Ethics Recommendations for Crisis Translation Settings

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1.0: Description

This document is a summary public version of the Ethics Recommendations for Crisis Translation Settings produced by some of the INTERACT project team. INTERACT is the International Network in Crisis Translation, a project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 734211. Further information about the project as a whole is available at: https://sites.google.com/view/crisistranslation/home

The recommendations emerged out of collaborative work in INTERACT's Work Package 6 "Ethical Challenges for Crisis Translation". The objectives were to:

- Conduct detailed ethical analysis of the central ethical issues identified in crisis translation
- Make ethics a central component of the proposed Network's research, training, and networking activities
- Contribute ethical analysis to all Network outputs, including reports, policy recommendations, training materials, research articles

As the field of Crisis Translation has not undergone much ethical scrutiny, what are presented here are initial ethics recommendations. They are by no means complete and should be read in conjunction with other work on ethics and translation in general, as well as the other publications from the INTERACT project (listed on the web site above). We expect these recommendations to evolve and to be refined over time.

The work leading to these ethics recommendations had been supported and informed by a number of scholarly articles emerging from INTERACT. In particular:

- **Dónal P. O'Mathúna, Carla Parra Escartín, Proinsias Roche, Jay Marlowe. (Forthcoming), Engaging Citizen Translators in Disasters: Exploring ethical challenges. *Translation and Interpreting Studies*.**

The deliverable has been informed not only by INTERACT collaborators, but also by Dr Matthew Hunt (School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University, Canada), who spent some time at Dublin City University on a Flaherty Research Scholarship (Ireland Canada University Foundation) in 2018.

- **Matthew Hunt, Sharon O'Brien, Patrick Cadwell, Dónal P. O'Mathúna. (Forthcoming), Ethics at the Intersection of Crisis Translation and Humanitarian Innovation. *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs.***

In addition, Matthew Hunt and Dónal P. O'Mathúna have had a joint journal article accepted in a Special Issue on Crisis Translation of the journal *Disaster Prevention and Management*, currently being co-edited by Sharon O'Brien and Federico Federici. The title of that article is:

- **Matthew Hunt and Dónal P. O'Mathúna. (Forthcoming), Ethics and Crisis Translation: Insights from the work of Paul Ricoeur.** *Journal for Disaster Prevention and Management* - **Special Issue on Crisis Translation.**

Carla Parra Escartín (DCU – now at Unbabel) and Helena Moniz (Unbabel) have co-authored a chapter entitled:

- **Carla Parra Escartín and Helena Moniz. (Forthcoming), Ethical Considerations on the Use of Machine Translation and Crowdsourcing in Cascading Crises. In: Federico M. Federici and Sharon O'Brien (Eds),** *Translation in Cascading Crises*. **Routledge.**

that will be published in an edited volume on *Translation in Cascading Crises* (to be published by Routledge in 2019), also being co-edited by Federico Federici (UCL) and Sharon O'Brien (DCU).

Finally, the following chapter also considers some ethical aspects of translation technology in crisis settings:

- **Sharon O'Brien. (Forthcoming), Translation Technology and Disaster Management. In: Minako O'Hagan (Ed)** *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Technology*, **pp. 304-318.**

2.0: Ethical challenges in crisis translation: Context and Motivation

The work in INTERACT's Work Package 6 included a scoping review of published literature that addressed ethical issues in crisis translation, as well as discussions with experts addressing translation related to disasters. This led to the identification of many ethical issues in crisis translation which are outlined below and discussed in more detail in the resulting articles.

We use the term "crisis translation" here to refer to any cross-language mediation that takes place in any stage of a crisis. "Translation", when used in isolation, is an umbrella term for "translation and interpreting". Though translation and interpreting are seen as separate tasks in the professional sphere, we include both aspects here because it is possible that a language mediator operating in a crisis setting might pivot between the two tasks.

