

Revisiting the notions of translation ethics in Saudi Arabia: a survey of translators' perceptions

Notions of
translation
ethics in Saudi
Arabia

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper investigates professional translation practice in Saudi Arabia with a particular focus on translation ethics. Following an examination of varying opinions and contentious concepts relating to translation, this paper suggests that Saudi Arabia should establish a code of ethics for translation services. It investigates the ethical challenges that translators encounter during their professional work and considers their responses to these challenges.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative methodology was adopted to collect data from forty participants. This self-completed survey uncovered 11 ethical dimensions that translators encounter during the translation process and the researchers used descriptive analysis to calculate the mean and standard deviation of their frequency and importance. Participants' responses to the multiple-choice questions were categorised as personal, professional ethics or sociopolitical activism, and their overall percentages calculated.

Findings – For all 11 dimensions, the mean scores fell in the mid-frequency range between 2.74 and 3.88, inferring that the respondents faced these ethical challenges neither particularly frequently nor infrequently. Regarding the importance rankings, the mean scores varied between 1.58 and 2.04, consistently lower than the experience frequency rankings, which indicates that these challenges were considered important regardless of their frequency. The majority (40.27%) related to professional notions of ethics, followed by personal ethics (35.22%) and sociopolitical and activist conceptions of ethics (24.14%), while less than 1% (0.37%) reflected mixed motivations.

Originality/value – The study's concept and methodology are both novel. The researchers believe that this is the first study to examine professional translation ethics in the Saudi context. Unlike most studies in this field, this study adopted a quantitative approach, thus calling for the development of an effective professional code of ethics for translators.

Keywords Code of ethics in translation, Translation studies, Professional ethics, Sociopolitical ethics, Activist ethics, Personal ethics, Translation context in Saudi Arabia, Translators' responsibilities

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the ethics of the written translation profession in Saudi Arabia. Currently, Saudi Arabia lacks any accreditation body that establishes codes of ethics for



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translators. The position of this paper is that Saudi Arabia needs to establish a code of ethics for translation that considers translators' perceptions and the ethical challenges they have faced while translating. There is no consensus in the realm of translation ethics, as there are divergent opinions and disputed concepts.

The translation theorists, including Pym (2012, 2020), Kruger and Crots (2014), Tyulenev (2021) and Hutchings (2022), have all explored the ethics and responsibilities of translators. Many translation theorists consider translators communicators of messages, with the role contributing to social justice during the translation process. However, this standpoint is inconsistent with the ethical standards required of professional translators. Although translation researchers understand that a translator's personal ethical standards influence the process of making translation-related decisions, personal ethics have largely been ignored by professional codes of ethics in the translation field. An empirical exploration of the friction between various (e.g. professional, sociopolitical or activist, and personal) views of translator ethics is warranted.

2. Literature review

The ethical roles and responsibilities of translators are contested in the literature. According to Chesterman (2001, 2020) and Pym (2012, 2020), professional ethical responsibilities apply narrowly to the professional situation in which the translation is created. In contrast, Cronin (2003), Tymoczko (2007) and Rossi (2021) opine that translators also have sociocultural and political responsibilities, while Robinson (2003) and Kruger and Crots (2014) also include the dimension of personal ethics. Inghilleri (2009, p. 100) suggests a comprehensive study of translation must include ethical responsibility, social activism and personal integrity.

2.1 Professional ethics in translation

Chesterman (2001, pp. 139–142) proposes the professional ethical responsibilities and rights of translators are represented by the ethics of representation, service, communication and norms. The “ethics of representation” reflects the imperative of preserving the fidelity of the original message in a translation. Translators who add, alter or omit information in the translation are not adhering to the ethics of representation, and they are responsible for inaccurate translations (Pym, 2001, p. 130). The basis for the “ethics of service” is that, in providing a commercial service, translators must follow their client's instructions (Pym, 2001, p. 131). Chesterman (2001, p. 141) defines the “ethics of communication” as the collaboration and communication involved in translation, exemplified by the translator's efforts to bridge cross-cultural understandings. “Norm-based ethics” reflects the expectations of translation products, which vary according to culture and time (Chesterman, 2001, p. 141).

However, there is tension between the different theoretical models of ethics, as their limitations, focus, range and values can differ (Chesterman, 2001, pp. 142–143). Chesterman (2001, p. 152) argues that the key value for translators is understanding, and this determines the extent of a translator's professional ethics and responsibility of their practice. A translator's feelings about what and how they translate may be affected by their understanding and sense of personal responsibility. However, the translator is not responsible for the ethics of the communicating parties and their application of their subsequent understanding.

Pym (2012) suggests translators' responsibilities are limited, stating they are not responsible for the content of the document they are translating – that is determined by the author. Pym (pp. 76–81) argues that the translator's professional responsibility is their clients, the profession and expressing the message of the source text. Further, since the translation

process is collaborative, translators have an ethical duty to ease cooperation between the parties involved (Pym, 2012, p. 134; Chesterman, 2001, p. 141).

2.2 Activism and engagement ethics in translation

Other translation scholars consider the scope of translators' responsibilities broad, applying to political and social contexts. Instead of adhering to the codes of ethics set by translation associations, Baker (2011, p. 274) asserts that translators must have the critical capacity to make translation-appropriate ethical decisions. Translators' agency makes them responsible for their ethical decisions and ensuing sociocultural consequences (Hermans, 2009, p. 93). Rossi (2021, p. 396) states that "the ethical dimension of translation should be seen as a question of respect – respect for the otherness and difference of the past, of the victims of conflict, of the author of the source text and of his/her readers (including the translator)".

According to Cronin (2003, p. 134), translators' extended responsibilities result from increased communication between different languages and cultures. The traditional focus on source-text context and targeted text readers minimises the text's cultural, social and political contexts (Cronin, 2003). However, the globalised world demands ethical translations that engage with the text's cultural and political elements given that translation is regarded as "a humanitarian necessity" (Gill and Guzmán, 2011, p. 100). Tymoczko (2007, p. 316) recommends the importance of translator's agency be recognised, along with their skills, power and ethics, redefining the role of translator.

