics of service, namely an ethics of accountability, where the perspective is moved from the notion of service vis-à-vis an employer to service vis-à-vis a wider community. The notion of service vis-à-vis a wider community is also refracted through the concept of ‘social responsibility (of the translator)’ as explored in a recent special issue of *The Translator* entitled Translation, Ethics and Social Responsibility, edited by Joanna Drugan and Rebecca Tipton (2017a). In it, Drugan reminds us that ‘The provision (or absence) of translation, and its quality, have wide-reaching effects. Interpreters and translators manifest virtues and vices, respect obligations, and produce consequences within the translated encounter, but the impact of their choices can also be apparent far beyond the encounter itself’ (2017, p. 128). Possible (negative) consequences may range from a lack of ‘linguistic justice’ – majority languages receiving undue priority in unregulated translational flows on the Internet – (McDonough Dolmaya, 2017, p. 143) to (witting or unwitting) violations of human rights in contexts of conflict and war (Inghilleri, 2008, p. 212).

Some ethical principles proposed are intended as global principles, while others are more local in that they concern translational sub-genres such as the translation of children’s literature. Oittinen (2014) states that she sees ‘the purpose and ethics of translating children’s books’ to be helping ‘children to enjoy their human potential to the fullest’ (p. 37) – what we could call an ethics of existential fulfilment. Kenny (2011), on her part, proposes an ethics for machine translation, involving a number of different agents involved in the machine-translation (MT) ‘cycle’, from developers on the one end to users on the other, and emphasizing a societal responsibility towards translators, whose work, according to Kenny, is currently being exploited in order to train MT systems which increasingly relegate human translators to the role of post-editors.

Since the 2000s, discussions regarding ethics in translation studies have been increasingly diversified, taking into account not only professional translators and translation. The ‘new terrain for ethical inquiry’ (Pym, 2012, p. 4) that has subsequently opened up has only been modestly explored within translation studies, for what Tyulenev (2014) would call paraprofessional translators, namely ‘those people whose jobs are not directly translation- or interpreting-related who do translate or interpret’ (p. 77). Both Pym (2012) and Baker and Maier (2011) seem to include paraprofessional translators in their considerations of ethics, but this group is not singled out for particular scrutiny (others who have touched on the issue more recently are Drugan and Tipton in their introduction to *Translation, Ethics and Social Responsibility* (2017b, p. 121)). More work has been done on the ethics of *non*-professional translation, such as activist, crowdsourced, and fan translation (e.g. Drugan, 2011; McDonough Dolmaya, 2011a, 2017). These studies tend to approach ethics from a more descriptive point of view. Drugan (2011), for example, describes how ethics is discursively constituted by various voices within the online translation communities where the translation activity goes on, which is something I will come back to when discussing translators’ voices below.

* 1. ***Institutional Voices***

Institutional voices on translational ethics emanate from various organizations and translation associations and networks and are expressed in the form of formal, written codes of ethics. McDonough Dolmaya (2011b) presents an overview of a number of profession-oriented translation networks across the globe and their codes of ethics, comparing these codes to each other and to statements made by practising translators in online discussion forums in order to find out if there are any issues that these codes fail to address. What she found was, among other things, that the majority of the codes, targeting issues such as remuneration, confidentiality, competence, good general behaviour, and so on, were not specific to the translator profession (McDonough Dolmaya, 2011b, p. 32). Only three translation-specific issues were targeted in the codes, concerning accuracy, the choice of working languages (with one’s mother tongue generally agreed to be the only acceptable target language), and the issue of whether immoral or illegal texts should be translated (McDonough Dolmaya, 2011b, p. 32). The first of these three clearly falls under Chesterman’s (2001) category of representation (more specifically, the ethics of fidelity), the second, a consideration connected to competence, could be seen as a facet of Chesterman’s ethics of commitment, while the third is not easily seen in terms of any of the overarching categories introduced so far, dealing, as it does, with translators’ rights in certain circumstances *not* to translate (see ‘ethics of non-translation’ in Table 1).

