

# 'Caring' Through Translation: A Dialogue on Ethics and Inclusivity in Cross-Language Research

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## Abstract

Cross-language research involving translation is prevalent in the social sciences yet under-discussed in terms of its ethical impact on participants or the translator her/himself. This paper applies a feminist ethics of 'care' to the topic of translation in cross-cultural, cross-language research. We argue for the importance of emotional intelligence and awareness of emotional labor involved in meaningful, ethical translation between the researcher, translator, and participants. The paper itself is a reflexive conversation between a translator and researcher following six months of data collection involving over 120 interviews and 10 work-life histories. We discuss the opportunities and limitations for more emotionally evolved translation in cross-cultural research, discussing specific strategies for *caring about*, *taking care of*, *caregiving* and *care receiving* through translation. Applying the 'caring through translation' framework promotes deeper collaboration and relationality between researchers, translators, and participants, grounded in feminist ideals of equitable, ethical knowledge production.

## Keywords

translation, cross-language research, qualitative methods, emotional intelligence, feminist ethics

## Introduction

"Theories are nets cast to catch what we call 'the world'... [w]e endeavor to make the mesh ever finer and finer." – Karl Popper (1959, p. 59)

Attention to inclusivity, accessibility and equality allows researchers to refine the mesh of qualitative research practice. Without such attention, research risks catching a particular version of the world, reproducing norms rather than ensuring theory is a real, heterogeneous reflection of society (Fricker, 2007). Feminist researchers have foregrounded the long-standing and intersectional imbalances of power shaping research practice. This includes theory development rooted in epistemic structures which often favor and globalize norms of the North and West (Enloe & Krystalli, 2019; Jazeel & McFarlane, 2010; Noxolo, 2017; Osuteye et al., 2019; Walker & Martinez-Vasquez, 2020; Yeung, 2007). Deeper reflection on theory building, representation, and sincere collaboration reveal cultures and communities who have been marginalized from academic theory or the research process

historically, to the detriment of research efficacy (Chambers, 1984, 2006; Mueller et al., 2023; Proefke & Barford, 2023).

Translation is one area ripe for deeper engagement on the topic of ethics and inclusivity within qualitative research. Translation is a pervasive methodological process in cross-cultural, cross-language research, and bares significant impact on research findings, yet remains widely under-discussed in academic literature outside the discipline of translation studies (Berman & Tyyskä, 2010; Gawlewicz, 2019; Gibb & Danero Iglesias, 2017; Wong & Poon, 2010). Academics rarely reveal the intricacies of their translation process or openly reflect on the impact of translation on participant experiences (Müller, 2007; Temple & Edwards, 2002). Academic institutions have

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little to no requirements for transparency around the translator selection process, language competency, or the translator's familiarity with the study participants, context or topic (Berman & Tyyskä, 2010; Esposito, 2001). A growing body of work on less-than-fluent researchers draws attention to the need to bring researcher's levels of fluency into the methodological discussion, considering how their language abilities impact their observations, relationships in the field and dependence on translation (Gibb & Danero Iglesias, 2017; Watson, 2004). To date, little research has explicated the emotional-psychological dimension of translation. Translation demands both emotional intelligence and emotional labor from the translator and researcher, mediating their relationship as well as their relationship with participants and research outcomes (Ayan, 2020; Hubscher-Davidson, 2013).

This paper discusses translation through the lens of a feminist ethics of care. We introduce a *caring through translation* framework for advancing the inclusivity and quality of translation in cross-cultural, cross-language research (See Table 1). This framework is organized along three domains of care (following Fisher & Tronto's analysis of institutionalized care (1990)): (1) *caring about* and *taking care of* translation; (2) *caregiving* in translation; and (3) *care receiving* in translation. We begin with an overview of key theoretical concepts core to a feminist ethics of care through translation, followed by a brief study background. The findings section takes the form of a reflexive dialogue between a researcher and translator. Three hours of interview dialogue have been condensed into eight questions and responses, discussing reflections on the process of integrating care more deeply into ethnographic research in Nepal. This is followed by a discussion of findings and their implications for translation theory and practice. We conclude with a prompt for further research on the processes and outcomes of translation through a feminist ethics of care.

## A Feminist Ethics of Care in Translation: Conceptual Overview

Translation has a multitude of meanings in social science literature. In this paper, translation (as opposed to interpretation) refers to both text-based and live-interview translation (Gawlewicz, 2019; Temple & Edwards, 2002). Literature on translation tends to focus on standardizing translation to achieve an objective level of quality and rigor. Key processes to facilitate rigorous translation practice have been identified (Regmi et al., 2010), as well as techniques for achieving conceptual equivalence, such as back-translation; validation through a third party; developing a translation lexicon; and explicating ongoing limitations through reflexivity (Smith et al., 2006; Squires, 2009). While technical criteria are useful for creating benchmarks around translation quality, researchers have demonstrated that the process of translation is also highly relational, subjective, and political (Gawlewicz, 2019; Spivak, 1992). This is especially true where translators

have the responsibility to translate experiences, sensitive stories and 'lives' (*ibid*). Though literature is growing on the importance of emotionally connected translation, this is almost exclusively limited to the discipline of translation studies (Hubscher-Davidson, 2013, 2016, 2017; Massey et al., 2023), and demands deeper theoretical engagement in wider social science disciplines. This paper therefore focuses on the dimensions of translation which go beyond objectivity and into the gray areas of emotionality, feeling and human connection that shape meaning making.