2.3 Personal ethics in translation

The beliefs, experiences and opinions of translators are likely to influence the ethical decisions they make during translation. There is little research into the influence of personal ethics on the translators' ethical decisions. Robinson (2003, p. 26) defines "personal ethics" as the moral and political beliefs held by an individual; Kruger and Crots (2014, p. 158) refine the definition to include the individual's religion and values.

Chesterman (2001, p. 147) asserts that the political and sociocultural outcomes of a translator's action fall under personal, not professional, ethics. Kruger and Crots (2014, p. 154) highlight professional ethics only apply to the agreement to undertake translation and the product of that process. In contrast, personal ethics are founded on subjective opinions and beliefs, which inform ethical choices (Kruger and Crots, 2014). Robinson (2003, p. 26) states that translators dealing with offensive texts might successfully suppress their personal ethics for a time, but not indeterminately. Finally, scholars like Koskinen (2000, p. 15) emphasise the potential for conflict between personal and professional ethics arising in the translation process.

2.4 Professional codes of ethics

To regulate the professional conduct of members, professional codes of ethics have been introduced by numerous translation associations, such as the American Translators Association (ATA), the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) and the International Federation of Translators (FIT) (Drugan, 2013, pp. 111–112). These professional codes aim to deal with any emerging ethical issues by addressing aspects of translation, including accuracy, confidentiality, impartiality and professional relationships (AUSIT, 2012, pp. 4–7), thus requiring translators to follow them closely to ensure that their translation practices adopt a common set of ethical principles. Generally speaking, translators' ethical rights and responsibilities focus on a narrow perspective of professional ethics rather than broader social contexts in these codes of ethics in translation studies

(Kruger and Crots, 2014, p. 148). Since codes of ethics rarely consider the role of personal ethics, they do not reflect ongoing debates about personal and activist ethics seen in translation studies literature.

2.5 Translation in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi Government is currently redeveloping the nation's strategic plan, known as "Vision 2030", to diversify the economy and attract international visitors and investors. The plan stresses the need for increasing translation services. These are provided by freelancers, government institutions, publishers and translation centres. The profession of translation is largely nationalised, hence the need for a code of ethics. The Ministry of Commerce has issued rules addressing the acquisition of translation-agency licences, but not addressing professional conduct or standards. To resolve this, the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission was recently established by the Saudi Ministry of Culture to develop these sectors and improve the necessary legislation. Despite this, translation in Saudi Arabia continues to be unregulated, and there is yet no professional code of ethics or conduct. To guide translation practices, a professional code of ethics is urgently required. Although professional codes of ethics exist in other contexts, they cannot be imported directly into Saudi Arabia, as they are context-specific. This study argues that a Saudi code of ethics can be devised in context, based on the evidence of an empirical analysis of the ethical issues faced by translators in Saudi Arabia. The empirical analysis should disentangle the intertwining strands of professional ethics views, the translator's potential role as a sociopolitical activist and translators' personal ethics.

To investigate translators' perceptions of actual ethical challenges and their abstract ethics dimensions, the following questions and sub-questions are posed:

- (1) What ethical challenges do translators face when working with different texts in different professional environments in Saudi Arabia? How often do translators encounter these challenges, and how important do they consider them?
- (2) What are translators' views (professional, sociopolitical or activist, and personal) regarding the suitable ethical responses to such challenges?

To address these questions, data were obtained through an online survey administered to a sample of professional translators in Saudi Arabia.

3. Methodology

Using the Qualtrics online survey programme, a self-completion questionnaire was used to collect quantitative, empirical data. This was considered the most suitable method of collecting the maximum data from a representative sample, thus delineating ethical challenges encountered during translation process and assisting researchers to propose some generalisable statements about ethics in the Saudi context of professional translation. A pilot study was conducted to ensure face and construct validity of the questionnaire. Ethics approval for the study was granted, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

3.1 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire had two sections.

3.1.1 Section 1. Three renowned professional codes of ethics for translation (i.e. AUSIT, ATA and FIT) were synthesised in order to find out the commonalities and differences related to ethical stipulations governing the translation process. Consequently, eleven dimensions

of translation ethics were identified from the literature review, namely, confidentiality, accuracy, competence, maintaining professional relationships, professional solidarity, impartiality, professional development, translator's rights, clarity of role boundaries, ethics of activism and engagement, and personal ethics. This questionnaire section, in two phases, investigated translators' perceptions of ethical issues that they experienced in translation, and their interpretation of ethically appropriate responses to these.

3.1.1.1 Phase 1: questions to explore translators' opinions on the frequency and importance of ethical issues in translation. Thirty-six closed-ended questions were used to present ethical scenarios, answerable on a five-point Likert scale. To yield a multi-item scale of differently worded questions addressing the same ethical principle, each underlying dimension was reflected in three questions, enabling comprehensive coverage of each ethical principle.

Respondents were asked (a) how frequently they experienced ethical issues in their work, and (b) what they rated the importance of the ethical issues they encountered. The five options for the frequency question ranged from "rarely or never" to "very frequently"; the five options for the importance question ranged from "not important" to "very important". Questions were presented in random order. To ensure reliability and validity, five response options were provided to make it easier for respondents to distinguish between options, and to relieve them of a forced choice through the provision of a middle/neutral option.

3.1.1.2 Phase 2: questions to explore translators' opinions on appropriate responses. Selecting the "very frequently" or "frequently", or "very important" or "important" options in Phase 1 initiated a pathway to 36 additional closed-ended questions. Each had three choices participants could select from on how they would typically respond to the ethical issue addressed in the question. The options were based on professional, sociopolitical and personal ethics. There was a fourth option of "other" – in which respondents could provide a detailed response – to yield richer information than the four preformed multiple-choice responses. To facilitate data analysis, these free responses were coded and linked to one of the other response options (i.e. personal, professional or sociopolitical).

