



Translation Business Management in a Technology Era: Principles, Ethics and Practices

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ABSTRACT

One of man's oldest occupations, translation is an activity which involves reproducing messages closely and naturally in target language in a way that it is equivalent to the text in the source language as regards its style and meaning. The translation industry has, over the past decades, undergone lasting changes. In recent times, the aspects of translation that have to do with business have witnessed greater interest among scholars of translation studies. Business management is a term denoting a range of strategies and activities that are carried out to actualize the goals of an organization or a firm. From the foregoing, translation business management is defined as a set of strategies and activities that translators carry out in accomplishing the goals of their organization or firm, whose key operation involves substituting a text (s) in one language for another text in another language. In today's translation industry, technology, which includes machine translation engines, computer-assisted translation tools, Artificial Intelligence, and others, play a central role in how translators render their services. These technological systems have revolutionized translation practices in a lot of ways. In order for a translation professional to effectively handle the business of translating texts, they must abide by the basic principles of translation, one of which is preservation of meaning. It is these principles which constitute the bedrock of translation business management. Hence, this study examines translation business management in a technology era with respect to principles, ethics, and practices of professional translators. Based on the findings of the research, various recommendations are provided to help translation business managers stay relevant in the modern era. One of these recommendations is that translators need to engage in ongoing training and professional development to stay updated with the latest technological tools, trends, and practices in the industry.

Keywords: Translation Business Management, Technology Era, Machine Translation, Computer-Assisted Translation, Artificial Intelligence, Principles of Translation, Ethics of Translation

1. Introduction

Translation is among man's oldest occupations (Pym et al., 2012). In modern times, the translation landscape is undergoing rapid changes. Translation is a term for an operation that is carried out on languages, where a text in one language is substituted for another (Catford, 1974). It is an activity that involves reproducing messages closely and naturally in target language (TL) which are equivalent to the text in the source language (SL) with regards to its style and meaning (Harliani, 2019). Recently, the aspects of translation that have to do with business have witnessed greater interest among scholars of translation studies. Business management entails a range of strategies and activities that are carried out to actualize the goals of an organization or a firm (Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001; Mintzberg, 2009). It encompasses a variety of aspects and activities, which include planning, organizing, controlling, and leading resources with the aims of achieving an optimal performance level and realizing desired organizational outcomes (Kotter, 1999).

From the foregoing, translation business management can be defined as a range of strategies and activities that translators perform to actualize the goals of their organization or firm, whose key operation involves substituting a text (s) in one language for another text in another language. In the translation industry, technology, including machine translation (MT) engines, computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, Artificial Intelligence (AI), terminology management systems, and others, play an integral role in how translators render their service in modern times (Sin-wai, 2015; Saleh et al., 2020). However, studies that examined translation business management in today's technology era are scanty. Hence, this research seeks to explore translation business management in a technology era, focusing on principles, ethics, and practices of professional translators.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Translation as a Business and Translation as a Profession

Over the past decades, the translation industry has undergone fundamental changes (Risku et al., 2016). Dunne & Dunne (2011) argue that various factors such as globalization, restructuring processes in the business world, and cost-cutting strategies have made translation services become outsourced increasingly, particularly since the late 1980s. Hence, in-house translators are steadily becoming a rarity. A majority of translators, copy editors, and

proofreaders are now operating as freelancers as businesses working for various clients on a project basis (Risku et al., 2016). According to Gallego-Hernández et al. (2016), translation practice in the area of business and economics are described in different ways. Translation businesses specialize in managing translation projects, ensuring the projects are completed within budget, on time, and based on the specification of clients (Dunne & Dunne, 2011).

Minna (2023, p. 5) considers translation as a profession to be “any economic activity involving a client in need of a translation and a service provider who supplies the translation for remuneration”. Some scholars assert that the translation market in modern times is both fragmented and extremely heterogeneous because of the revolution in digital technology and information and communication technology (ICT) (Gouadec, 2007; Gambier, 2014; Koskinen, 2019). Additionally, clients differ based on their needs (i.e., the types of text to be translated) and translation purposes, with translations produced both using human effort and technological software and tools (Minna, 2023). The field of translation can be categorized into various groups, including human translation, CAT, and MT (Bowker, 2002; Gambier, 2019). However, CAT is dominant in today’s professional translation market (Dunne, 2012; Gambier, 2014; Doherty, 2016).

2.2. Ethics of Technology Use in Translation

According to Moorkens & Rocchi (2020), analyzing an industry from an ethical viewpoint requires the consideration of the purpose of the industry and whether the everyday operations of businesses are in alignment with their purpose. Melé (2019) believes that the purpose of a business can be examined in various ways: 1, the shareholder approach, where the business is all about satisfying shareholders’ interests; 2, the stakeholder approach, where it can expand its purpose by considering the existence of various agents who have an interest in its activity; 3, the common good approach where the business aims to contribute to the common good of society. A translation business that set its mission in alignment with the stakeholder approach or even the common good approach does not have to ignore shareholders’ interest (Moorkens & Rocchi, 2020). But, expanding the purpose beyond just profit generation can help the translation business in being regarded as a community of individuals that are collaborating to achieve a common purpose, instead of a set of contracts meant to be respected.