* 1. ***Source-text Authors’ Voices***

From J.R.R. Tolkien’s ‘Nomenclature of *The Lord of the Rings*’ (Tolkien, 1975) to Umberto Eco’s *Experiences in Translation* (2001), which relates his experiences both as a translator and as an author whose works have been translated, many a source-text (literary) author has not been shy in directly or indirectly, with more or less force, proposing an ethical stance for translators. ‘Directly or indirectly’ is obviously a key phrase here, because in order to accept the premise that these (and some of the later ones that I present) are indeed voices on translation ethics, we have to accept that these voices, unlike those of academics and professional bodies, rarely address ethics directly or use the term ‘ethics’. Also, sometimes, they refer to related concepts such as ‘values’, and ‘norms’. The nature of the relationship between ethics, values, and norms, which in dictionaries are often used defined similarly or used as synonyms for each other, is often defined in terms of degree of generality in scholarly work on translation ethics. Chesterman (1997), for example, talks specifically about ethicalvalues as ‘concepts that govern and underlie norms’ (p. 149), thus situating ethics on the more general plane of values. Toury (1995), (bypassing the notion of ‘ethics’), sees ‘general values or ideas shared by a community – as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate’ as translated into norms, which he defines as ‘performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations, specifying what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioural dimension’ (p. 55), thus seeing degree of generality as that which differentiates values and norms. All in all, the three phenomena seem to depend on each other to such a degree that reference to one is going to be seen, here, as indirect reference to (at least certain aspects) of another.

Tolkien’s ‘Nomenclature’ clearly subscribes to, and hence indirectly promotes, an ethics of fidelity.[[2]](#footnote-2) In regard to *The* *Lord of the Rings* he prescribes that names in general ‘should be left *entirely* unchanged in any language used in translation, except that inflexional *-s*, *-es* should be rendered according to the grammar of the language’ (Tolkien, 1975, p. 155). Tolkien also provides a 21-page-long list of exceptions to this rule, with detailed instructions on how specific names and things should be translated, as in the entry for the surname ‘Appledore’:

An old word for ‘apple-tree’ (it survives in English place-names). It should be translated by the equivalent – that is, by a dialectal or archaic word of the same meaning. In Germanic languages this may be a word of the same origin: for example, German (Middle High German) *aphalter*; Icelandic *apuldur*; Norwegian, Old Swedish *apald*. (Tolkien, 1975, p. 160)

Literature is of course an area with a strong sense of textual ownership, so that the focus on ethics of representation is not surprising. It can be found also in Umberto Eco’s *Experiences in Translation* (2001), although his statements do not take the form of direct instructions but rather of a discussion of what fidelity can reasonably mean, given the incommensurability of languages, noting that ‘[e]very sensible and rigorous theory of language shows that a perfect translation is an impossible dream’ (p. ix).

Authors’ notes and books on translation are not the only communicative spaces where we find authors’ voices on translation ethics. We also find them in printed or online media, where humour is often used to capture readers’ imaginations and, possibly, to mask a fear of loss of control in encounters with translators and their often incomprehensible languages.

An ethics of fidelity seems to be taken for granted by many of these authors-in-the-media (Halfon, 2011; Maloney, 2004), although in at least one case (Fishman, 2017) it is understood as somewhat of a misplaced ethic. On the translation from English into Russian of his debut novel, set against the backdrop of the Russian community in New York, Fishman notes that the translator conscientiously enough ‘had translated everything, but hardly every word was as necessary for an audience already familiar with, say, how and why the [Russian] pre-revolutionary nobility fled to France’ (2017, n.p.). Here, we find a rather more functional approach to translator ethics in the form of a concern for the target reader’s immediate textual needs.

An ethical issue frequently touched on by these authors is that of competence (e.g. Fishman, 2017; Maloney, 2004), which is one of several principles consistently mentioned in formal codes of ethics, according to McDonough Dolmaya (2011b, n.p.). She identifies it, however, as one that is not specific to the translation profession, which may be why it is an issue that is not among the most debated amongst academic voices on translational ethics. The fact that this seems to be a strong concern among authors is of course unsurprising, in that it is their reputation that is on the line, given that most readers of the translations will have accepted the ‘translation pact’ (Alvstad, 2014), a rhetorical construct leading to the reading of the translated version as if it were the original.