3.1.2 Section 2. This section used seven close-ended questions to collect demographic and general data relating to translation (e.g. languages translated, text type translated and duration of experience). The data provided a description of the sample to determine its representativeness. A drop-down menu of answer options was provided that included an "other" option for free responses. Some questions allowed more than one answer (e.g. the source and target languages translated). For the types of texts translated, respondents were asked to rank the frequency that they translated different text types using three-point scale, with "1" being the most frequent and "3" being the least frequent.

3.2 Respondents

Study participants were translators working in Saudi Arabia. Three sample categories were identified as reflecting different sectors of the translation industry—translators working: (1) in academic translation centres or universities in Abha, Al-Damam, Jeddah and Riyadh; (2) in translation agencies operating in Abha, Al-Damam, Jeddah and Riyadh; and (3) for or with a publishing house.

Internet searches identified 242 translators and translation experts as potential study participants. Of these, 120 were from academic translation centres or universities, including the Translation Centre at King Saud University, Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, King Khalid University, Umm Al-Qura University, Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University and Effat University. A further 110 translators were identified through the websites of Obeikan Bookstore, Mars Publishing House and Jarir Bookstore. The remaining 12 translators were associated with translation agencies. This latter low

number is attributed to many agencies not having a website or failing to provide translator contact details.

3.3 Data collection and processing

In total, 41 responses were received [1]; however, one respondent only completed part of the survey, so his or her response was removed from the study. Thus, the final number of respondents providing data was 40. The Qualtrics online survey programme assures respondents' confidentiality by anonymising their IP and email addresses. Data were downloaded from Qualtrics to an Excel file for processing and analysis. Section 1 questions were coded to reflect the respondents' ratings, using a scale of 1–5, with 1 = very frequently and 5 = never. The same scale was used for importance (i.e. 1 = very important 5 = not important). These data, together with the participants' demographic data, were analysed using SPSS Statistics software, version 22.

To answer research question 1, a descriptive analysis was performed. This calculated the mean and standard deviation of the frequency and importance ratings for the 11 underlying ethical dimensions. From these analyses, the most and least frequently encountered ethical challenges were identified and participants' perceptions of their importance established. To answer research question 2, participants' responses to the multiple-choice questions were categorised as professional ethics, sociopolitical activism or personal ethics. Any free-text responses were analysed and categorised into one of the three categories when possible. However, a fourth category ("mixed") had to be created, as there were responses expressing multiple motivations. Respondents' responses and demographic data were compiled.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Sample description

This study involved 40 respondents who completed an online survey. Most participants (70%, 28 of 40) were male, indicating that translation is predominantly a male profession in Saudi Arabia. This may be because of unfavourable working conditions for women (such as long hours and a lack of female-only work environments), low wages in comparison to language teachers, poor professional training and insufficient information regarding employment opportunities.

Most were aged 20–39 (70%, 28/40). However, there was still an adequate number of participants aged over 40 (30%, 12/40) (see Figure 1). As can be seen in Figure 2, all participants were highly qualified, with a bachelor's degree or higher qualification. With regards to the participants' years of experience working in the translation industry, approximately half of the participants were experienced (six or more years' experience, 47.50%), with many participants highly experienced (more than 10 years' experience, 27.50%) (see Figure 3).

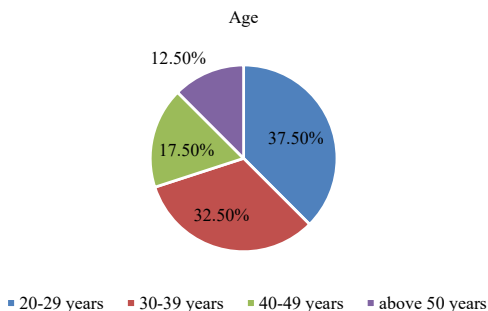


Figure 1.
Age of respondents

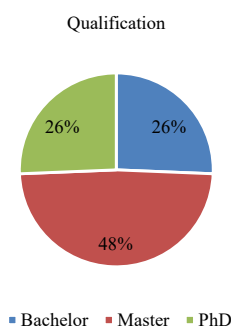


Figure 2. Respondents' qualifications

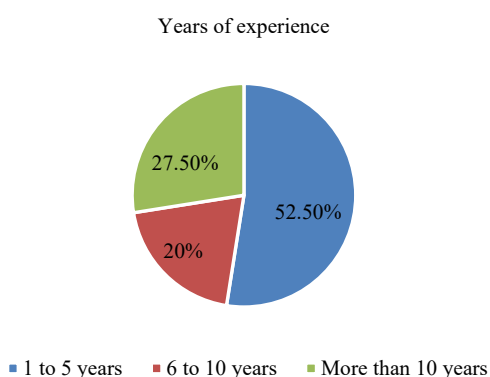


Figure 3. Respondents' years of experience in the translation industry

The questionnaire asked participants about language pairs and directionality related to their translation work. They were permitted to select multiple options. The English to Arabic language pair was indicated 38 times, Arabic to English 33 times, French into Arabic six times and Arabic into French four times. Finally, German into Arabic, Arabic into German, and other languages were each reported once. Post-hoc categorisation was performed to simplify the data and prepare it for statistical analysis. This involved combining distinct languages and directions (see [Figure 4](#)).

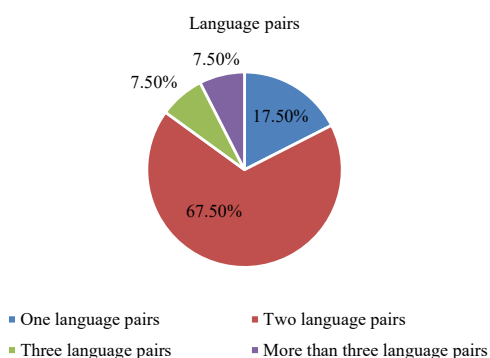


Figure 4. Language pairs for translation work

Respondents' working environments are represented in Figure 5. Most participants worked in academic translation centres (i.e. the Translation Centre at King Saud University, the Translation Unit at King Khalid University and King Abdullah Institution for Translation and Arabization). However, other work contexts are sufficiently represented. Subsequently, participants specified the types of text they translated (see Figure 6). Although most participants indicated they work primarily with general texts, other text types are adequately represented.