Psychological and sociological literature is helpful for understanding the emotional-affective competencies invoked in live-interview translation. As translators 'becom[e] the voice of the speaker', they take on emotional labor in addition to cognitive and physical labors (Ayan, 2020, p. 125). Emotional labor was developed as a concept to describe the elements of employment that involve the management of emotions in exchange for a wage (Hochschild, 2012/1983). Importantly, 'cultures carry different feeling rules' (Hochschild, 2012/1983, p. xi), which is precisely why translators take on so much emotional labor in the process of translating participants' experiences and stories. Translators go beyond other service-sector work involving emotional labor, such as caretakers. They not only need to manage others' and their own emotions, but also communicate emotion accurately across cultures and languages, often within a time limit and under conditions of uncertainty (Angelone, 2022). Translators therefore require certain emotional-affective skills that will allow them to navigate the feelings and emotions of participants and researchers, as well as 'discriminate among [emotions] and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions' (Salovey & Mayer, 1990/2004, p. 6). In other words, they need emotional intelligence (Hubscher-Davidson, 2013, p. 326). Emotional labor addresses an overlooked dimension of emotions management in translation, while emotional intelligence speaks to a person's competency at navigating emotional labor. In the last ten years the concept of emotional intelligence has grown in connection with quality translation (Hubscher-Davidson, 2013, 2017; Massey et al., 2023), pointing out that translators who demonstrate certain emotional competencies and personalities experience more job satisfaction and career success (Hubscher-Davidson, 2016). In the pursuit of more delicate handling of complex and sensitive situations, emotional intelligence may offer translators and researchers access to deeper connection with participants and more evolved readings of situations or life experiences (Hubscher-Davidson, 2013).

Building on translation's emotional-affective dimensions, this paper contributes new theoretical ideas by applying a feminist ethics of care to the translation process. 'Care' as a concept spans a large body of interdisciplinary work, but may be defined as a combination of attention and protection: (1) 'serious attention, especially to the details of a situation or thing' and (2) 'the process of protecting someone or

**Table I.** Overview of Discussion Questions and Insights for Caring Through Translation.

Discussion Topic	Discussion Question	Dimensions of Care Ethics in Translation
(I) <i>Caring about and taking care of translation: Identifying care needed and sharing responsibility</i>		
Q1 Roles of the translator	Translator: In this project, you were a 'less-than-fluent' researcher. What additional roles and responsibilities did I take on because of your language/cultural knowledge level?	Explicating often-hidden dependencies between less-than-fluent researchers and translators reveals expertise translators bring to research beyond language competency (e.g. emotional, embodied and cognitive labors), and opens new dimensions to <i>caring about</i> the translator and research process.
Q2 Translator as co-researcher	Researcher: What are examples of your active participation in research decisions, showing your role as a co-researcher, in addition to a translator?	We pursue equitable knowledge production in <i>caring for</i> translation through collaboration between the researcher and translator over key design and methods decisions (e.g. participant recruitment and consent or navigating gatekeepers). The translator's emotional intelligence can support better co-production between researcher and translator and mitigate the limitations of a foreigner's presence.
Q3 Limitations to sharing power	Researcher: Did you ever feel power was only superficially given to you over research decisions?	Researchers may more authentically share power and responsibility in the research process through listening and genuine engagement with the translator's suggestions and supporting a translator's ongoing learning. Shared experiences and characteristics like age can also improve the communication between researcher and translator as they share responsibilities for care.
Q4 ""	Translator: Did I ever over-influence you in your decision making, phrasing of questions or understanding answers? Is there a risk of the translator influencing the research <i>too much</i> ?	Sharing control over the research process can be difficult for both researchers and translators, which is why ongoing reflexivity and discussions about the process of sharing decisions is important for care to be given.
(II) <i>Caregiving in translation: Utilising emotional skills for translation ethics and quality</i>		
Q5 Emotional-affective dimensions of translation	Researcher: What are some examples of how your 'affective' translation skills helped you to be an 'effective' translator?	There are many different dimensions of the translator and researcher's emotional labour during interviews, such as tone, body language and interpersonal skills. We offer examples of how emotional intelligence supports meaningful and ethical translation.
Q6 Increased translator vulnerability	Researcher: Are translators more on the 'front lines' with sensitive content than researchers?	Caregiving can be a taxing and demanding process, meaning greater potential exposure of translators and researchers to ethical dilemmas or social-psychological harm. Precaution and boundary setting should be prioritized, as well as emotional support and encouragement from both translators and researchers toward participants.
(II) <i>Care receiving in translation, assessing how well care was given</i>		
Q7 Ensuring ongoing translator support	Researcher: For an inclusive project where a translator may have more responsibility, what can researchers do to support translators, as a co-researcher, co-translator and employer?	We assess how well the researcher provided care over the translator's multiple roles as co-researcher, translator and employee. It is important to ask translator's opinions on research topics, share findings between translators and researchers through open dialogue, and give verbal and non-verbal feedback during translation. Researchers should offer help to translators where needed, and pay a fair wage that reflects the full spectrum of labor involved.
Q8 Boundaries for translator work	Researcher: How much can researchers expect translators to be involved in the research? Is there ever a scenario where researchers may be putting too much expectation on a translator?	Ongoing discussion is necessary to ensure researchers are aware of blind spots over translator's workload. Researchers should ensure conditions are right for translator's work and support them by opening doors for them in the future where possible.