According to Melé (2019), ethics serve as a guide for achieving human excellence, while business ethics serve as a guide for accomplishing human excellence in business organizations. In today’s technology era, the translation business is subject to various ethical concerns (Pym, 2001; Ramírez-Polo & Vargas-Sierra, 2023), which managers of such a business have to take into consideration in their operations. Some of such concerns include sharing of translation resources and their commoditization; the privacy and confidentiality of clients’ data (see Bowker, 2020); the ethics of algorithms (see Tsamados et al., 2021); issues about copyright (see Moorkens & Lewis, 2019); environmental sustainability (see Cronin, 2017); data extractivism (Paullada, 2020); the risk of making use of technological tools in safety-critical domains (Hunt et al., 2019; O’Mathúna et al., 2019; Canfora & Ottmann, 2020), and the issue of gender bias that comes in translation data (see Prates et al., 2020; Savoldi et al., 2021).

2.3. Theoretical Frameworks

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and deontological ethics are the theoretical underpinnings for this paper. The Technology Acceptance Model was initially developed in the late 1980s by Fred Davis (1986; 1989; 1993). It is based on the premise that the perceived usefulness (PU) of users and perceived ease of use (PEOU) are the key factors, which impact their acceptance of a technology. TAM was developed based on social psychology theory generally and specifically, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein, & Ajzen, 1975). TAM posits that PU and PEOU form the beliefs an end-user has about a technology, and thus, the two factors predict their attitude toward this technology, which in turn predicts their acceptance of the technology. However, the model has different limitations, as it has been criticized for failing to account for other factors that can influence technology adoption, including attitude, social influence, and emotions (Chuttur, 2009).

Often called deontology, deontological ethics is a moral philosophy that lays an emphasis on the importance of abiding with rules, duties, and principles when making ethical decisions (Aboodi et al., 2008). These ethical theories are centered around the concept of duty in which actions are judged to be right or wrong depending on their adherence to moral obligations and rules, irrespective of the outcomes or consequences they produce (Alexander, 2000). Put in another way, the focus of deontological ethics is on the intrinsic nature of actions, and not their consequences. This paper adopts the Kantian deontological theory, which posits that a good will is the only thing unqualifiedly good (Kant, 1785). However, deontological ethics has been criticized for “the seeming irrationality of our having duties or permissions to make the world morally worse” (Alexander & Michael, 2021).

3. Material and Methods

A qualitative approach is the methodology adopted for this research, and the approach involves a thematic analysis of the relevant literature on translation business management, focusing on principles, ethics, and practices.

4. Results and Discussion

Translation is generally all about rendering meaning, messages, or ideas of a text from one language, which is called the source language, to another language, which is known as the target language (Newmark, 1988). For a translation professional to handle the business of translating texts effectively, they must follow the basic principles of translation. One of these principles is preservation of meaning: The translator needs to ensure their translation

accurately reflects the meaning of the original text (Fuller, 2010). Another principle is preservation of form: They must ensure the ordering of ideas and words in the translation match the source text as much as possible (Fuller, 2010). These are some of the principles that form the core of translation business management.

According to Doherty (2016), the translation industry has focused their attention traditionally on using the latest technologies for making the translation process more efficient. CAT tools and MT engines have revolutionized, and keep on revolutionizing, the practice of translation; these technologies are changing the way users perceive translation and the way translation is conceptualized among producers and theorists (Pym, 2011). Vandepitte & Lefever (2018) argue that within the translation industry, post-editing, which involves the correction of automatically generated translations by human translators, is popularly considered as being faster compared with human translation. Aranberri et al. (2014) explained that this belief has been confirmed by different studies, which have shown that there is higher productivity when making use of post-editing for different language pairs. Additionally, studies have established that post-editing is less demanding cognitively compared with translating from scratch (see García, 2010; Pym, 2011; Guerberof, 2012; De Almeida, 2013; O'Brien & Moorkens, 2014).

Furthermore, there are various underlying technologies in MT systems, and the MT standard was Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) until lately (Vandepitte & Lefever, 2018). Large parallel bilingual corpora, which are sentence-aligned, are used in training SMT systems, and these systems contain a separate translation model (choosing the most probable word chunks translation), in addition to a language model (ensuring the well-formedness of various translation probabilities) as well as a reordering model. In recent times, Neural Machine Translation systems (NMT systems) have brought about a huge leap forward in the quality of automatic translation. The core of these systems is artificial neural networks inspired from the working of the human brain, specifically billions of neurons connected to one other (Bentivogli et al., 2016). NMT systems make use of a single sequence model that predicts the translation of one word a time considering the whole source sentence as well as the translation generated so far. Vandepitte & Lefever (2018) argue that these systems have a much higher capability for finding connections between distant words and generate fewer errors in grammar and thus produce more fluent translations; this is because the systems have information about the whole source sentence as well as the preceding context.