Overall, the sample is sufficiently representative of the Saudi translator population in terms of age, gender, years of experience, academic qualifications and translation languages. However, the sample is not considered completely representative in terms of the most frequently translated text types because fewer participants working with legal, religious and scientific texts were included. This must be considered when interpreting the results.

4.2 Ethical challenges faced by translators in Saudi Arabia

Overall, the findings revealed that the participants did not face the ethical challenges specified in the questionnaire especially frequently or infrequently, as the mean scores vary between 2.74 and 3.88 for all 11 dimensions, all of which fall within the mid-frequency range (see Table 1). The analysis findings suggest that professional development, translators' rights and maintaining professional relationships were the most common ethical issues encountered (with a mean score of around 3). All three dimensions are related to the professional dimension of ethics.

The most common ethical challenges faced by translators related to professional development, generating a mean score of 2.74 (SD = 0.90). This could be because of the lack of high-quality training available to Saudi translators. The finding indicates that professional development is a key issue for the research participants. The second most common ethical

Figure 5.
Translation work environments

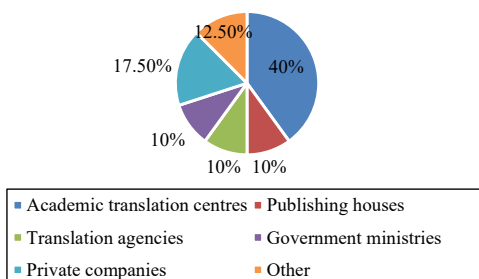
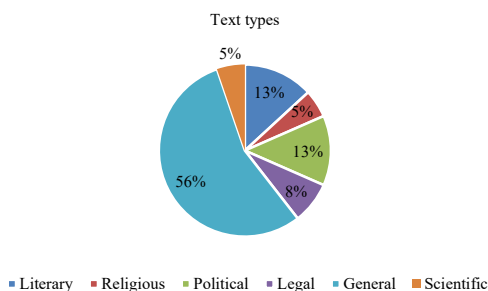


Figure 6.
Types of texts translated by respondents



Ethical dimensions	No of respondents	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Professional development	40	1.00	5.00	2.74	0.90
Translators' rights	40	1.33	4.67	2.91	0.91
Maintaining professional relationships	40	1.33	4.67	3.08	0.82
Activism and engagement	40	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.01
Clarity of role boundaries	40	1.00	5.00	3.29	0.86
Professional solidarity	40	1.67	4.67	3.31	0.84
Accuracy	40	1.33	5.00	3.33	0.86
Competence	40	2.00	5.00	3.48	0.88
Impartiality	40	2.00	5.00	3.68	0.74
Personal ethics	40	1.67	5.00	3.73	0.90
Confidentiality	40	2.00	5.00	3.88	0.91

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics:
frequency ratings^a for
ethical challenges, by
underlying dimension

Note(s): ^a The ranking scale ranges from 1 = "very frequently" to 5 = "never"

challenge highlighted by respondents was translators' rights, generating a mean score of 2.91 (SD = 0.91). This may be because translators are not supported by the Saudi Government or any private professional association, highlighting the need for further research to examine this relationship in more depth. Finally, the third most common ethical issue reported by translators was maintaining professional relationships, generating a mean score of 3.08 (SD = 0.82).

These top-three ranked dimensions appear associated with the narrower perspective of translation ethics, which limits the translator's responsibilities to three key levels: the source text, clients and the translation industry. The study findings indicate that ethical challenges are commonly caused by professional development issues or difficulties with client relationships. One challenge not considered common by participants was fidelity to the source text.

The fourth most common ethical issue faced by translators related to the contested area of the translator's role as an activist and sociopolitical agent, generating a mean score of 3.10 (SD = 1.01). Of all variables, this one had the highest standard deviation, which suggests disagreement between translators' responses and highlights the contentious nature of this dimension. The ethics of activism and engagement also cover a translator's duty to include broader contexts beyond the immediate context of professional ethics. However, this notion is not often included in professional codes of conduct. This is critical, as participants do encounter ethical issues related to activism and engagement, and thus should understand how to overcome them. Nonetheless, most existing professional codes of ethics for translation focus exclusively on limited professional aspects of translation ethics. This highlights the need to cover translators' sociopolitical duties in relevant professional codes of ethics to help them solve ethical issues based on the ethics of activism and engagement.

Subsequently, four aspects of professional ethics generated close mid-range scores, with a mean value of 3.29 (SD = 0.86) for the clarity of role boundaries dimension (ranked fifth), 3.31 (SD = 0.84) for professional solidarity (sixth), 3.33 (SD = 0.86) for accuracy (seventh) and 3.48 (SD = 0.88) for competence (eighth). The clarity of role boundaries concerns translators' relationships with clients, and this helps translators to establish clear boundaries between their professional position and other roles. Professional solidarity focuses on the need for translators to be loyal to the translation industry. The findings suggest that the participants encounter issues relating to client relationships and boundaries on a regular basis. In fact, these factors are reportedly encountered more often than issues of accuracy. What is more, the competence rankings suggest that the participating translators experienced issues

relating to their expertise fairly often. Such issues can be caused by a lack of professional development opportunities.

Issues related to impartiality were found the third least common ethical challenge (ranked ninth). There is a significant difference between the mean scores of the four dimensions presented above, and impartiality, which has a mean score of 3.68 (SD = 0.74). This may be because most participants (74%) in this study had completed postgraduate degrees and received training to be impartial and neutral with professional contacts. Personal ethics were the second least common ethical issue encountered, with a mean score of 3.73 (SD = 0.90). This suggests that participants did not experience personal ethics issues as often as professional and sociopolitical translation ethics issues. The least common ethical issue reported by participants was confidentiality, generating a mean score of 3.88 (SD = 0.91). Again, this may be because most participants (74%) had completed postgraduate degrees in which the importance of confidentiality is continually highlighted.