Finally, although some literary authors do not want to have anything to do with the translation of their works, the responsibility of the translator to consult the author in cases of uncertainty or doubt – arguably an aspect of the ethics of service – is a theme that seems to strongly underlie the abovementioned authors’ reflections. On his personal website, crime fiction novelist Shane Maloney, whose works feature Australian slang, puts it as follows:

At least the Americans consulted me. With the Finns, there was no correspondence whatsoever. Presumably, this is because Helsinki has a good supply of unreconstructed Whitlamites who know the difference between a franger and a furphy. Or perhaps because the translator guessed that my grip on the Finno-Ugric branch of the tree of languages is tenuous at best, limiting my capacity to make constructive suggestions. Whatever the case […], a book in Finnish simply arrived one day. (Maloney, 2004, n.p.)

* 1. ***Translators’ Voices***

Translators’ voices make themselves heard in many different communicative spaces. There is, of course, the translated text itself, which constitutes indirect testimony of the adoption of a certain attitude or approach to the task of translating (Toury, 1995, p. 65). On a paratextual level the voices of professional literary translators are found in prefaces and footnotes, which may contain ‘explicit theoretical statements about translation norms and a translator’s decision-making processes’ (Toledano Buendía, 2013, p. 150).

The age of the Internet has brought along with it opportunities for translators of all kinds, not just professional literary translators, to express themselves on various issues, including ethics. McDonough Dolmaya (2011c) suggests that blogs, for example, offer a glimpse into the field from the practitioners themselves. The majority of the 51 blogs she studied were run by individuals identifying themselves as full-time or part-time professional translators (McDonough Dolmaya, 2011c, pp. 83–84). The various blogs sometimes commented on ethical issues such as the degree and kind of necessary competence (McDonough Dolmaya, 2011c, p. 94), whether or not to accept commissions that pay less than the going rate, and how to deal with problematic relationships with clients and translation industry professionals (McDonough Dolmaya, 2011c, p. 88). There exist, however, blogs that are fully devoted to ethical issues, such as the Translation Ethics website (<http://translationethics.blogspot.com>), which targets the unethical behaviour of translation companies as intermediaries and offers a blacklist of non‑ and low-paying agencies. The list has been created with the help of insider tips from other translators and could perhaps be said to fall under an ethics of service, one that concerns the behaviour of translational agents other than the translator.

In addition to such blogs, various types of networking forums or online communities can be found, such as TranslatorsCafé, whose various forums include one on Ethics and Professionalism (<https://www.translatorscafe.com/cafe/MegaBBS>[)](https://www.translatorscafe.com/cafe/MegaBBS/forum-view.asp?forumid=6&catlock=2)). Here, the various posts show, like the Translation Ethics website above, that when translators discuss ethics among themselves, it is often the (un)ethical behaviour of *other* agents in the translation industry that they are concerned with, especially clients or translation agencies that offer cut-rate wages and poor working conditions.

While online communities such as TranslatorsCafé are mostly about networking between those who see themselves as professional translators and who do paid work individually, outside the online platforms a great number of communities have arisen around various forms of non-professional translation done by activists, fans, or other idealists whose translations are often produced for free, collaboratively, and on site (Drugan, 2011). These spaces, where professional translators sometimes also figure, are not controlled by any form of official code of ethics.[[3]](#footnote-3) According to Drugan, however, they instead establish their own ethics, in quite specific ways, enabled by the purposes and features of the online communities. Drugan found differences between the professional and non-professional realms regarding the relative importance placed on various ethical issues: while the primary concern in a set of professional codes of ethics studied by Drugan was individual competence – the importance of not taking on work for which one is not fully qualified – the corresponding primary concern in the online communities studied was to arrive at a common, community-wide philosophy. Moreover, Drugan noted how guidelines for ethical behaviour tend to be upheld in these communities via an encouragement to be loyal – not to other, individual translators, keeping their secrets, so to speak, but to the community as a whole, by reporting other translators’ unethical behaviour, which will then receive some form of sanction. This is something that Drugan carefully applauds as an ethical mechanism that might work also in a professional context. Here, I will think of this discourse as being concerned with an ‘ethics of community’ (see Table 1).