something and providing what that person or thing needs' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Care is both a natural and necessary response to the dual task facing translators, who must marry the objective criteria of translation with its subjective conditions involving emotional labor and emotional intelligence. Care is central to a practice of feminist ethics in research, since we know that research is not an observation on the 'outside' world, but is situated within and acts upon its surroundings and participants (Fricker, 2007). Knowledge is situated at the intersection of many 'knowers' experiences, values and positions, as well as within knowers' physical bodies (Crenshaw, 2017; Rendell, 2019). Translators, participants, and researchers are 'embodied' in the research experience (Damsgaard et al., 2023). To deny the knowledge and experience of the body, expressed and felt in many ways, is to miss key parts of the research context and limit the knowers' full experience. Situated, embodied care is especially required in projects engaging participants in research for the first time, or where there is a disproportionate power imbalance. This is not only as an ethical responsibility, but also to facilitate genuine relationality and openness. Care ethics builds on feminist research as relational and embodied, bringing empathy, as opposed to the distance associated with neutrality, into the research process (Held, 2006; Markowitz, 2019; Padan, 2019b).

Fisher and Tronto (1990) provide a theoretical framework of care we have adapted to the process of translation. First, applying care to translation involves *caring about* translation, or paying attention in a way that allows research stakeholders to see the needs of translators, participants and researchers, as they aim to connect and communicate. After building awareness of caring needs, *taking care of* translation means taking responsibility to meet the caring needs. Here we discuss the opportunity to recognize expertise within the translator, and ways to share decision making power between the researcher and translator in the project. We have merged the first two phases into one section, as we found in practice they are often done in parallel. We have also built on Fisher and Tronto's (1990) third phase, *caregiving*, adding emotional dimensions to their discussion of the ongoing physical labor of care. The fourth phase is *care receiving*, which involves evaluating the care provided from the perspective of those who are being cared for (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, pp. 40–46). The four phases combined summarize 'caring through translation', grounded in feminist ethics.

## Study Context and Dialogue Format

This paper discusses translation insights from a six-month period of qualitative data collection for a PhD thesis. Following the conclusion of the data collection, the researcher and translator recorded a three-hour conversation about the experience of working together and cultivating relationships, both as co-researchers on the project, as well as with participants. The entire conversation was transcribed and coded

in qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. The findings section reflects our original conversation, structured as a dialogue between researcher and translator, following examples such as Fraser and Jaeggi (2018) and Bardhan (1990). The conversational tone of a dialogue format allowed the researcher and translator to reflect candidly on their experience of doing feminist research together, without getting caught in language formality. Conversational approaches to exploring theory and practice also work to make the paper itself more accessible to academics and translators at various levels, inside and out of the Academy.

The translation work for this project discussed in this paper involved 120 semi-structured interviews, 10 work-life histories, 3 focus group discussions, and some text-translation (e.g., consent forms and meeting coordination). We worked with 20 female domestic workers as research informants. Many participants were from caste and ethnic groups which experience frequent social and economic discrimination. Participants were often in fragile economic conditions and had access to little-to-no state social protection. The women were all first-time research participants.

At the time of the project, Aashma Baniya was a Master's student at Amrit Science Campus (Nepal) and a first-time translator. She was chosen as a translator for her research and English skills, because she is local to the area of research and a native Nepali speaker. The researcher is Grace Mueller, a PhD student at the University of Cambridge (United Kingdom), who had beginner-level knowledge of Nepali prior to eight months in Nepal, during which time she became conversational.

The translator aimed to achieve conceptual equivalence when translating the language from Nepali to English, considering individual words as well as cultural context to transfer meaning from the participants to the researcher and researcher to participants (Choi et al., 2012). In the below paper we do not discuss the details of more objective quality criteria for translation, such as free or literal, hermeneutic or technician approaches, as these are well documented in other papers (Abfalter et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2012; Regmi et al., 2010). Instead, we focus on the emotional, affective element of translation as an overlooked but crucial foundation for strong research in cross-cultural, cross-language contexts.

## I. Caring About and Taking Care of Translation: Identifying Care Needed and Sharing Responsibility

*Caring about translation* can be seen as a first step to applying a feminist ethics of care to translation, as it involves recognizing a need for care. In our work, this happened almost in parallel to *taking care of* translation, or taking responsibility to meet the caring needs. We made a concerted effort for the researcher and translator to work together in research design, participant recruitment, and methods decisions. Sharing power and decision making between the researcher and

translator was in alignment with the feminist aims of the project, and can also improve translation quality, as discussed below (Wong & Poon, 2010).