Translation is an important component of communication and knowledge transfer, which leads to an ethical responsibility to provide language translation and interpreting services. Most, if not all, crises occur in multilingual settings and therefore language barriers can lead to harms and inequalities due to some people not having access to needed information. Ethics is an undeniable component of professional translation and interpreting practice and important commentaries have been provided elsewhere (see, for example, Baker and Maier 2011; Drugan 2017; Drugan and Megone 2011; Drugan and Tipton 2017). However, crises introduce a number of extraordinary factors when considered against the provision of translation and interpreting in standard (e.g. commercial, governmental) settings, which may need to be balanced against the service provision responsibility. Public good and private interests can lead to ethical dilemmas in crisis translation and need to be critically appraised and balanced. Our recommendations focus on these extraordinary factors and should not be considered to be exhaustive in relation to *all* translation and interpreting settings.

Translation has additional impacts beyond the pragmatic which need to be taken into consideration. These include ways that translation services demonstrate *respect* for others and their cultures, especially for communities affected by crises that are recipients of aid from international organisations. In this context, translation needs to be seen as a two-way communication process, allowing for translation of critical information *to* but also *from* affected communities. The lack of such two-way communication was noted, for example, in the response to the Haiti 2010 earthquake: lack of translation during responder cluster meetings led to decreased participation of Haitian government and NGO actors.

Translation can also be an important component of building *trust* between communities and fostering community capacity to prepare for and respond to crises, which adds to the ethical responsibility to provide services. Account should be taken of the fact that the act of translation does not induce trust in and of itself, but that much also hinges on *what* is being translated, *by whom* in *what language* and *format,* and on the trustworthiness of the actors involved.

In crisis settings, the *quality* of translations may need to be balanced against other important principles and humanitarian goals. For example, in crises where translation professionals are in short supply, or professionals may in fact be affected personally by a crisis, other people (e.g. ad hoc citizen translators) or technology (e.g. Machine Translation) may need to be used even though translation quality may be affected. This solution is preferable to having no translation available.

The use or non-use of translation technology, such as translation memory tools or automatic machine translation, raises ethics-related questions even in "standard use" contexts. These ethical questions become more pronounced in a crisis. For example, is machine translated output of unknown quality better than zero translation? Another example: should a translation memory (TM) be used even if quality problems are known to exist in the TM (for example, inconsistent terminology that could cause confusion and thus, potentially, result in harm)? The answers will, of course, depend on factors such as the quality that can be generated by the MT/TM system, the speed with which it can be generated, and the level of need for translated information in a particular context.

It is important to build evaluation into the offer of technology solutions, especially when they are innovative or incorporated into new communities. It should not be assumed that technologies built to service commercial needs will be automatically "fit for purpose" in crisis settings. Information needs (What information do affected communities *really need* and *when*?), required languages (*in which languages precisely?*), formats (*written, oral?*) and content types (*medical, legal, WASH, social media, information leaflets, or radio broadcasts* etc.?), would have to be considered before a technology is simply rebranded as being suitable for crisis settings. This requires consideration of technological infrastructure and its suitability for the tool (*Is an online system really appropriate if people cannot access the Internet?)*, training requirements for those who may interact with the tool (*How much time is required to figure out how to use a tool?*), data usage (*How appropriate is the data used for machine learning? How relevant is the glossary/TM*?) and associated questions such as copyright ownership (*Who owns this data? Who will have a claim over it in the future?*), and user evaluations (*Was the provided solution suitable and how could it be improved for future crisis settings*?).

To elaborate on some of the points above, justice is an important ethical issue that impacts many aspects of translation and therefore needs to be given due consideration. For example, minority linguistic groups may have additional barriers to access information and thus be at higher risk for marginalisation. Translation technology may not be affordable to lower income groups, and thus exacerbate economic differences between groups. Furthermore, translation technology may not be accessible. Accessibility in this context means availability, as opposed to accessibility specifically in relation to blind, deaf or hard of hearing, or other disabilities. Developers of accessible translation technology ought to be expected to take the following into account:

- Cost of data - the cost of data for deployment or use of a tool may be prohibitive, especially when those tools use considerable bandwidth.