The findings related to the importance assigned by participants to specific ethical issues are presented in Table 2. When comparing Tables 1 and 2, the mean scores pertaining to the importance rankings are consistently lower than the rankings for experience frequency, varying between 1.58 and 2.04. This means that the participants considered these challenges important even if they did not experience them frequently. Another interesting detail is that the standard deviations from Table 1 are much higher than those from Table 2. This suggests that responses were far more homogeneous than those pertaining to the frequency of ethical challenges rankings. Thus, most participants agreed on the relative importance of each challenge despite how variably they experienced them.

Findings in Table 2 also reveal that participants believed all 11 ethical dimensions were important to some extent. Translators' rights were found the most important ethical dimension, generating a mean score of 1.58 (SD = 0.69). This may be because of participants' experiences with the lack of support or lack of advocacy for translators' rights in Saudi Arabia. This highlights the need to develop a professional association for translators in the country to provide translators with the professional training and recognition required in their profession.

The second most important ethical dimension found was maintaining professional relationships, with a mean score of 1.66 (SD = 0.61). This suggests that aspects such as honesty, dealing with clients, establishing adequate working conditions and using contracts are critical to translators. This may be because of the present lack of a translation regulating body in Saudi Arabia, as participants assigned high value to the establishment of

Ethical dimensions	No of respondents	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Translators' rights	40	1.00	4.67	1.58	0.69
Maintaining professional relationships	40	0.67	3.67	1.66	0.61
Professional solidarity	40	1.00	3.67	1.69	0.66
Confidentiality	40	1.00	4.67	1.75	0.80
Personal ethics	40	1.00	3.67	1.76	0.72
Accuracy	40	1.00	4.00	1.78	0.66
Professional development	40	1.00	4.33	1.83	0.78
Impartiality	40	1.00	4.00	1.84	0.71
Competence	40	1.00	4.67	1.85	0.74
Clarity of role boundaries	40	1.00	3.67	2.04	0.74
Activism and engagement	40	1.00	5.00	2.04	0.97

Table 2. Descriptive statistics: importance ratings^a for ethical challenges, by underlying dimension

Note(s): ^a The ranking scale ranges from 1 = "very important" to 5 = "not important"

professional protocols with both clients and employers to ensure that there are no misunderstandings between the parties involved in the translation process.

Professional solidarity was found the third most important ethical dimension in translation, generating a mean score of 1.69 (SD = 0.66). This highlights the need to establish a professional translation association to help translators feel supported and rewarded for their loyalty to the profession.

Participants highlighted confidentiality as the fourth most important ethical dimension in the translation process, and this variable generated a mean score of 1.75 (SD = 0.80). Interestingly, the four most important dimensions (translators' rights, maintaining professional relationships, professional solidarity and confidentiality) appear associated with a narrower view of translation ethics, which limits translators' responsibilities to the immediate context of producing translations.

Participants considered personal ethics the fifth most important ethical dimension in translation, generating a mean score of 1.76 (SD = 0.72). This value was only slightly higher than the rating assigned to confidentiality. Thus, participants seemed to consider personal ethics important in translation, even though current ethical codes focus predominantly on a narrower perspective of professional ethics that does not consider personal ethics during the translation process. Kruger and Crots (2014) also found that personal ethics play an important role. Such findings indicate that personal ethics should be carefully considered in ethical codes, as translators are human beings who cannot eliminate their personal beliefs, values and morals when carrying out translation tasks.

The participants rated the other six ethical dimensions as important, although there are differences in the mean scores: accuracy = 1.78 (SD = 0.66), professional development = 1.83 (SD = 0.78), impartiality = 1.84 (SD = 0.71), competence = 1.85 (SD = 0.74), clarity of role boundaries = 2.04 (SD = 0.74) and ethics of activism and engagement = 2.04 (SD = 0.97).

The ethics of activism and engagement dimension (normally overlooked in most professional codes of ethics) was ranked as the fourth most common issue encountered by respondents (see Table 1). Challenges associated with this variable are thus considered important. As previously mentioned, the ethics of activism and engagement dimension is controversial, which is clear as the variable received the highest standard deviation value (SD = 0.97) (this was also the case for the frequency of this variable). This suggests that there is significant disagreement between participants regarding how important they considered the potential activist role of translators to be in relation to other roles.

To summarise, the participants considered all 11 ethical dimensions in this study important, even if they did not often encounter them in their professional practice. In general, participants found the dimensions of translators' rights, maintaining professional relationships and professional solidarity most important. Even though personal ethics were ranked low on the list of importance (fifth most important), this aspect should be covered in professional ethical codes for translators in Saudi Arabia. Participants did not consider activist and engagement-related challenges especially important, regardless of the relatively high frequency with which ethical challenges related to this dimension were encountered.

4.3 Translators' perceptions of ethically appropriate responses

The frequency of the three ethical motivation categories (i.e. professional, sociopolitical and personal) are depicted in Figure 7, demonstrating that 40.27% (447 of 1,110 responses) of the appropriate responses selected were motivated by professional notions of ethics, 35.22% (391/1,110) by personal ethics and 24.14% (268/1,110) by sociopolitical and activist ethics conceptions. The responses reflecting a mix of motivations accounted for 0.37% of responses (4/1,110). This finding indicates that the translators' ethical motivations were not solely determined by professional interpretations of translation ethics, as personal ethics are almost

equally important. The responses chosen by respondents were often ones that acknowledged translators can be social agents who provoke change. These findings are consistent with those of Kruger and Crots (2014, p. 165), who note that personal and professional ethics wielded similar degrees of influence on respondents' choice of translation strategies. Robinson (2003, p. 26) also highlights the effect of personal ethics, noting that although translators may have the capacity to suppress their distaste for translating texts that they consider abhorrent or offensive, they cannot suppress it indefinitely.