In Question 1 we examine the different roles the translator played in this project and the range of value she added by being more involved, highlighting often hidden dimensions of translation work which may need care attention (See Table 2). Question 2 explores what it means to *take care of* translation by sharing decision making power with translators across the research project, as long as this level of engagement has been discussed and agreed upon. Question 3 discusses the limits of sharing power between the researcher and translator, and Question 4 shows the weight translators may feel when given more responsibility in research decisions.

**(Q1) Translator: In this project, you were a ‘less-than-fluent’ researcher. What additional roles and responsibilities did I take on, as a translator, because of your language/cultural knowledge level?**

**Researcher:** In our project you held many more roles than just a translator...

You were a situation interpreter, a cultural liaison, you supported travel, and often meal logistics. You were a local point of contact who helped me navigate different spaces in the city. Your workload was not only live-interview translation, it was text message and phone call translation for meeting coordination, or text-translation of consent forms. There was an emotional workload that involved sensitive interview content and bonding with participants, and a physical workload which involved walking long-distances between interviews in the hot sun and translating for multiple hours at a

time. You were also one of the only strong English speakers I could connect with for six months, and I saw you for five to six hours a day, five days a week. You invited me to your home; I knew your family. So above all, you were my friend and confidant, which added more complexity to your work and job.

**(Q2) Researcher: What are examples of your active participation in research decisions, showing your role as a co-researcher, in addition to a translator?**

**Translator:** When we began the project, you were explaining our primary method as ‘interviews’, but I started to explain them to women as ‘tea talks’.

In Nepali we say *jaha gayo tehi bhijnu parcha*, meaning wherever you go you need to adapt to those environments. So, to make participants understand what we want to say, sometimes we need to talk their way. I helped to adapt the methodology to be more culturally specific, especially for women who haven’t done research before. ‘Tea talks’ were a mix of cultural custom with interviewing, that made the method more interesting to the women. Whenever women have time, they just have tea and talk and gossip. It’s the culture of our country. After this tea talk framing, women were paying more attention and had more enthusiasm compared to calling the conversations ‘interviews’. It was easy to make them understand because it is related to our culture.

**Translator:** For participant recruitment, I adopted a strategy for every gatekeeper...and it really worked. The strategy was to create a balance in our attention between the employers and the domestic workers, not to focus too much energy only on the women we were recruiting. At the end of

**Table 2.** Possible Roles of a Translator in Cross-Cultural Research Aiming for Inclusivity, Accessibility and Equitable Knowledge Production.

Role	Tasks
Language translation	Face-to-face interview translation of verbal and non-verbal interview elements Voice memo translation (receiving and sending) on Facebook messenger Consent form text-translation SMS text-translation Other written materials observed throughout data collection Written-output translation throughout the research process (i.e., letter of appreciation, findings summary)
Co-research	Strategizes for participant recruitment and approaching gatekeepers Live interview translation of verbal and non-verbal interview elements Voice memo translation of Facebook messenger audio notes Real-time question development Reflection on data insights and initial analysis
Relational mediator	First point of contact with participants and gatekeepers Last person to say goodbye or clarify final questions Often fielding small talk and side questions from gatekeepers or participants
Logistics support	Transportation communication Accommodation negotiation Research materials shopping Supportes logistics of paying research stakeholders
Cultural liaison	Ensures approaches to relationship building are appropriate and make sense in the local context Consults researcher’s behaviour and clothing to ensure respect is shown to research stakeholders Supportes language learning of local terms (opposed to classroom grammar)



the day, it's because of the employers we are getting a chance to enter the house and talk to domestic workers. That is why I was forcing you to come inside [the employer's house for tea] with me, even though we didn't have anything we needed to do with the employer specifically. Sometimes to get something, you need to give something. We were giving something to the employer when we went inside for tea, because most of them really wanted attention. Some employers have one of those personalities who will do anything for the person who really shows genuine care and attention towards them.

**Researcher:** You were also constantly helping me navigate cultural nuance in a way that supported participant retention, because it enhanced their comfort and trust in us.

An issue for me as a foreigner was not knowing how deep I can go before it becomes too direct, or inappropriate. Even non-verbal prompts which might be easier for me to respond to in my own culture became more difficult to identify, like the difference between shyness and discomfort. This was one area where you played a big role, in letting me know when we needed to change a topic or make the mood a bit lighter. Your emotional intelligence in detecting other people's emotions allowed my emotional understanding to go further and minimized the risk of making participants uncomfortable.

**Translator:** Yes, of course, your being a foreigner impacted the project. Because our participants are not always aware about PhD things or the benefits of research. They usually focus on the present benefits that they will get. And the general thinking is if a foreigner comes, then they feel they have a big opportunity to go to America. So, my presence matters a lot to be honest—to explain what is really happening in the research project, in terms that may make more sense to them.

