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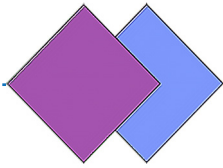
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Risk Management in Translation: How Much Does It Really Explain?

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Abstract

While risk has always been part of translation, it was taken up as a distinct topic recently, with some confusion as to what the term actually covers and some problematic claims about its central role as a determinant of translation behavior and the links between risk and translation effort. It is argued that risk is more often a constraint than a driver of decisions, that the correlation between the magnitude of risk-associated loss and the number of problem-solving efforts can be weak, and that achievement-oriented decision making explains translatorial behavior better than risk management and is more compatible with professional ethics. However, there are interesting nontrivial cases where risk is salient, and the topic deserves more conceptual and empirical exploration.

Keywords: decision making, knowledge risk, cognitive risk, non-compliance risk, decision driver, decision modulator

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Risk Management in Translation: How Much Does It Really Explain?

In human translation (*translation* is used as a hypernym for translation and interpreting, *translator* for translators and interpreters, and *text* for written texts and speeches), the importance of decision making has been salient to practitioners, trainers, and researchers for a long time—Bible translation choices being a striking example—and underlies much of the reflection, research, and discussion activity reflected in contemporary Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS) literature, from interventionism or the lack thereof in community and signed language interpreting (Roy, 2000; Wadensjö, 2004) to tactics and strategies in translation and conference interpreting (e.g., Baker, 1992; Chesterman, 1997, for translation; Kalina, 2015, for a review in conference interpreting; Levý, 1967), to cite just a few highly visible topics in which the translators' and interpreters' decisions are central (also see Schwieter & Ferreira, 2017, for numerous references to decision making in the more recent focus on translation cognition).

Many decisions can be explained by the influence of prevailing professional and cultural norms that translators may follow (Toury, 1995), subconsciously or not, but many others are more personal.

In human decision making, choices are naturally associated with concerns about their expected outcomes, which are more or less favorable or adverse, and thus with concerns about risk—namely, the possibility of a decision's outcome being less favorable than expected or less favorable than the outcome of a different decision. This self-evident principle was formalized at least as early as the 17th century with Blaise Pascal's *Wager*. In the context of translator training, in view of linguistic and cultural differences between Japanese and French, Gile (1984) considered it particularly useful to highlight it to students of Japanese-into-French translation to help them understand that by staying very “close” to Japanese original sentences, they were taking the risk of writing unclear or even incorrect French target texts, and that by making decisions involving bold interpretation of the source text and bold reformulation options, they could hope to have better outcomes in terms of not only linguistic acceptability but also transmission of the author's message to readers. He later formalized this, including the risk aspect, in a “Sequential Model of Written Translation” and in hypotheses about what motivates the selection of interpreting tactics (Gile, 1995, 2005), but he did not elaborate beyond general principles.

More recently, Pym developed a strong interest in risk and risk management in decision making in translation (Pym, 2005, 2011, 2020). In his wake, other researchers (e.g., Akbari, 2009; Hui, 2012; Matsushita, 2019) conducted studies on the topic. Regarding the business aspect of translation, viewed from an “industrial” viewpoint (Akbari, 2009), and also regarding large collective translation activities in administrations and international organizations, it makes sense to look at how risk-management theory and practices developed in business environments also apply to translation companies. However, their extrapolation to individual translation methods is more challenging. Pym (2020, p.446) criticized the most influential models of translation competence for not relying on bottom-up process research. This essay analyzes risk in translation from a bottom-up perspective and looks at how and to what extent Pym's top-down ideas about risk and risk management apply.

What is *Risk*?

