

When 'Living Translation' is Ethically Stressful

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Translators suffer from an onslaught of job stressors which can impact their productivity and well-being. In a working context where time pressures, technology, and competition are increasingly threatening professional linguists, and where translation can be a transitory, low-status, and poorly-paid occupation (e.g. Dam and Zethsen, 2016), it is easy to conceive that professional translators can experience stress. While a certain amount of stress can be healthy and enhance translation performance, however, occupational stress that results from disparities between one's ethical values and expected behaviours – known as ethical stress – can have nefarious consequences for individuals and even lead to burn-out.

The disjuncture and associated guilt that provoke ethical stress have recently been discussed under the label of professional dissonance, that is, 'a feeling of discomfort arising from the conflict between professional values and job tasks' (Taylor, 2007: 90). While dissonance can eventually lead to greater professional and personal growth, value collisions can also be a source of great psychological pain.

Increasingly, professional dissonance is apparent in the stories of professional translators whose desire to produce quality work for readers in line with their professional ethics often conflicts with an agency's goal to keep costs to a minimum (e.g. Abdallah 2010). The situation is exacerbated when there are few opportunities to communicate with clients or to discuss risky translation decisions.

In this presentation, I will define the psychological concept of ethical stress and outline the conditions that can lead translators to a state of moral hazard and professional dissonance. Drawing on examples from the translation and psychological literature, I will argue that encouraging risk-averse and defensive cultures of practice can constrain the affective experience of ethical decision-making and prevent translators from making use of their professional and moral judgements in line with their moral compass.

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