**(Q3) Researcher: Did you ever feel power was only superficially given to you over research decisions?**

**Translator:** You were so welcoming towards me; you created a bond with me and made me feel like I mattered. Like my opinions mattered a lot. And you made decisions based on some of my opinions, that also created a great bond.

Our bonding was a sister kind of bonding; whenever I got comments from you it was not judgmental. So, I think the connection between a researcher and translator matters *a lot* when working on sensitive projects. You made me feel like it was my project also, that my decision mattered—you were very respectful towards me and showed appreciation toward me. There's a quotation like... teach me, but never belittle me. You did that to me. You always made me feel like I can learn. And I was always there ready to learn. You also respected my time. And I always want my friends or anyone whom I work with to respect my time and effort.

The other thing that helped us is our age difference. It's not that [far apart] and we both are in the research field as Masters and PhD students. Maybe our topic and our field are totally different, but we know what qualitative research is...and what happens inside the research process.

**(Q4) Translator: Did I ever over-influence you in your decision making, phrasing of questions or understanding**

**answers? Is there a risk of the translator influencing the research too much?**

**Translator:** ...because, to be honest, it's impossible to not influence the research if you share the responsibility of the project. If you want to help and assist the person, then you'll have to share your opinion. But I was also scared. Because the researcher has everything planned out in the beginning, and it could modify the whole research if my opinions are overwhelming...it could lead somewhere where you didn't want to go. An example is whenever I told you to change the questions or words in the interview. Or do you remember while interviewing one participant, her daughter was in the background complaining a little bit. And I told you to change the subject quickly. In that way, I somehow influenced the questions from my side...maybe I was interrupting the questions a lot.

**Researcher:** You did influence me, which was sometimes difficult when I had a specific vision for the interview, but I also valued your input enormously. I tried to create an environment where you could feel as free as possible to share what you thought or add questions during the interview. There were times when you asked to change the subject, or you read the feeling in the room and said we needed to go. We would adapt the interview based on what you said. I was always looking at your face, seeing your reactions, and gaging the progress of the interview from your interaction with our participants. In the example you just mentioned with the daughter in the background, once you said we needed to change the subject, we did. That could have helped us preserve our relationship with the core participant.

## II. Caregiving in Translation: Utilizing Emotional Skills for Translation Ethics and Quality

*Caregiving* in translation builds on *caring about* and *taking care of* translation, as the ongoing work of providing care throughout the study process. *Caregiving* in translation marks both the reflexive and relational work which spans across the period of data collection, but also explicates the ways in which "close attention to the feelings, needs, desires, and thoughts of those cared for" supports the translator's ability to get closer to participants point of view (Held, 2006, p. 32).

In Question 5 below, the translator and researcher discuss how translating feelings and emotion, mimicking body language and copying participants' emphasis on keywords supported understanding, both for the participants and for the researcher. Question 6 considers the temporal element of translation, including the impact of translators being the 'first' to hear and react to the information shared (Ayan, 2020). This can also impact translator's wellbeing as they attempt to mask and transform emotions to maintain professionalism or the cadence of the interview (*ibid*). The exposure of translators to emotional content is not only something to consider in terms of translation skill, but also translation workload (see Table 2).

**(Q5) Researcher: What are some examples of how your ‘affective’ translation skills helped you to be an ‘effective’ translator?**

**Translator:** I had to ‘deliver’ the questions in the interview in a way that involved much more than just saying what you said in order to achieve a more accurate translation.

If I just translated what you said, they would not always get the key words, or the *gist* of the questions. Sometimes when I translate their questions or when I express their answers, there are lots of emotions, lots of non-verbal elements involved in it. The question is the same, but the emotion that you put into it is different. So, I ‘deliver’ that gist to them in the question, and do the same with the answers, delivering the gist without missing any part [of the translation].

**Researcher:** And just to understand that ‘gist’ process more...so it’s more about the tone of your voice and emphasizing the key words?

**Translator:** It’s like when you are asking questions, and they are answering, there are lots of emotions included. Like somebody might be *sad* about that thing and somebody might be very *happy* with that thing, or somebody might be really *amazed* with that thing (the translator used a different tone and body language to communicate each of those affective words). That can be heard in the tone. So, I was talking about the delivery of the tone, delivery of the whole vibe, which includes body language and facial expressions.

The good part about translation for me in this project is it is quite an emotional thing because I’m kind of a sensitive person. So, I thought at the beginning, translation is just a job, and you just translate things. But the best part was transferring the emotions that our participants were feeling to you in the translation process.

**Translator:** If we did not have strong interpersonal skills for the consent form process, many first-time participants may not have felt comfortable joining the project.

In the end, our research success was all about the way we presented ourselves to them. I was concerned about avoiding confusion that you were with a non-profit, and you helped me a lot with that by knowing a few things in Nepali. That helped a LOT to be honest. For you it might be a small deal, but to hear Nepali from you reassured them.

Also, because most of them are not good with reading and writing, when they held the consent forms (written in Nepali), you could tell they were confused. They wanted to learn about it through *us*, not through the papers. The consent form was a plus point—but it was really our interpersonal skills that made the project more approachable to them. The thing that made them the most comfortable was you being patient, open to their refusal, and showing language skills.