- Internet connectivity - users may be located in territories with low or no Internet connectivity and/or a sudden-onset emergency might reduce access to the Internet.
- Bandwidth - users may be located in territories with low bandwidth, causing certain types of technologies to be difficult to load or use.
- Phone type - in some areas, "feature phones" are more typical than "smart phones", so apps that depend on the latter may rule out significant numbers of users. In addition, storage capacity on a phone plays a role: technologies should not require much local space on a phone.
- Operating System - tools should not be developed with the assumption that end users will have the most recent OS in place.
- Social Media - technologies that require membership of or login via a social media network should be avoided as users may not be members, it is difficult to guarantee privacy, or the social media network itself might be disallowed or inaccessible in their countries/languages.
- SIM cards - in some countries, migrants or refugees are not allowed to purchase SIM cards for phones and would therefore not have access to tools that require mobile connectivity.

Language and communication involve verbal and non-verbal components which should be taken into consideration in the design and implementation of translation technology. In some cases, technological limitations are unavoidable, but in other cases can be counteracted by balancing factors, e.g. ensuring translation is provided orally and in written format.

It is important to protect privacy and security, especially when translation and interpreting occurs in conflict settings or touches on sensitive issues.

Sharing of data in humanitarian crises raises different ethical issues for various actors, which can sometimes lead to a reluctance for actors to share important data. Many of the ethical principles and values have to be balanced in specific settings, which points to the need for training in ethical decision-making skills.

3.0: Ethics Recommendations

Given the contextualization above, three sets of recommendations are elaborated here. The first relate to policy for crisis translation, the second to translation technology development and deployment, the third to training of translators and users of translation services.

We reiterate that these recommendations are preliminary in nature and are expected to evolve. Inevitably, some of the recommendations will pertain to other translation activities and so are not exclusive to crisis settings. However, they are all (also) relevant to crises.

Ethics Recommendations Relating to Policy

1. International, national and regional emergency response policies should ensure that multilingual societies with known and existing needs for language support in ordinary situations do not automatically become more vulnerable in crisis situations.
2. Since information saves lives, there is an ethical obligation for crisis preparation and disaster risk reduction policies to include mechanisms to provide accurate translation and interpreting services, especially for minority language speakers who might not be comfortable communicating in lingua francas.
3. Translation policies should ensure that they include mechanisms to identify and address issues of justice and discrimination by, for example, considering which languages are translated, by whom and whether this is in both directions, so that issues of justice and discrimination are mitigated, or at least not further exacerbated by the policies and services provided.
4. Policies should ensure that the translation needs of those with heightened vulnerabilities, such as women, children, the elderly, or deaf, are taken into account.
5. Policies should both identify ethical challenges and issues with crisis translation and provide practical guidelines and training tools to help address and resolve ethical dilemmas.[1] (See further recommendations on training below.)
6. The deployment of citizen translators (some of whom may not have professional translation training) should be considered during crises when more highly trained translators or interpreters are not available in sufficient numbers. Clear policies on the scope of practice and required training for translators and those working with them should be developed. Additionally, measures should be taken to avoid damaging the image or livelihood of professional translators.

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[1] A relevant example, albeit still in development at time of writing and pertaining to the development of ethical issues in health research in humanitarian crises, is http://www.preaportal.org/. PREA stands for "Post-Research Ethics Analysis". This *type* of resource could be useful for analysing previous crisis translation ethical issues and providing training for all stakeholders.

Ethics Recommendations Relating to Translation Technology Development & Deployment

1. Translation Technology for crisis response should be developed with the needs of affected communities in mind.[2] This requires consultation with and training of users as well as community-based evaluation of such technologies through participative research practices. Translation Technology that specifically makes use of Artificial Intelligence or Autonomous Systems should be developed in line with the IEEE Global Initiative for Ethical Considerations in Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Systems (IEEE, 2016[3]). General principles of note here are that AI/AS should:

   - Embody the highest ideals of human rights.
   - Prioritise the maximum benefit to humanity and the natural environment.
   - Mitigate risks and negative impacts as AI/AS evolve as socio-technical systems.

