

BOOK REVIEW

TRANSLATION ETHICS

Apri Wardana Ritonga*

State Islamic University Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Ayu Desrani*

Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia

Translation Ethics, Joseph Lambert, New York: Routledge, 2023, 205 pp., £33.99, ISBN: 978-0-367-70852-8 (Paperback).⁵¹

The book *Translation Ethics* by Joseph Lambert is an essential read for students, researchers, and professional translators, offering a comprehensive perspective on ethics in translation and interpretation, an area that has seen significant growth over the past decade. Chapters 1-3 discuss foundational theories, while Chapters 4-6 shift to the interpersonal domain, examining the roles of various agents within the translation industry. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on professional contexts, with Chapter 9 providing reflections on ideas not addressed elsewhere, thus enhancing the book's cohesiveness. Lambert delves into fundamental questions concerning ethical practices, from the translator's role to the ethical implications of technology within the language industry. The book explores the evolution of translation ethics both conceptually and historically, from its simpler early perspectives to more nuanced ideas shaped by figures like Mona Baker, and Christiane Nord, both prominent figures in the field.

Chapter 1 of this book lays a robust foundation in the philosophy of ethics as a compass for translation practice. Lambert explores the often ambiguous definition of ethics, delving into the philosophical groundwork that supports theories within *Translation and Interpreting Studies* (TIS). This chapter introduces readers to three major streams of moral theory: deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics to unpack the principles shaping translators' ethical practices. Lambert defines ethics as "the moral principles governing behavior or practice", a concept he categorizes into three primary branches: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics (2023, p. 12). This framework emphasizes the shift from abstract principles to practical applications, underscoring the value of a metaethical approach in examining the philosophical aspects of translation. For instance, Lambert addresses the unique challenges of translating sacred texts, where translators face a profound dilemma: how to convey divine messages accurately, particularly when texts like the Qur'an are considered incomparable and cannot be equivalently translated (2023,

* 230104310018@student.uin-malang.ac.id, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8035-7197>.

* ayudesrani.2024@student.uny.ac.id, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0962-5034>.

⁵¹ Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/Translation-Ethics/Lambert/p/book/9780367708528?srsItd> (Accessed: 28 October 2024).

p. 18). While Lambert does not offer definitive solutions, he positions ethics as a moral map guiding translators through contemporary issues, thereby strengthening the link between theory and practice in TIS.

The core discussion on Translation Ethics is presented in the second chapter of this book. Lambert develops a framework for translation ethics by drawing on Andrew Chesterman's 'Proposal for a Hieronymic Oath' (2001), which emphasizes fidelity as the foundation of ethical standards in the translation profession. Chesterman views fidelity in translation not as a mere word-for-word rendering but as an endeavor to achieve equivalence in meaning and impact across cultures, time, and context. Lambert delves into TIS ethics by examining how the concept of "fidelity" (2023, p. 33) has evolved from Schleiermacher's tradition (1834) to contemporary models, such as 'dynamic' versus 'formal' or 'documentary' versus 'instrumental' approaches. Lambert asserts that translation ethics should not rest solely on deontological principles, but should also account for four primary domains: truth, fidelity, understanding, and trust, influenced by the notions of sacred duty and moral responsibility attributed to Saint Jerome, the 'Father of Translators' (395 CE/1997). He critically evaluates the ongoing debates surrounding the 'correct' translation methods, questioning whether definitive ethical standards can truly be achieved amid the frequently conflicting complexities of cultures and texts.

Chapter 3 explores questions of truth, leading readers into a deep examination of deontology in translation practice. Lambert builds his argument on the basis of Antoine Berman's (1991) ideas, presenting translation as an ethical and non-ethnocentric act, an approach that preserves the integrity of the text and respects the wholeness of the source culture. This approach is further supported by Kaisa Koskinen's perspective, which views the translator as a guardian of integrity rather than merely a language conduit. However, Lambert critically questions the feasibility of a universal, rigid code of ethics, cautioning that such an approach could overlook essential cross-cultural sensitivities and diversity. He advocates for a more flexible, contextually aware, and interactive approach to foster richer and more meaningful cross-cultural dialogue (2023, p. 53). Thus, this chapter calls for deeper exploration into whether '*moral absolutes*' can be universally applied or should be adapted to cultural sensitivities.

Chapter 4 explores the 'responsibility' of translators as cultural agents, moving from micro-ethics to a macro perspective. Lambert emphasizes that a translator's responsibility extends beyond textual fidelity to a complex accountability that considers social and ideological impacts. He reviews Reiss's (1976) text-type theory, which categorizes texts into informative, expressive, and operative types, each requiring different forms of fidelity. However, Nord's (2001) critique through the concept of 'Function plus Loyalt' challenges Reiss's view by integrating functionality with interpersonal loyalty, which is essential for broader cultural goals. Pym (2012) further suggests that translators are accountable not only to clients and audiences but also to society. A case illustrating this is Marina Gross, a U.S. State Department translator, who was asked to testify about the Trump-Putin

meeting,⁵² highlighting Pym's perspective on the dilemma between confidentiality codes and public responsibility (2023, p. 67). Lambert critiques traditional translation ethics for focusing solely on linguistic equivalence and proposes a more flexible, context-sensitive approach. Translators are encouraged to balance textual fidelity with a broader social and moral responsibility.