For me, whenever a translator asks a participant a question, if that translation is not respectful towards the experiences that the participant shares, or is not curious about the answers, then that participant will eventually not like to answer. So, a translator must be very curious about the answers a participant is giving and should also be respectful, with no judgements at all. And the

translator’s facial expressions matter a lot. The translator needs to genuinely be listening to the participant, not just translating.

**Translator:** We also used body language to translate emotion or communicate things more quickly, between translator and participant or between translator and researcher.

I used my body a lot [laughing]. When somebody was happy, I’m showing happiness through my body. And when someone was aggressive – towards anything, then I was saying that in that way. One participant was shocked at how well I mimicked her emotion and body language, she was shocked because all the sudden I became like her when I shared her answer with you. So, I didn’t only translate her words to you, but also her overall feeling that she was delivering to me.

And another thing that I used my body for with translation was to stop them from giving a long explanation. Sometimes I did like this (holding up hand) and sometimes I also asked you to stop the question just with the facial expression. In one participant’s case, I used big eyes to show you the answer was going long. So sometimes you have to use your body because some third person might be present in the conversation and our time might get wasted explaining everything. This is an area where our relationship (translator/researcher) supported the translation quality, as we got closer, our communication got better.

**(Q6) Researcher: Are translators more on the ‘front lines’ with sensitive content than researchers?**

**Translator:** Sometimes when the questions were very emotional, and it was very personal, I felt like I hesitated.

Because, for example, when it was about someone’s husband’s death, then most of the women don’t like to talk about it or don’t feel comfortable.<sup>1</sup> So sometimes I watch women’s faces, and for example when a difficult topic came up, I wondered if maybe the participant felt bad and didn’t want to talk about it. But that was my assumption. Maybe she felt bad or not, who knows? But I did it anyhow...it’s my job to deliver the questions. But that was a difficult situation when things got too personal.

**Translator:** The personal bond we developed was the foundation for many of our conversations and helped me to navigate translation decisions with sensitive information.

On our first day I observed everyone and learned that domestic work is a sensitive topic. The questions are personal to them... and they will not share their personal things with a random person who just comes and asks you. I wanted to create a safe and comfortable environment, and for that, creating a bond would be the biggest starting point. I was already good with that because I’m a very social person, so I approached them with an intention to create a bond with each one, whether it was *didi* (elder sister) or *bahini* (younger sister). Do they like jokes or not? Do they like politeness or not? I offered them respect and I ensured them that their secrets are safe with us. And I just kept building those things throughout the whole data collection period until the last day and it really worked for building connection and making them feel comfortable.

**Researcher:** There were many times when the conversation became emotional or difficult, and you cared for or reassured a participant in a way that enabled us to continue the conversation. It would have been okay to stop the interview also, but you just did such a good job prioritizing loving and caring for our participants, above our research goals, that it naturally made them feel at ease. It's almost not possible for me to reach that level of care with participants without you. As much as I can show that I'm patient and gentle, I can't really have a deep conversation with them, or console them through words, without your translation in the middle. My body language and facial expression are still important, even if I don't totally know what is being said, I'm showing empathy.

### III. Care receiving in Translation: Assessing How Well Care was Given

*Care receiving* in translation explores the responsibilities of the researcher as an employer of the translator. This process carves out space to be reflexive with the translator to evaluate if and how well care was given and received in the employment relationship. This could also involve evaluating the care given to participants through the entire research process, or through translation. Here we focus on care given to the translator.

Building on the breadth, depth and emotional intensity of translation work discussed in Questions 1 through 6, Question 7 discusses the responsibilities a researcher may have to care for the translator. Care may need to be evaluated in contexts where the translator has taken on more cultural and emotional responsibility, such as when working with a foreign researcher or with research participants experiencing forms of social or livelihood deprivation. Question 8 discusses the limits to translators' more engaged involvement in research practice, and the need for researchers to learn from translators about work boundaries to support successful and ethical translation.

**(Q7) Researcher: For an inclusive project where a translator may have more responsibility, What can researchers do to support translators, as their co-researcher, co-translator and employer?**

**Translator:** As a co-researcher, ask for translator's opinions on different research decisions, take their voices into consideration and share ongoing research findings.

The translator has a big role in the project, from sharing culture to understanding ways of thinking through language (see Question 1 and 2). The researcher should always be being very honest, not always telling 'you are so good, you're so nice' if that isn't true. They should also acknowledge the translator's big role in the project, appreciate their work, and share knowledge and instruction without belittling.

Another thing would be updating them about the research findings. That's a key point. That makes a translator feel they are also involved in research more deeply. And that makes a translator more focused and enthusiastic about the research.

**Translator:** As a co-translator, the researcher should give non-verbal and verbal feedback real-time during the translation, and be ready to offer help in the translation process when a translator needs it.

Researchers should make the translator feel that you really trust the translation. The hardest part was when I was shifting towards the word-for-word technique from summary, I was worried I would manipulate answers with my word choices. But you made it easy to be honest. You made it easy by giving the response that you gave while I was translating—you were so confident and trustworthy towards me. The facial expressions that you had, it felt like I was doing a good translation and it made me trust my own translation.