   (IEEE, 2016: 5)

2. Language technologists should strive to support low-resource and crisis relevant languages, even if they lack commercial viability, so as to ensure linguistic inclusion for crisis response.

3. Language technologists should prioritise audio and voice tools in order to make language support more accessible to low literacy populations.

4. Language technologists should develop tools and infrastructure specifically designed to be accessible to impoverished and rural populations (e.g. offline or low-bandwidth tools, tools that can work on smartphones with limited computing power, tools that are designed for feature phones etc., as elaborated above).

5. Issues concerning data use for translation technology should be considered. For example, stakeholders of the data produced along the technological pipeline should be trained on ethical issues and should raise awareness and create mechanisms to prevent data misuse (e.g. use of translation data generated by volunteers to create commercial systems, which are then unavailable for crisis response, lack of open, linked data etc.). Short- and long-term impacts and unintended consequences should be monitored, such as the consequences of (non-)anonymisation of data.

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[2] As an example, the INTERACT project will produce brief training materials introducing stakeholders to Machine Translation and the task of Post-Editing by the end of the project.

[3] IEEE (2016), "Ethically Aligned Design: A Vision for Prioritzing Human Wellbeing with Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Systems (AI/AS)". [Available at: https://standards.ieee.org/content/dam/ieee-standards/standards/web/documents/other/ead_v1.pdf, [last accessed 26/02/2019].

Ethics Recommendations Relating to Training

1. Professional and ad hoc citizen translators (see Federici and Cadwell 2018) should receive training to prepare them for the ethical challenges they are likely to face in crisis situations (such as prioritising certain information or languages over others) as well as how to address these and balance competing ethical priorities.

2. Ethics training for citizen translators should include consideration of the ethical virtues involved, not just ethical principles and weighing of consequences. Virtue ethics emphasises duties and moral roles, ethical character traits (like honesty and courage), personal integrity and the relational impact of ethics (for deeper discussion, see the journal paper mentioned above – O'Mathúna *et al.* forthcoming). Case studies and other narratives are important in these approaches but need to be relevant to the context and relatable to participants.[4] Training materials based on real crisis settings should be developed and evaluated in this approach.

3. Other stakeholders engaged in crisis translation such as INGOs, humanitarian response organisations etc., should engage in training their staff in the importance of two-way translation, the use of translation technology and, in particular, the ethical issues pertaining to the use of translators and interpreters in crisis settings, keeping in mind that translators and interpreters working in these settings may be operating outside their normal frame of practice. Interpreting, in particular, may induce some negative effects on the person doing the interpreting if the nature of the communication is negative or distressing. Courses such as those designed for and offered to emergency responders for dealing with trauma should be adopted and offered to crisis interpreters (see, for example Disasterready.org, which has courses on understanding and coping with traumatic stress). While crisis translators may possibly be removed from the crisis location itself, and have to deal with written content, rather than live, spoken communication, some content could be distressing too. Requesters of translation need to take the nature of the content into account and reflect on whether the translator might need some training and support.

4. Those charged with creating content for crisis management, risk reduction, response and recovery should be trained in the practice of "plain language authoring". Plain language authoring has the dual advantage of ensuring that the message can be better understood by those with limited proficiency in the original language, and of improving the translatability (by human or machine) of that content.[5]

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[4] Paul Ricoeur's concept of 'linguistic hospitality' provides a useful window through which translators and interpreters could approach the virtue aspects of ethics (Ricoeur, P. (2007), *On Translation,* New York: Routledge). See Hunt and O'Mathúna (forthcoming), mentioned above.

[5] See, for example, https://www.plainlanguage.gov/resources/articles/beyond-a-movement/ or https://www.nala.ie/what-we-do/remove-barriers/plain-english-service