In everyday language, the word *risk* is associated with an adverse event. This is the meaning adopted by Gile (1984, 1995) and also most often by Pym, judging by his definition of risk as “the probability of an undesired outcome as a consequence of an action” (2005), and by various examples of risk that he has given in other publications (loss of credibility, risk to one's life, etc.). However, in other contexts, such as insurance and finance (e.g., Knight, 1921), the same term has a wider meaning that encompasses desired and undesired outcomes. In her doctoral dissertation, Hui (2012) explained the origin of the term as well as the conceptual evolution of risk analysis. In addressing risk management, she nevertheless reverted to the “negative” meaning of risk when referring to risk managers who can estimate their risk exposure in terms of “risk probability, i.e.[.] the likelihood of negative consequences” and “risk impact, i.e.[.] the severity of negative consequences if they really happen” (Hui, 2012, p.15). She later explained that she had “come to understand the term risk as the probability of a desired or undesired outcome of a (translational) action” (p.36). This inconsistency cropped up again, on the same page, when she considered “risk-averse behavior” to be an attempt to reduce negative consequences, which refer to the “negative” meaning of *risk*, and “risk taking” to be an attempt to “obtain potential benefits,” which refer to the “positive” meaning of risk; as for “risk transfer,” it is an attempt to share the positive or negative outcomes of the relevant translation decision and thus refers to both positive and negative potential outcomes.

For the sake of consistency, in this paper, risk is taken to refer to potential adverse outcomes only, and *risk management* refers to the part of decision making that addresses them.

Another ambiguity that needs to be cleared up is that between risk as the probability of an adverse outcome, as defined by Pym (2005), and risk as the outcome itself, such as “damage by fire” or “damage by water” (Pym & Matsushita, 2018, p.4). When referring to “high-risk,” “mid-risk,” or “low-risk,” Pym (e.g., 2015) seems to merge both interpretations into a single construct: It would not make sense to view high probability of occurrence of a minor negative outcome as “high risk” (for instance, the high probability that one out of many readers of a translation will dislike a particular choice of wording by the translator in a sentence); neither would it make sense to view as “high risk” a major negative outcome with very low probability of occurrence (say, in a document explaining the operation of a life-critical medical device, the probability that the author made an error that will make the device deadly if used according to instructions).

In a (highly) simplified mathematical form, the risk associated with a particular translation decision d_1 as compared to the risk associated with another translation decision d_2 can be expressed as follows:

- (1) $\text{risk}(d_1) = \text{loss}_1 \times \text{probability (of loss}_1)$
- (2) $\text{risk}(d_2) = \text{loss}_2 \times \text{probability (of loss}_2)$

Assuming that translators can quantify the respective losses and probabilities—which they can only do roughly most of the time—if loss_1 is 100 and its probability is .2 (2 chances out of 10), the risk has the value 50. If loss_2 is 90 and its probability is .7 (7 chances out of 10), the risk has the value 63. In other words, statistically speaking, it would make sense to opt for d_1 in spite of the fact that it entails a potentially higher loss.

Every decision d_i also entails a potential gain, and, when acting rationally, the difference between the two determines the desirability of a decision:

- (3) Expected outcome (d_i) = [gain_{*i*} x probab. (of gain_{*i*})] – [loss_{*i*} x probab. (of loss_{*i*})]

Translators acting rationally would only opt for d_i if its expected outcome is positive (> 0). Actually, they generally consider not one but several different courses of action and compare (sometimes subconsciously) the expected outcomes before choosing the most positive value.

Going one step further, the cost of each decision in time and effort may also be considered, consciously or not. Translators may also opt for a decision with a suboptimal expected outcome because they have run out of motivation or energy.

The main question that is addressed in this paper is whether the recent focus on risk and risk management in translation has contributed significantly to understanding translational behavior so far and what potential exploration avenues are likely to be most productive.

Risks and Quality in the Practice of Translation

Pym defined three categories of risk. For him (Pym, 2015), “risk in translation is first and foremost risk of losing credibility.” In Pym (2020, p.448), he explained that in practical terms, this means the risk of losing trusting relationships with the other parties involved in the communicative act. The second category is “uncertainty risk,” or the risk of handling “inadequately” a source-text item, such a term or a sentence. The third type of risk is “communicative risk,” or the risk of the translation’s not fulfilling the desired communicative function.

Conceptually speaking, the definitions of credibility risk and communicative risk are clear enough. “Uncertainty risk” is more problematic: How does one determine whether source-text items are handled adequately?