More than your facial expressions, when you were clearly taking notes based on the translation and making questions that engaged with my translation real-time, that made me feel more confident that you were getting what I was telling you. Because only if you understand the answers then you'll be able to make good follow up questions.

In the middle of the conversation, whenever a translator pauses, then maybe they are not getting the correct word. The researcher should offer help when needed, and not make a translator feel dumb for not knowing a particular word. Maybe the translator is getting disturbed and distracted by noise or other people. Then again, the researcher can offer help. Maybe some translator needs some water rather than offering vocabulary help. Showing a simple gesture of support, that is all.

**Translator:** As an employer, researchers should pay a fair wage that reflects the full spectrum of the work involved (see Table 1), including meeting coordination, small talk before and after interviews, travel costs and more. Ask translators what their hourly translation limit is in a day, and what food or snack breaks they might need.

Researchers should take time to value the translator's time and effort. Researchers as employers should consider work conditions and be aware of realities like hunger or sound irritations. Because when a translator is irritated, then that person is not translating nicely. That person will miss out on something. So, researchers should also take care about wider environmental or human circumstances sometimes.

**(Q8) Researcher: How much can researchers expect translators to be involved in the research? Is there ever a scenario where researchers may be putting too much expectation on a translator?**

**Researcher:** I was concerned that, because I've never been a translator before, I may not fully know your needs. Even though we're both putting in the same hours, our mental and physical work looks different. There's also a fear that if the researcher gives too much control to the translator, that the translator is the one producing the research, not the researcher. There's an ethical question in my mind—does that put too much weight on you? Is it okay for so much labor to be done by the translator, when I feel I should be doing that labor as the researcher?

**Translator:** It's okay to expect more engagement from translators, as long as they agreed to this in the beginning and



the environment is correct (i.e., translators are supported). The limits are different, but it's about the understanding a researcher has. If the researcher is making busy schedules and not caring about whether the translator is tired, or mentally able to translate...in those cases a translator must speak up. In our case, you were in the interview time and again, asking for my needs and we had breaks. So that helped a lot.

At the beginning of the project, the priority was very clear, to respect our participant's time. And to respect the women's time means to be there at any time possible. Sometimes we might have five interviews a day, sometimes we might have two interviews or sometimes we might not have any interviews. So, I knew those things at the beginning.

The main thing is the person you're working with needs to be satisfied the way you are translating. And if you don't get that satisfactory vibe and connection, that will be felt. If I was working with any other person with whom I don't vibe well and who didn't have any trust on me, then I wouldn't work. So, the difficulty of translation isn't always about the work, but who you are doing it with.

Researchers can also add value to translators lives by opening doors for them. They can do things that would help them in the future, like the letter of appreciation you gave me that I can take to future employers. So yes, providing things that show their quality of work, or give a recommendation, could help a lot.

## Discussion

The above conversation pushes forward the critical agenda of equitable knowledge production through translation by discussing different dimensions of 'care' that can be applied to cross-cultural, cross-language translation. Core to a feminist ethics of care is the idea that the process of translation is not objective or neutral. Instead, there are multiple interpretations of qualitative contexts, based on one's subjective, embodied worldview (Gawlewicz, 2019; Temple & Young, 2004). This process involves emotional labor, and further emotional intelligence, to effectively monitor, navigate and communicate one's own and others' emotions in the translation process (Hubscher-Davidson, 2013; Salovey & Mayer, 1990/2004). Within a more dynamic view of the emotional and embodied work of a translator, the paper discusses dimensions of *caring about*, *taking care of*, and *caregiving* in translation, as well as *care receiving*. These phases are at times overlapping, as we discuss below, and require continuous attention to establishing and maintaining trust.

*Caring about translation* and *taking care of translation* involve identifying care needed and sharing the responsibility to meet that need. We follow Gibb and Danero Iglesias (2017) and consider the overlapping roles of the translator when working with a less-than-fluent researcher. Translators bring different levels of expertise to the project depending (in part) on the researcher's familiarity with the research environment (Question 1). Paying attention to the many additional roles the

translator may assume when facilitating cross-cultural research, such as logistics coordinator, is a feminist practice of care, as it makes visible forms of emotional, embodied labor historically overlooked and undervalued (Junor, 2020).

In light of the expertise the translator brought to our project, and the researcher's lack of fluency, we made an active decision in our work to collaborate between the researcher and translator on research design and methods decisions, aiming to build deeper 'relationship, respect and responsibility' through co-production (Padan, 2019a; Wakefield & Whetung, 2015). Involving a translator more deeply in research decisions is an epistemological choice which can blur boundaries between translator and researcher (Temple & Young, 2004). In Question 2, the translator shares her contributions to making methods more adaptable to the cultural context and her strategy for navigating gatekeepers, showing how her expertise and emotional intelligence layered onto the researcher's knowledge in the research design, participant recruitment and retention. This shines new light on the role of emotional intelligence to advance co-production between a researcher and translator, enabling a shared knowledge production process that extends the researcher's capacity to navigate culturally-mediated forms of expression (Mesquita & Walker, 2003). Examples of shared knowledge production decisions include the translator's prompts to change the interview's direction due to signs of participant discomfort, or helping the researcher build rapport with participants by managing their expectations for the project (Question 2 and 5).