The 11 ethical dimensions against the frequency of ethical response motivation are cross-tabulated to establish if there is a pattern in the relationship between types of ethical motivations and type of ethical concern (see Figure 8). Common preferences in participants' ethical motivation are shown for some dimensions, with many respondents choosing the same motivation for a particular dimension. However, the ethical motivation frequencies for some dimensions are quite even.

Figure 7.
Overall frequency of underlying motivations for ethically appropriate responses

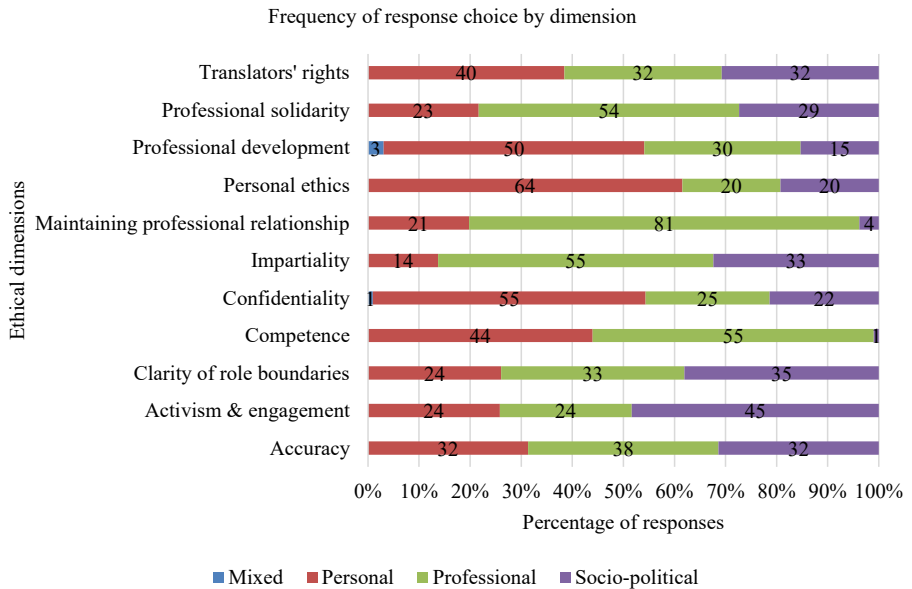
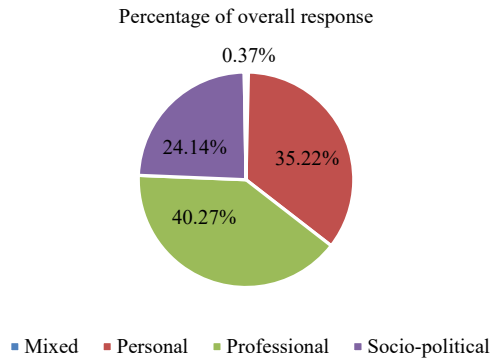


Figure 8.
Frequency of response category by dimension

4.3.1 *Dimensions dominated by personal ethics.* Personal ethics were the most common motivation selected by participants for response in three ethical dimensions: professional development, personal ethics and confidentiality. Of the total 104 responses, 62% ($n = 64$) were attributed to personal ethics, while professional ethics and sociopolitical ethics were equally divided (19% [$n = 20$] for each motivation).

The categories of ethical responses to the item, “You are asked to translate a text that contains statements that mock one of your religious practices”, are presented in Figure 9. Of the 37 responses, 75.7% ($n = 28$) of respondents selected the option reflecting personal motivation (“I would refuse to translate because I respect my religious practices”). Thus, most translators in this study mainly drew on their personal ethics when making decisions challenging their personal beliefs or morals. A situation such as this is rarely covered by professional codes of ethics for translators, despite being clearly important to respondents.

Respondents also favoured personal motivations for challenges to confidentiality. Of the 103 total responses, 54% ($n = 55$) of respondents chose personal motivation options. Just 24% ($n = 25$) selected professional motivation responses and 21% ($n = 22$) sociopolitical motivation responses. One person (1%) provided a mixed response.

The breakdown of motivations for the confidentiality-based question, “You are asked to translate an official certificate, but it looks different to certificates that you have translated in the past and you suspect that it is a fraudulent certificate”, is shown in Figure 10. The finding suggests that personal ethics was the most dominant motivation (“I would refuse to translate because I do not want to be involved in anything that could be illegal”), garnering 67.7% (23 of 34) of responses. In contrast, 17.6% (6/34) of respondents selected

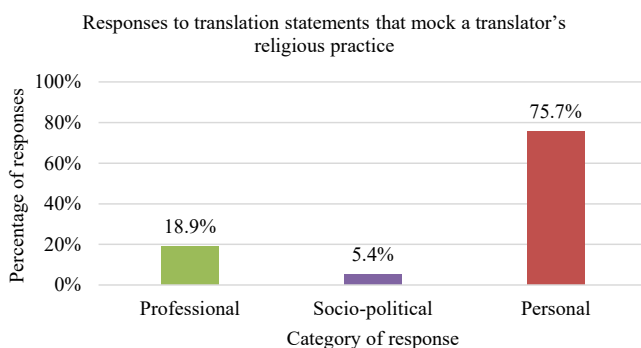


Figure 9. Categories of ethical responses selected in response to the item, “You are asked to translate a text that contains statements that mock one of your religious practices”

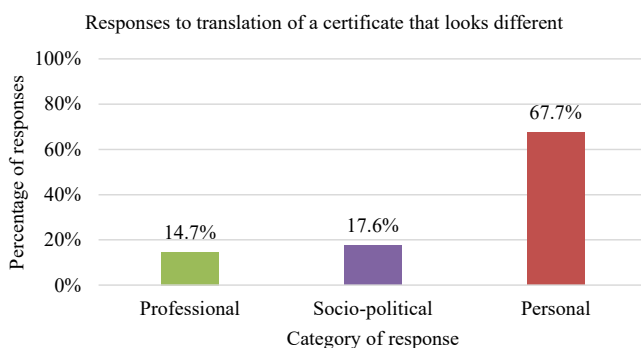


Figure 10. Categories of ethical responses selected in response to the item, “You are asked to translate an official certificate, but it looks different to certificates that you have translated in the past and you suspect that it is a fraudulent certificate”

the activist response (“I would inform the relevant authorities so that they can investigate the matter and protect the society from the circulation of fraudulent documents”). Only 14.7% (5/34) of respondents selected the professional ethics option (“I would translate it and keep all information secret, because translators are supposed to be objective and keep all information in confidence”).