Proximal and Distal Components of Translation

For the purposes of this discussion, it is convenient to make a distinction between two parts of translation work. There is a “proximal” part, in which source-text segments are processed and target texts are produced, including ad hoc use of information sources as well as revision. But translation also involves contacts with potential clients, negotiations over prices, deadlines, delivery modalities, and so forth before and after work on the text. In a freelance environment, this upstream and downstream “distal” part of the work can be just as important as the technical, proximal work. In corporate translation or interpreting departments or divisions and in international organizations, it is mostly the concern of the head of the translation or interpreting unit, while individual translators give all their attention to their proximal work.

Risks and Quality in Proximal Translation Work

The risk of handling “inadequately” a source-text item or a sentence is naturally associated with proximal translation—but whether the parties concerned will consider a translation to be “inadequate” also depends on distal factors. What Pym referred to as “uncertainty risk” arises partly from failure to understand source-text segments, either because of lacunae in the translator’s linguistic or extralinguistic knowledge (including terminological, phraseological, and signing preferences as well as normative preferences) or because of cognitive issues, such as lapses of attention or, in the case of interpreting (see Section 5), cognitive saturation. This “comprehension risk” often leads to errors, omissions, and/or infelicities (EOIs) in the production of the target text. “Uncertainty risk” can also arise from the same lacunae and cognitive factors in the target-text production stage even if comprehension upstream is satisfactory. Such weaknesses can result in communicative failure, provided that the EOIs are significant enough. They can also lead to credibility loss if other stakeholders, such as the commissioners of the translation or its intended recipients, detect them and react strongly to them. However, credibility risk can also materialize without any communicative failure or errors or omissions of source-text items: Stakeholders may dislike the translator’s textual style and choices or the translator’s extra-textual behavior, including insufficient punctuality, unpleasant human contacts, what they perceive as insufficient commitment toward an ethnic or deaf community in the case of community interpreting and signed language interpreting, personal appearance, and so forth.

In other words, “uncertainty risk” seems to amount to the risk of providing what is perceived by some or all stakeholders, including authors, recipients of the target text, and clients, as unsatisfactory translation because of either subjectively or intersubjectively perceived EOIs or other aspects of the translator’s work, attitude, or behavior. “Uncertainty risk” is therefore the risk of non-compliance with norms and preferences—established professional and cultural norms and the personal preferences of stakeholders.

At this more fine-grained level of analysis, one major difference between translation and interpreting is that cognitive risk is more salient in the latter. Another is that knowledge risk (EOIs and noncompliance with the stakeholders’ preferences resulting from the translator’s insufficient linguistic and/or relevant extralinguistic knowledge) can be mitigated in translation by consulting relevant sources to acquire more information even during proximal work, whereas in interpreting, under the pressure of time, this can be markedly more difficult.

The Case of Organizations

Risk for individual translators is strongly (albeit not exclusively) linked to the quality of the proximal part of their work.

Translation businesses are first and foremost interested in having and keeping clients. In other words, their priority lies in credibility risk as defined by Pym, which depends to some extent on the quality of their translators’ proximal work, but also on their business practices, including human resource management, project management, public relations, pricing policy, and so forth. They tend not to manage directly noncompliance risk after they have communicated a brief to the translators, and they are not concerned about communicative risk as long as their client is satisfied with their service.

Translation organizations, such as translation and interpreting departments in companies or in international organizations, operate in generally smaller and more stable “client” environments. For them, credibility risk is far more dependent on knowledge risk and cognitive risk.

Risk Management as a Focus in the Study of Translational Decision Making?

In translation, codes of professional conduct as well as clients’ expectations and the action of trainers all converge to suggest that individual translational behavior is by default achievement-oriented: Translators aim first and foremost to achieve compliance with applicable norms and with the preferences of stakeholders and to contribute to communication through their decisions. As explained earlier, risk comes in when facing uncertainty due to knowledge gaps and cognitive problems, and for individual translators, in proximal work, risk management consists mainly in acquiring the necessary knowledge if they can and in assessing the risks associated with reformulation decisions against expected achievement. In other words, risk management in proximal translation is an integral part of strategic and tactical decision making (on the distinction between tactics and strategies, see the editorial of *CIRIN Bulletin*, 50, July 2015).