The progression between *taking care of* and *caregiving* overlaps as translators and researchers move from taking the initial responsibility to care, to engaging in ongoing care work throughout the data collection period and beyond. In our study, the translator initially took responsibility to lean into the emotional connection required to establish trust in participant recruitment. In some contexts, the translator may be more well suited to provide care earlier than the researcher, as *taking care of* requires some 'explicit knowledge of the situation' that the researcher may not yet have (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, p. 42). Aashma, the translator, continued the ongoing work of *caregiving* by engaging in emotional, cognitive and physical labor for the duration of the project. In Question 5, the translator discusses the multiple dimensions of emotional labor used to make participants feel more comfortable and understand the research process better, including translating emotion, using tonality and body language to represent participants accurately. Aashma builds on Gawlewicz's (2019) understanding of translation as an 'interpretive act' by mimicking participants' tone and non-verbal language so accurately they laughed with shock. The translator's use of interpersonal skills to connect with women in participant recruitment and the consent process, as well as the researchers use of local language and patience, show that emotional intelligence skills may be just as significant to translation quality as language, cultural knowledge and positionality (Gawlewicz, 2019; Varzande & Jadidi, 2015; Wong & Poon, 2010).

In addition to the benefits of emotionally engaged translation, translators may be exposed to more vulnerability in sensitive interviews due to their proximity to participants and being the first to hear the information shared. There can also be a heavy burden, as Temple and Young (2004) state, "...no one researcher has been responsible for being the repository of meaning for all English speakers in quite the same way as individual non-English translators and interpreters have been assumed to be" (172). Interpretive decisions may be influenced by different positionalities across countries of origin, financial resources, race and ethnicity, gender, age and more—further complicating the work of translation (Gawlewicz, 2019; Holland et al., 2010; Proefke & Barford, 2023). Our research shows how relational bonds between translators and participants, or shared characteristics like age, can help ameliorate some of the burden around collaboration or fear of misinterpretation (Question 3 and 6). The translator shared what made it easier for her to feel empowered to guide the project, including when the researcher shared ongoing research findings with the translator and when the researcher acted on the translator's suggestions, showing trust and respect. Given that language is a major avenue through which researchers access and interpret meaning, increasing translators' access to information about the research aims and findings can set up the project for stronger collaboration (Question 7) (Wong & Poon, 2010).

In the final section, *care receiving* in translation demonstrates how researchers can support translators through the full spectrum of their work, as co-researchers, co-translators and as employers (Question 7). This phase emphasizes that providing genuine care requires reflexivity and discussion among research stakeholders throughout the research project (Fisher & Tronto, 1990). Attentiveness to the translator's suggestions, recognizing if any unintentional harm has taken place, and paying a fair wage that reflects the multi-dimensions of translation work are among topics relevant to discuss in *care receiving* (Tronto, 2012). The translator shares what boundaries helped her be in a good state of mind despite the at-times hectic working conditions, including reliable days off work, the researcher's willingness to work the same difficult hours, and the relationship of trust and confidence built between the translator and researcher. In consideration of how the research process can add value to stakeholders' lives, we discuss ways researchers can support translators beyond the project, such as offering a letter of appreciation or recommendation for future jobs (Question 8).

## Conclusion

*Caring through translation* builds on a feminist ethics of care to understand and value the emotional, subjective dimensions of qualitative, cross-language research. Progress within qualitative research has rightfully positioned participants and interlocutors as the knowledge experts of their own lives and contexts, contrasted with the idea that 'experts' are those within academic institutions (Proefke & Barford, 2023). The

*caring through translation* framework developed here makes visible the ways in which quality translation moves beyond distanced-neutrality and toward greater immersion within the complex experiences, emotions and lives shared in the research process. This is an ongoing process of relationality and reflexivity, involving *caring about* translation, *taking care of* translation, *caregiving* and *care receiving* in translation.

As qualitative research advances toward greater inclusivity, we urge cross-language researchers to consider 'care' as a cornerstone of research practice. Translators and researchers have an ethical responsibility to represent research participants fairly and accurately, particularly when working with first-time or participants experiencing any form of marginalization potentially limiting their agency (Alcoff, 1991; Baker-Shenk & Kyle, 1990; Gawlewicz, 2019, p. 5). Future research is needed to refine the theoretical mesh of *caring through translation*, including how care might be offered differently according to research context, as well as how researchers can evolve decision making *with* translators. More opportunities are needed for translators to share their first-hand experience and insight on receiving and giving care in translation work.

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## Note

1. As part of a wider ethics framework for the project, we ensured participants they could opt-out of any question or terminate interviews at any time, without needing to give a reason. We often repeated this at the beginning of interviews, or before a more sensitive question, to reassure participants of this option. The nature of the project was sensitive and often involved asking about more intimate information; this was a difficult line to walk, as reflected in Aashma's answer.

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