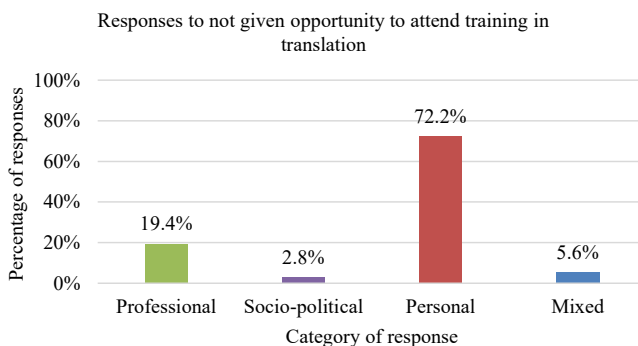
Personal motivation was commonly drawn on for professional development challenges. Of the total 98 responses, 51% ($n = 50$) were personal motivations, 30% ($n = 30$) were professional motivations, 16% ($n = 15$) were sociopolitical motivations and 3% ($n = 3$) were mixed.

The categories of ethical responses to the question, “Your translation agency or institution does not give you the opportunity to attend training programmes to enhance your skills in translation”, are presented in Figure 11. The majority (72.2%, 26 of 36) of respondents selected personal motivation responses (“I would develop some opportunities for self-learning—I think a translator has a personal responsibility to develop his or her own skills”). The professional ethics option (“I would join a professional association for translation, which offers training for their members”) was selected by 19.4% (7/36), the sociopolitical motivation (“I would coordinate with professional translators and relevant authorities to establish a training centre for translation”) by one respondent (2.8%) and two respondents (5.6%) returned mixed responses. These findings indicate most translators are not motivated by professional demands to develop but consider it a personal responsibility.

4.3.2 Dimensions dominated by professional ethics. Professional ethics were the primary motivation behind the impartiality, maintaining professional relationships and professional solidarity dimensions. Of the 106 responses relating to professional relationships, 77% ($n = 81$) were motivated by professional ethics, 20% ($n = 21$) by personal ethics and just 3% ($n = 4$) by sociopolitical ethics. Professional ethics had a less prominent influence on the impartiality and professional solidarity domains, at 55% (5/101) and 51% (54/106), respectively. Personal motivations were invoked in 14% (14/101) and 21% (23/106) of responses for impartiality. Sociopolitical motivations accounted for 31% (32/101) and 28% (29/106) of responses relating to professional solidarity.

For these dimensions, the respondents’ choices were generally consistent with professional codes of ethics. The distribution of categorised responses to the impartiality-based scenario, “You are given a text to translate. This text contains unfair and discriminatory statements against a minority”, is presented in Figure 12. In total, 33 translators responded, with 87.9% ($n = 29$) selecting the professional response (“I would refuse to translate because I can’t maintain impartiality in translating such a document”). The remaining 12.1% ($n = 4$) opted for the sociopolitical response (“I would translate the

Figure 11. Categories of ethical responses selected in response to the item, “Your translation agency or institution does not give you the opportunity to attend training programmes to enhance your skills in translation”



document, but take out or neutralise the offensive material, because I do not want to cause harm to members of the minority group or the target audience”). This shows that most respondents adhered to professional codes of ethics, which demand that if impartiality cannot be maintained, a translation commission be refused.

4.3.3 *Dimensions dominated by sociopolitical and activist ethics.* Only the challenges arising from activism and engagement prompted responses that were mainly motivated by sociopolitical ethics. Of the 93 responses, 48% ($n = 45$) chose sociopolitical and activist-based responses. Personal and professional ethics were secondary, but equal, each garnering 26% ($n = 24$) of responses. Thus, presumably respondents considered they have an activist role to play when encountering sociopolitical ethical challenges. This finding echoes Cronin’s (2003, p. 134) argument that translation has an activist element, whereby the translator must participate in the cultural politics of society, both nationally and internationally. Notably, current codes of ethics rarely consider this dimension.

To explore sociopolitical and activist ethics, the following item was posed to respondents: “You are asked to translate a text on a controversial topic that you have very strong feelings or opinions about. The text expresses the same opinions that you have”. The frequency of responses is shown in Figure 13. Of the 27 responses received, 74.1% ($n = 20$) opted for the sociopolitical response (“I would translate the document, because it is important that the target audience has access to this information”), four respondents (14.8%) selected the professionally motivated response (“I would not accept the translation commission—my personal views on this topic are so strong that I cannot really be objective”) and 11.1% ($n = 3$)

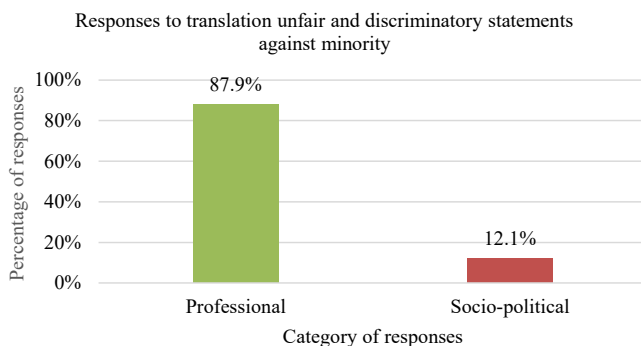


Figure 12. Categories of ethical responses selected in response to the item, “You are given a text to translate. This text contains unfair and discriminatory statements against a minority”