Translators also sometimes voice their views on ethical issues in academic work, as respondents to surveys or as interviewees. Kruger and Crots (2014), for example, talked to 31 South African professional translators, giving them a hypothetical set of ethical challenges and asking them about the translation strategies they would have chosen. What they found was an overwhelming preference for an ethics of fidelity (see also Jansen, this volume), although in different degrees and for different reasons depending on the translator’s age and experience.

* 1. ***Journalistic Voices***

Translational agents serve larger societies and cultures. Thus, when some aspect of translation is perceived to ‘go wrong’, then sometimes, members of these societies and cultures explicitly react. Whether as engaged members of societies (representing themselves) or as ‘neutral’ reporters, journalists comprise one category of agents who take the initiative and/or mediate when some issue arises in regard to either translations or communicative events involving translations. According to Baker and Maier (2011), a tendency towards increased accountability and visibility means that translators and interpreters are subject to greater media scrutiny. In identifying something as a wrong course of action, these media voices imply a kind of ‘negative ethics’ – a suggestion to translational agents, including publishers and copy editors, for example, regarding what they should *not* do.

Three relatively recent cases from the Norwegian news landscape will serve here as examples of such media reactions. The three cases touch on three different ethical issues: the issue of whether translators and their collaborators should be expected to be linguistic gatekeepers/guardians of a smaller language (part of an ethics of service, to society), the issue of the (non‑)right of translational agents to manipulate information for political gain (ethics of representation or service), and issues related to the uncritical or naïve use of machine translation (cf. Kenny, 2011). The first case may be divided into a first and second act. The first act concerns a series of media debates in the cultural press between 2011 and 2013, discussed in Solum (2017), over, among other things, a number of Anglicisms found by literary reviewers in translations from English into Norwegian. As with other languages in Europe, Norwegian is currently being influenced by English borrowing and code-switching, and some degree of domain loss. Attitudes to this development range from silent acceptance (from the majority) to fierce and vocal purism (in a minority), the latter particularly evident in the cultural press. While Solum’s focus is on how these debates call attention to normally invisible agents in the translation process, such as translators, proofreaders, and publishers, these cases also illustrate how translational agents are often called upon to function as protectors of the Norwegian language, shielding it from undue influence. Examples that were commented on in the press debate ranged from excessive use of loan words such as *bigotteri*, *partyet*, *armyjakka*, and *dealen* in one translation (Bekeng, 2012, p. 12), to unidiomatic calques such as *full av seg selv* (‘full of oneself’, for which the translator could have chosen an idiomatic equivalent in Norwegian, viz. *høy på pæra* [lit. ‘high on the pear’, where *pear* is a metaphor for *head*]) (Willis, 2011). The second act of this issue of Anglicized translations involves journalists commenting on *other* journalists doing translation. Since they are subject to strict deadlines, often rely on online, English-language source material, and often write for younger audiences who are used to and therefore perhaps expect Anglicized texts, Norwegian journalists nowadays tend to produce relatively large numbers of direct translations of English-language expressions – calques – in their texts, causing the presence of what the language-conscious will perceive as ‘unidiomatic’ expressions. This has been criticized, among other places, in an article by journalist Nils Martin Silvola (2016), which offers examples such as *jeg vil savne ham uten mål*, a verbatim and unidiomatic translation of ‘I will miss him beyond measure’, as tweeted by the actor Kevin Spacey after the death of his colleague Robin Williams.

The second case dates from 2015, and concerns the investigative efforts of a Norwegian newspaper, *Bergens Tidende*, to prove that a letter from Afghan authorities to the Norwegian government had been translated incorrectly, whether by accident or on purpose, by someone at the Norwegian embassy in Kabul (Gillesvik & Røssum, 2015). The letter from the Afghan authorities, originally in Dari, contained an expression of outrage at a bout of forced repatriations from Norway of families with children at the time. It was claimed that the situation was too unsafe, and the letter also contained threats to close the borders to these returned families. The letter reached the Norwegian government in translated version and, according to the latter, contained no mention that the repatriation constituted a problem. *Bergens Tidende*, however, got hold of the letter in Dari and had their own translation made, which revealed the true content of the letter. Because of *Bergens Tidende*’s perseverance, the Norwegian government was finally forced to admit that their translation had been flawed, and that certain information had indeed been missing. According to the somehow nebulous news coverage of the incident, the government subsequently had a number of new translations of the letter made, where ‘some of the versions’ contained the missing information, and ‘some didn’t’ (Gillesvik & Røssum, 2015, n.p., my translation). For the Afghan families in question, the incorrect translation, which may or may not have been carried out in good faith, or, alternatively, the incorrect *representation* by the Norwegian government of a ‘correct’ translation, could mean the difference between remaining in Norway and being returned to an unsafe situation in Afghanistan, underscoring Baker & Maier’s (2011) point that translations may at times even have a life-altering impact.

