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ETHICS OF ADAPTATION IN TRANSLATION: BETWEEN FAITHFULNESS AND CULTURAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

The paper explores the ethical boundaries of adaptation in literary translation and examines the role of the translator as an interpreter and cultural mediator. The tensions between loyalty to the author, the expectations of the target audience, and the translator's personal ethical responsibility are discussed. Relying on theoretical concepts such as skopos theory, Lawrence Venuti's idea of translator visibility, and postcolonial approaches, key dilemmas are analysed: linguistic adaptation, replacement of cultural references, and translation of sensitive political content. Suggested practical criteria for making ethically sound decisions include transparency, respect for the original text, and awareness of cultural implications. The conclusion is that ethical adaptation is always contextualised and demands reflective practice, particularly in an era of extensive use of automated translation systems.

Key words

Ethics of translation, adaptation in translation, translator's responsibility, translation, cultural ethics.

Introduction

In the context of globalization, translation is becoming more than just a technical act of transferring information; it is becoming a complex process of intercultural communication. Modern translators are increasingly faced with ethical dilemmas related to the need to adapt texts to the expectations of the target audience, cultural sensitivity requirements and social norms. Under such circumstances, the translator ceases to be an "invisible" intermediary and becomes an active interpreter whose judgements directly influence the meaning and perception of the original work. The primary challenge lies in determining the boundary between acceptable adaptation, which ensures comprehension of the text, and unacceptable distortion of the author's intent. This issue is particularly acute when translating culturally marked elements, historically conditioned vocabulary, and texts touching on ideologically and morally sensitive topics.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the ethical aspects of translation adaptation and to define criteria that enable translators to make responsible and informed decisions.

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The Translator as an Ethical and Cultural Agent

Traditionally, translation has been regarded as the endeavour to achieve maximum correctness in relation to the original. Violations of ethical standards can take various forms, ranging from incorrect translation choices to deliberate attempts to reinterpret a literary work and distort its content (Purat, 2022). Yet, the evolution of translation studies has led to a reconsideration of this position.

The functional theories of translation, in particular skopos theory, have changed the focus from formal equivalency to the purpose of translation and its function in the target culture. As a result, adaptation has come to be seen as a necessary and justified tool. Such approaches have increased the responsibility of the translator. Translation as a cultural mediation process involves the interpretation of cultural symbols and the adaptation of cultural meanings. It is a complex and multifaceted activity that requires an in-depth understanding of both source and target cultures. (Asadova 2024). Based on the idea of the "visible translator," translation inevitably reflects the cultural and ideological attitudes of the target society. Consciously or unconsciously, the interpreter acts as a filter through which the source text passes.

Therefore, it not only conveys the content, but also builds the interpretation of the work. From the point of view of postcolonial and cultural studies, translators have a particular responsibility for how ‘foreign’ cultures are presented. Unconsidered adaptation can lead to simplification, exoticization or distortion of cultural realities, which reinforces the stereotypes and upsets the ethical balance of the intercultural dialogue.

Linguistic and Cultural Challenges: Adaptation Versus Distortion

There are approximately 7,000 living languages in the world, not to mention the number of dialects that exist within these languages. A funny joke in one language may lose all meaning when translated into another, so if the joke is translated incorrectly, the reader-audience may not understand the humour embedded in the original text. (Satish, 2020). Translating stylistically and socially marked speech is one of the most difficult tasks. The main difficulty lies in achieving equivalence. Cultural references rarely have exact lexical or conceptual counterparts across languages.(Rajabova 2022). The dialects, sociolects, and colloquial vocabulary have an important characteristic function. Their complete neutralization simplifies the text but deprives it of depth, whereas replacing them with similar elements in the target language may lead to anachronisms and distortion of the historically accurate context. Translating cultural realities is no less complicated. The direct borrowing strategy preserves national flavour, but requires additional explanation, which can overload the text. By contrast, searching for a functional equivalent facilitates perception but often leads to a loss of cultural meaning.

Thus, every translation option involves a compromise between precision and accessibility. While these examples demonstrate that adaptation is inevitable, its extent must be strictly correlated with the function of the text and the expectations of the audience. The ethical problem arises when adaptation begins to replace the author's intention with the translator's interpretation.

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Ideology, Censorship, and Reader Expectations

A special place in translation ethics is occupied by the issue of ideological pressure. In translating classical works, translators encounter vocabulary and imagery that contradict modern norms. The softening of such elements may make the text more acceptable to modern readers, but at the same time it deprives it of its historical authenticity. Current demands for political correctness and inclusivity intensify this dilemma. It goes without saying that today's technology offers increasingly sophisticated

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disseminating ideological agendas, and censoring and manipulating ideas in translation. (McLaughlin & Muñoz-Basols 2021). The adaptation of texts to current social norms is often perceived as a form of censorship or revisionism. In such cases, the translator must decide whether his intervention is a form of concern for the reader or a violation of the right to the authentic text. Responsibility to the reader also implies honesty. The reader has a privilege to know where the original ends and the interpretation begins. The use of prepositions, comments, and footnotes helps maintain a balance between adaptation and transparency in translation solutions.

Criteria for Ethical Adjustments

On the basis of the analysis, several key criteria can be identified that help to determine the acceptable limits of adaptation. In the first place, the translator must take into consideration the author's intention and preserve the core meaning of the text. The second is to assess the effect of the adaptation on the reader: does it make it easier to understand or does it introduce new meanings that are not embedded in the source text. The third thing is that it's important to be culturally responsible and avoid reinforcing stereotypes. The principle of transparency ultimately makes translation intervention ethically justifiable.

Conclusion

The limits of translation adaptation are not fixable or universal. They depend on the genre, the aim of the translation, the historical context, and the social situation. The contemporary translator acts not as a neutral channel for the transmission of information, but as a reflective cultural mediator, aware of their power and responsibility. In the era of machine translation, the importance of ethical factors in human translation is only increasing. While the algorithms are unable to consider the moral and cultural implications of interpretation, the translator makes decisions that affect cross-cultural understanding.

Hence, the ethics of adaptation becomes an integral part of a translator's professional competence and a key condition for maintaining dialogue between cultures.

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