Chapter 5 introduces the concept of justice in translation, highlighting the translator's role as an active agent of sociocultural transformation. Drawing on Venuti's (1998) ideas of visibility and the ethics of difference, as well as Inghilleri's critique of the neutrality myth, the chapter challenges conventional views on objectivity. In terms of 'justice', translators are encouraged to go beyond a mechanical role in linguistic transfer and view translation as an ideological practice that influences power dynamics and cultural status. Venuti advocates for "foreignization" as a strategy to preserve cultural uniqueness in translated texts, countering dominant domestic norms and actively promoting cultural diversity (2023, p. 80). Inghilleri emphasizes the translator's role in advancing social justice, implying that translation should account for broader social contexts beyond mere textual structure (2023, p. 84). Lambert provides insights into translation ethics, focusing on social responsibility and efforts to create 'intercultural justice' that integrates humanistic values amid diversity.

Chapter 6 addresses 'commitment' as an extension of translation ethics, exploring the limits of translator agency within personal and professional ethical contexts. Lambert views translators not merely as language intermediaries but as agents capable of becoming advocates or activists for specific values (2023, p. 101). Drawing on Bauman's (1993) concept of the 'moral burden of the individual', Lambert illustrates the complexity of ethical decisions that translators face, which often extend beyond an apolitical role (2023, p. 96). He also supports Pym's (2012) perspective that, in certain situations, refusing to translate can be an ethical choice in the face of structural injustices. This chapter outlines a shift from the traditional mediatory role of the translator to a more progressive form of advocacy, showing that translation decisions are frequently influenced by ideological motivations on both macro and micro levels. Lambert then characterizes the translator's commitment as an ethical stance that reflects a deep moral responsibility within complex social and cultural contexts.

In Chapter 7, Lambert reviews ethical standards in the translation and interpretation professions, providing an in-depth analysis of the content, structure, and limitations of existing codes of ethics. He outlines key principles in professional guidelines but also encourages readers to critically assess the shortcomings and contradictions within them (2023, p. 132). These standards often vary, ranging from broad rules to technical guidelines, yet they do not always address the complexities of real professional situations, making it challenging for translators to fully adhere to ethical codes in practice not due to a lack of

⁵² Nicole Gaouette and Elise Labott (2018) *Trump's Helsinki Performance Puts Translator in the Spotlight*, CNN Politics. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/18/politics/trump-russian-translator-spotlight/index.html> (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

ethical commitment, but rather due to the limitations of the codes themselves (Koskinen, 2000). Lambert ultimately advocates for an educational approach that emphasizes the importance of a critical understanding of ethical codes, which would better equip translators to navigate ethical challenges in real-world practice.

Building on the critical discussion in Chapter 7, Chapter 8 presents a code of ethics in translation by exploring the complexities of professional ethics faced by translators and interpreters. Lambert emphasizes the importance of both external and internal reflection, highlighting the need to balance social responsibility with the need to maintain mental, physical, and financial well-being. This chapter addresses ethical issues that have arisen due to rapid technological advancements, which have transformed the practice of translation and introduced challenges related to quality and privacy (2023, p. 150). Lambert also notes the shift between utilitarian business ethics and deontological ethics, as well as the moral dilemmas that translators frequently encounter in preserving integrity while meeting commercial demands (2023, p. 136). Such dilemmas can have detrimental effects, particularly on less experienced translators, who risk compromising the quality and ethical standards of their practice.

Chapter 9 concludes the book by offering a fresh perspective on ethics and human interaction. Lambert emphasizes the importance of identity and representation as foundational elements for exploring responsibility in translation ethics. This ethical discourse reflects the complexities and evolving dynamics within the field, inviting readers to consider perspectives that may transform their understanding. By referencing two cases (*Egoism and Self-Interest*) that illustrate different approaches to ethical issues, Lambert broadens the understanding of ethical themes within diverse social, cultural, and linguistic contexts (2023, p. 164). The emphasis on identity as a primary criterion in translation serves as a starting point for developing new theories, enriching ethical discussions at both micro and macro levels, and opening avenues for explorations that yield innovative ideas in increasingly relevant ethical debates within multicultural societies.

This book provides profound insights into translation ethics, showcasing its complexity in each and every chapter. Reading this book is akin to assembling a puzzle: each section interconnects to build a comprehensive understanding of ethical issues in translation practice. By progressing through the chapters sequentially, readers can experience the development of various themes and arguments, creating a holistic picture of ethical responsibilities in engaging with texts and other cultures. Lambert consistently reiterates statements from previous sections in each chapter, facilitating readers' connections to related concepts. However, there remains room for further exploration of certain aspects that have not been fully addressed, such as the relationship between translation ethics and the broader socio-political context.

Acknowledgment

The reviewers express their gratitude to the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education Agency (LPDP) for funding their Ph.D. education and supporting the publication of this book review.

REFERENCES

Koskinen, K. (2000) *Beyond ambivalence: postmodernity and the ethics of translation*. Tampere University Press.

Gaouette, |N. and Labott, E. (2018) Trump's Helsinki performance puts translator in the spotlight, CNN Politics [online]. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/18/politics/trump-russian-translator-spotlight/index.html> (Accessed: 31 October 2024).

About the authors: Apri Wardana Ritonga has pursued the field of Arabic language studies from undergraduate through Ph.D. levels. This field is closely associated with translation activities from Arabic to Indonesian. Currently, he is completing his Ph.D. studies through an LPDP scholarship and is actively engaged in research related to machine translation in Arabic learning.

Ayu Desrani is also studying Arabic and demonstrates a strong interest in this field, as evidenced by her research background. She is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Educational Evaluation through an LPDP scholarship and is particularly interested in evaluating the translation outcomes of Arabic language learners to enhance translation quality.