In a number of examples that Pym cited repeatedly, a simple gain/loss assessment provides a satisfactory explanation of the translator’s behavior, and further theoretical elaboration on risk management seems to be overkill.

For instance, Matsushita (2019) discussed the case of Japanese “journalators” (journalists *cum* translators) tampering with their Japanese translations of foreigners’ statements when presenting the Japanese versions as direct citations in violation of a fundamental norm in journalism. She argued that they believed they could afford to do so because the risk of someone checking the accuracy of the Japanese translations against the original was low—actually, the probability was low, not necessarily the stakes in terms of journalistic credibility, but, according to Matsushita, they tampered with the citations while still presenting them as direct citations to maximize the journalistic impact of their news reports. Risk was only a potential modulator of their action, not a driver.

Pym’s repeatedly cited example of translations of Pakistani birth certificates not carrying the names of midwives and reporting officers in hospitals (e.g., Pym, 2004) suggests that here again, risk is low enough to have little weight in the translators’ decisions.

Pym (2008) reinterpreted Gile’s findings in an experiment involving two successive interpretations of the same speech by the same interpreters (Gile, 1999): Some speech items that were reformulated in the target speech the first time were omitted the second time. This was interpreted by Gile as supporting the idea that these omissions were due to cognitive saturation, but Pym believed that the explanation lies in the interpreters’ prioritizing “high-risk segments” in their second rendition. It is not clear that those speech segments that Pym qualified as “high risk” were indeed associated with high risk or high stakes, especially in an overtly experimental setting where no communication goals were involved. And if they were and the interpreters chose to prioritize them during the second pass, why not during the first pass, and why were other speech segments that were omitted in the second pass not omitted in the first pass? In all these examples, focusing on risk and risk management seems to offer no significant contribution to the analysis of translatorial behavior.

There are, however, cases where risk deserves closer scrutiny, such as when stakes are high and suboptimal decisions can lead to major loss. This can happen in the translation of contracts, treaties, and political and diplomatic statements or when, despite their best efforts, translators cannot make sense of an important source-language text segment and need to decide what to do about it after having determined that they will not be able to come up with a satisfactory reformulation. A comment informing the client or reader is risky for the translator’s credibility and future business, and omissions and guesswork involve risks for the author, the client, and readers.

Risk in Interpreting

In conference interpreting, it is widely accepted that constant cognitive pressure puts interpreters at risk of making errors and omissions whenever difficulties come up and whenever they make an error in the management of their attentional resources (Barranco-Droege, 2015; Gile, 1995; Mankauskienė, 2018). This risk has given rise to practical recommendations, such as note-taking during consecutive translating or using coping tactics when interpreting from syntactically very different languages. In consecutive interpreting, most authors recommend not using many symbols (e.g., Rozan, 1956, which has been a standard reference for more than 60 years) because until they are fully mastered, retrieving them from memory for note-taking may take too much time and jeopardize comprehension of the unfolding speech, and interpreting their meaning when reformulating the speech is also hazardous (see examples in Tang, 2018).

The risk of cognitive interference has also been theorized as one of the “rules” that determine the choice of coping tactics by interpreters. Because some are more costly in time and/or processing capacity than others, when selecting tactics to cope with difficult comprehension or reformulation of a (short) speech segment, all other things being equal, it would be rational for interpreters to prefer the less costly tactics because of the risk of cognitive interference affecting the processing of neighboring speech segments (Gile, 1995). Language interference is another cognitive risk that has been strongly stressed by the so-called Paris school and that is one of the reasons why dissociating the linguistic form of source texts from its intended content (“sense”) before reformulating the “message” in the target language is so central in Interpretive Theory (e.g., Seleskovitch, 1975; Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1989; also see Setton & Dawrant, 2016).

Cognitive risk and associated tactics are present at virtually every moment in interpreting and can be considered a regular part of the interpreter’s decision making rather than a distinct risk-management issue.

Risk Avoidance?

If in some branches of translation, high risk is intrinsic to the exercise, how often is risk avoidance or risk-associated loss mitigation the main determinant of translators’ decisions? Setting aside some extreme cases, in translators’ day-to-day work, the author’s professional experience as a translator and as a trainer of translators and interpreters on one hand and the literature on

translation, including studies of the translators' strategies and tactics, on the other suggest that it is reasonable to consider that most of the time, in their proximal work, risk is a decision modulator rather than a decision driver.