The third and final case is the most recent one. In September 2017, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) reported on the unfortunate use of automated translation by employees at the Norwegian multinational oil and gas company Statoil (Tomter, Zondag, & Skille, 2017). On several occasions they had used the services of the open, free version of the translation tool Translate.com to translate internal documents. What they were *not* aware of was that data from such operations are stored in the WiFi network The Cloud and are therefore searchable in Google. This was first discovered by accident, and later on Tekna (the Norwegian Society of Graduate Technical and Scientific Professionals) made several Google searches which resulted in the retrieval of sensitive information from numerous other companies and organizations that had become searchable for the same reason. Passwords, contracts, and correspondence were suddenly openly available online. What is at stake here of course is an ethics of confidentiality, an essential part of – as well as a problematic area for – the aforementioned ethics regarding machine translation (Kenny, 2011). Similar confidentiality issues had long since been noted by professional translators in regard to texts uploaded to Google servers for machine translation (Drugan & Babych, 2010). This is perhaps an instructive example of how slowly scholarly insight trickles down to the general public.

* 1. ***Recipients’ Voices***

The unmediated voices of ‘ordinary’ recipients of translations also take part in the discursive (re‑)construction of translational ethics. Despite having gone out of fashion in academic circles, fidelity ‘continues to be a fact of social preconceptions of the translator’s task’ (Pym, 2003, n.p.). Believing that fidelity is an easy enough thing to achieve and recognize, the unmediated receiver’s voice often plays out in a carnivalesque fashion (Bakthin, 1984), challenging the translator as linguistic authority on perceived infidelities through the use of ridicule and humour. Countless websites and chat forums can be found where bloggers and other commenters make fun of slips of the translator’s pen or overly creative translational solutions. For example, one thread on an online forum (<http://vgd.no/samfunn/spraak/tema/1022892/tittel/sminkesex-har-faatt-en-oppfoelger-o>) took subtitlers to task for their ‘incorrect’ translations, some of which could indeed be characterized as errors, such as translating *hiking* (going for a walk in the countryside) into its false friend *hike* (hitchhiking). But despite the commenters’ ridicule, many of the examples cited in the thread are not easily categorized: are they really errors or are they merely creative (and funny) solutions to translational challenges, such as the translation of ‘That’s not even funny, you calloused people!’ into *Det er ikke morsomt, dere stygge fotvorter!* (‘That’s not funny, you ugly verrucae!’)? Another debate forum provides more unambiguously non-erroneous examples that are still derided by the users, presumably because of the perceived lack of fidelity to the source text, such as when ‘I don’t think you have the balls for this’ from the film *Tomorrow Never Dies* is translated creatively as *Jeg tror ikke du har nok snabelkraft til dette* (‘I don’t think you have enough trunk power [‘trunk’ being a euphemism for ‘penis’] for this’, <https://www.diskusjon.no/index.php?showtopic=48618>).

It follows that these voices, when commenting on these and similar examples, will express a concern with (a lack of) translator competence. This is especially the case when the translators in question are obviously translators into their (somewhat wobbly) second language, with or without the ‘help’ of machine translation. Several websites and blogs can be found that make fun of ‘Engrish’ translations within Asian linguistic landscapes, such as the translated English of tourist menus and signposts (e.g. <https://www.buzzfeed.com/ariannarebolini/bad-translations-that-are-better-than-the-original>). This kind of ridicule will function as a kind of sanctioning, indirectly promoting an ethics of linguistic gatekeeping like we saw in section 2.5, placing an onus on translators to keep the target language (here, as a second language) ‘pure’.