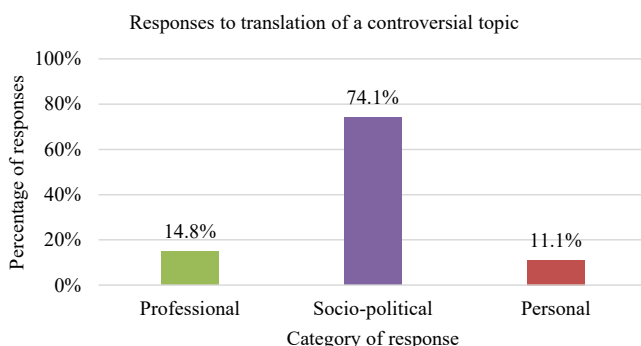


Figure 13. Categories of ethical responses selected in response to the item, “You are asked to translate a text on a controversial topic that you have very strong feelings or opinions about. The text expresses the same opinions that you have”

chose the personally motivated response (“I would translate the document and offer the client a discount because I want to make a personal contribution to supporting this cause”).

4.3.4 *Dimensions in which ethical motivations are more ambiguous.* The ethical motivations for the dimensions of accuracy, clarity of role boundaries, competence and translators’ rights are less polarised. For example, of the 100 responses for the competence scenario, 55% of the responses reflected professional ethics and 44% were motivated by personal ethics. Just 1% chose the sociopolitical and activist response.

The frequency of responses to the competence situation of “You are asked to translate a text into a language that you are not proficient in” is depicted in Figure 14. In total, there were 29 responses to this item, with 55.2% ($n = 16$) of responses reflecting professional motivation (“I would not accept the translation job, because my professional responsibility is to work only in languages that I am very proficient in”). Meanwhile, 44.8% ($n = 13$) were guided by their personal ethics (“I would not accept the translation job, because it is wrong to deceive the client”).

The distribution of motivation was fairly equal for the translators’ rights dimension. In total, 104 responses were received, of which 38% ($n = 40$) reflected personal ethics, 31% ($n = 32$) reflected professional ethics and 31% ($n = 32$) sociopolitical ethics. The accuracy dimension was also divided evenly. There were 102 responses, of which 37% ($n = 38$) were for professional ethics, and 31.55% ($n = 32$) each for personal and for sociopolitical motivated ethics. Ninety-two responses were received for the clarity of role boundaries dimension. These favoured professional and sociopolitical ethics, with 38% ($n = 35$) invoked by sociopolitical and activist ethics, 36% ($n = 33$) by professional ethics and 26% ($n = 24$) by personal ethics.

These heterogeneous responses highlight that ethics is a complex concept that draws on diverse understandings and motivations. It cannot be reduced to a single motivation that applies uniformly. This section provides evidence that the respondents who took part in this study did not view ethics solely through a professional lens. They drew heavily on their personal ethics and less so on their sociopolitical ethics. Moreover, different ethical scenarios prompted different motivations, indicating fluidity in the motivation behind ethical responses. The ultimate aim of this descriptive-quantitative research is to lay down a suitable basis for contemplating the possibility of translating these findings into guidelines for a potential code of ethics from professional translation in Saudi Arabia.

5. Conclusion

Understanding ethical motivations, responsibilities and decisions made by professional translators demands sensitive interpretations, indicating that the phenomenon of

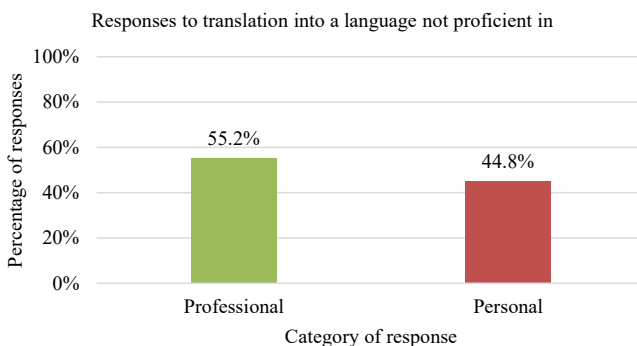


Figure 14. Categories of ethical responses selected in response to the item, “You are asked to translate a text into a language that you are not proficient in”

translation ethics is clearly complex. A survey was conducted to collect data about translators' perceptions and experiences of translation ethics. Most studies into this subject use qualitative methodologies; this study balances those studies by applying a quantitative approach. Research into translation ethics in Saudi Arabia is very limited, and it is qualitative where it exists. This makes the concept and methodology of this study unique. Since the mean scores fell in the mid-frequency range, the respondents faced the ethical challenges detailed in the questionnaire neither particularly frequently nor infrequently. Regarding the importance rankings, the mean scores varied between 1.58 and 2.04, consistently lower than the experience frequency rankings, suggesting that these challenges were considered important regardless of their frequency. The majority (40.27%) related to professional notions of ethics, followed by personal ethics (35.22%) and sociopolitical and activist conceptions of ethics (24.14%), while less than 1% (0.37%) reflected mixed motivations.

The study's limitations include the sample size and depth of data, so future research should include a larger sample and pursue additional data harvesting techniques such as interviews, which would facilitate a more in-depth investigation of personal and sociopolitical ethics and interests. Translators' perceptions of social responsibility would be a notable direction for future studies, particularly to aid the understanding of translation ethics in non-Western settings. Future research could also explore the influence of sociological theorists like Bourdieu on translators' sociopolitical roles. This study's scope did not include an investigation of the relationships between respondents' personal variables including gender and years of experience and their motivation for responses. Although initial analysis suggests that ethics perceptions are influenced by the type of text and personal qualifications, this requires further study.

Note

1. Data are available from the authors upon request.

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Further reading

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