Also, today, translation business managers use various integrated CAT-tools, including memoQ, SDL Trados Studio, Déjà Vu, WordFast, Memsource, and others (Doherty, 2016; Vandepitte & Lefever, 2018). These tools feature advanced search mechanisms in terminology support, translation memories, project management support, alignment systems for parallel corpora, pre-translation using MT plug-ins as well as functionalities for automatic quality control. Additionally, translators can collaborate on projects through cloud-based systems allowing them to work on the same translation project at the same time (Cadwell et al., 2017).

According to Minna (2023), while translation does require specialized knowledge, which involves a professionalized workforce in this context, the profession is mainly uncontrolled and unregulated, and this makes it lack the societal recognition characterizing such professional services. Biel (2011) believes that a majority of translation services can be rendered with no formal education in translation, or without a state or professional body being in control of the practice. For this reason, a majority of translation business managers on today's markets are not 'professionalized' as regards control. Koskinen & Dam (2016) explained that almost anyone can engage in translation practices, and this makes the status of translation as a profession weak. However, in certain countries, authorized translation are an exception. For instance, in Finland, authorized translation service providers are under the control of the Finnish National Agency for Education that issues a strict licensing system, with its major requirements including passing some exams and/or a form of documented translator training (Koskinen & Dam, 2016).

In business management generally, including translation business management, ethics is a key aspect. According to Chesterman (2001), in the skillset of a translator, there should be some competences for embracing excellent technical and research skills for discovering and evaluating possible alternatives. In some professional codes of ethics for translators, a reference is made to translation technology in terms of the commitment, which translators make when ensuring excellence (Ramírez-Polo & Vargas-Sierra, 2023). For instance, covenant 2 of the Spanish Association of Translators, Editors and Interpreters (ASETRAD) code of ethics stipulates professionals need to have access to sources of information, reference materials and possess the skills for using the tools of the translation profession (Ramírez-Polo & Vargas-Sierra, 2023).

However, in the American Translators Association (ATA) code of ethics, translation technology is not explicitly mentioned, though covenant 4 states the following principle: To use every opportunity for improving those capabilities through engaging in continuing education in subject field, professional practice, and language (ATA, 2020). In this context, technologies are part of the ways that the capabilities of a translator can be improved. But Bowker (2020) opines that the lack of technology-related guidance in the codes of ethics of translators' professional associations constitute issues that have to do with professional identity. Furthermore, in its recommendations regarding the ethics of AI, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2022) made mention of translation technology with regard to cultural policies by stating that it urges member states to look at and tackle the cultural effects of AI systems, particularly natural language processing (NLP) tools (including voice assistants and automated translation), on those nuances present in human language and expression. This recommendation attempts to address the potential benefits of translation technology (increasing human understanding and bridging cultural gaps) and potential negative issues, such as reduction in people's use of some languages, disappearance of local dialects, endangered languages as well as cultural and tonal variations.

The wide adoption of different technological tools by translation business managers nowadays can be understood through the perspective of the Technology Acceptance Model. Many translators perceive the usefulness of technology tools like CAT tools, MT engines, and AI in a positive light due to their benefits, such as improved consistency, enhanced efficiency, and faster project completion rates. Also, the translators' perceived ease of use of these tools are positive; hence, the technological tools are widely adopted by these translators, and their attitudes toward the tools are favorable. However, ethical concerns need to be taken into consideration in the use of technology for translation. As stated in deontological ethics, when making ethical

decisions, translation business managers need to consider abiding with rules, duties, and principles. When translating texts aided by technology, translators should consider ethical issues such as gender bias, cultural sensitivity, keeping in mind Kant's approach to deontology that states a good will is the only thing unqualifiedly good.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Translation is among man's oldest occupations. In today's translation industry, technology, which includes MT engines, CAT tools, AI, terminology management systems, and others, play a key role in how translators render their services. CAT tools and MT engines have revolutionized, and keep on introducing revolutionary changes into, translation practices. The technological tools are changing the way users perceive translation and the way translation is conceptualized among producers and theorists. For a translation professional to effectively handle the business of translating texts, they have to obey the basic principles of translation, one of which is preservation of meaning. It is these principles that form the bedrock of translation business management.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided to assist translation business managers stay relevant in the modern era driven by technology:

- Translators should engage in ongoing training and professional development to stay updated with the latest technological tools, trends, and practices in the industry
- They should strive to always follow the code of ethics of their association/industry and undergo further ethics training specifically tailored to technology use for translation so as to stay abreast of considerations about machine translation, privacy, data security, and cultural sensitivity
- Translation business managers should integrate technology tools into collaborative translation workflows and adopt translation management systems facilitating seamless collaboration among translators, editors, and reviewers so as to enhance efficiency and ensure quality control.

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