Not all recipients’ voices are of this carnivalesque kind. The discussion forums on the translation-based, language-learning platform Duolingo, for example, keep a serious tone. Sometimes the threads contain comments on issues of an ethical nature, for instance within the Esperanto thread (<https://www.duolingo.com/topic/915>), where one user laments substandard Esperanto translations where the publishers have either done a slipshod editing job (e.g. eschewing properly accented characters) or else seemingly running texts through Google Translate and publishing them without post-editing (cf. Kenny, 2011).

1. **Concluding Remarks**

The above discussion has shown how ideas about translational ethics are directly and indirectly addressed, shaped, and promoted in many more types of communicative space than those that have traditionally been studied, although more and more of these communicative spaces are indeed receiving scholarly attention, especially in literature that addresses new forms of translation. The ideas negotiated within the various spaces often coincide, yet they always slightly differ because they are adapted to fit different types of translational contexts (that differ across many different parameters, such as type of translator, commission, text, situation, and so on), supporting a Bakhtinian approach to discourse. Nevertheless, the complicated ways in which these ideas and spaces are in dialogue with each other – through structures built into our languages as well as rhetoric constructed in the act of authorship – is something that obviously deserves further attention in the form of a discourse-analytical approach to translational ethics, such as the one demonstrated here.

With intersubjective space being such an echo chamber of voices, an interesting question concerns, of course, who translational agents (translators, their publishers, proofreaders and so on) are most likely to listen to – what Drugan & Tipton (2017b) call ‘the problem of normative authority’ (p. 122). With the exception of the fact that we know that some professional translators are more or less bound by codes of ethics through membership in translator networks and organizations and through commissions carried out for companies with their own codes (Drugan, 2011, p. 117), we can, for the moment, only speculate when it comes to the question of who translational agents are most influenced by: scholars, authors, colleagues, publishers, bloggers, commenters? Because of their status as systematic thinkers and their preoccupation with well-founded opinion, and because of the privileged role their writings play in translator education (to the extent that ethics is indeed part of such programmes, see Drugan and Megone, 2011), one would perhaps think that scholars have a great amount of say. However, not all translators pass through a relevant educational programme before becoming a (professional, paraprofessional, or non-professional) translator, and they may therefore not be acquainted with these scholars’ views. Furthermore, according to Pym (2012), the ethical ruminations of certain theoreticians, if they are indeed known to translators, run the risk of being perceived as irrelevant to the ‘real world’ of translation, his example being that of Antoine Berman’s strong promotion of foreignizing translation, which suits some ‘real-world’ translational purposes quite badly (Pym, 2012, pp. 2–3). How ethical authority is constructed and perceived is a topic worthy of further study, especially in the light of how commenters, for example, are becoming increasingly more visible and powerful in discourse at large. How translators relate to such authority is another question that needs more attention, insofar as rather than more or less blindly following (some kind of) authority, thereby in fact *evading* responsibility for their actions, translators rather ought to be able to critically assess the multitude of voices out there and apply their expressed insights flexibly to given translational situations.

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Table 1: *Voice and ethical concerns as identified in the present selection of sources*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Whose voices?** | **Ethics of representation** | **Ethics of service (including ‘accountability’/’social responsibility of translators’ and ‘confidentiality’)** | **Ethics of readers’ immediate textual needs** | **Ethics of communication** | **Norm-based ethics** | **Ethics of commitment (including competence)** | **Ethics of existential fulfilment** | **Ethics of societal responsibility towards translators** | **Ethics of non-translation** | **Ethics of community** |
| Academics | v | v |  | v | v | v | v | v |  | v |
| Institutions | v | v |  |  |  | v |  | v | v |  |
| ST authors | v | v | v |  |  | v |  |  |  |  |
| Translators | v | v |  |  |  | v |  | v |  | v |
| Journalists/  reviewers | v | v |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| (Other) recipients | v | v |  |  |  | v |  |  |  |  |

1. Bakhtin (1981) refers to such voices as a ‘speaking personalities’ or ‘speaking consciousnesses’ (p. 434; see also Alvstad et al., 2017b). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Potentially one of the reasons why one of Jansen’s (this volume) respondents refers scornfully to the Nomenclature as an undue encroachment upon the translator’s freedom of action (p. Xxx)? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. At least not in any top-down sense – communities or individual members could of course choose to adopt or relate to such codes. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)