One striking example is literary translation, especially the translation of poetry: Having to juggle with images, syntax, and rhymes across languages and cultures inevitably entails high risks of failing to overcome all the obstacles successfully in the eyes of all readers—including those of the translator. It is difficult to imagine how a translated poem would look and read if it were determined to a large extent by risk management.

Another example is simultaneous interpreting, where, as explained earlier, due to cognitive pressure, there is a constantly high risk of being unable to translate adequately all the relevant information in source-speech utterances. This is especially true under present working conditions, with many speakers reading written texts at top speed without having provided them in advance to the interpreters to give them a chance to prepare for the task (Seeber, 2017). A systematic major risk-avoidance or risk-reduction component in an interpreter's decision-making behavior would not be compatible with an interpreting career.

A third example can be found in community interpreting in spoken language and signed language settings. Interventionism by interpreters, who are often reported to add explanations, even when doing so goes against the rules of professional codes of conduct, is difficult to explain by risk management as a determinant. It makes more sense to assume that the main driver of such behavior is the wish to help the mediated event unfold successfully and sometimes, as in the case of signed language interpreting, to help a community achieve better recognition and status.

Decision Making, Risk Management, and Effort

Do translators tend to invest as little effort as possible to achieve maximum effect, as postulated by Levý (1967)—without an accompanying explanatory rationale or empirical evidence? According to the law of least effort in human behavior (Zipf, 1949), they would invest as little effort as possible to achieve an acceptable effect, but would they always seek *maximum* effect or even an optimum balance between the amount of effort invested and the effect? This postulate is somewhat paradoxical: To decide which decision will produce a maximum effect, all options need to be considered, which requires significant effort, perhaps more than would be required to only consider options until one is deemed satisfactory, as in Gile's "Sequential Model of Translation." The theory becomes more attractive if it is interpreted not literally but as meaning that translators seek some balance between effort and outcome.

Pym (2015) did not take a position regarding the minimax principle, but he did believe that translators do and should devote more effort to "high-risk" decisions than to "low-risk" decisions. Presumably, this is a shortcut referring to the stakes.

In his 2015 paper, he looked at translation effort in terms of information gathering. Indeed, when looking for the best translation of a technical term or for adequate phraseology in a particular sociolect in the target language, the main endeavor generally consists of finding adequate documentary and/or human resources and then mining them for information and assessing the information found. Such effort can be measured in hours of work and sometimes in financial cost, but this is not the only type of effort involved. Cognitive effort is also present in proximal translation work, when assessing the plausibility of one's initial understanding of a source-text segment or the linguistic and cultural acceptability and informational fidelity of one's target text in written translation, and—very intensely so—when interpreting, in the simultaneous or consecutive mode. In both these cases, and especially when interpreting, this effort occurs over a short time span for every translation problem or uncertainty and cannot be measured in hours or financial expenditure. Another effort that has to do with the translator's mind but is distinct from evaluation-based comparisons of options is the "psychological" effort involved in forcing oneself to adopt a norm-compliant or client preferences-compliant attitude when interpreting in court settings and other public service settings and to resist reactions generated by empathy or antipathy, which might lead to unprofessional behavior. In this case, the effort can be continuous, made over the whole interpreting event, but again cannot be measured in hours of work or financial expenditure.

Another point is that a translation model that only considers effort in terms of cost does not sufficiently take on ethical principles or even individual psychological factors. Many translators and interpreters take pride in producing good translations, even if high workload, poor working conditions, lack of consideration from employers and other stakeholders, and uninteresting texts and speeches make them less conscientious at times. For them, finding good solutions to translation problems can be a source of satisfaction, even when they entail significant efforts. In conference interpreting, in particular, constant cognitive effort is required to produce reasonably faithful and linguistically acceptable output speeches, to pass tests when applying for positions in international organizations, and to be considered good enough to be hired in the private market. In a recent survey (Zwischenberger, 2017), the main source of satisfaction/dissatisfaction mentioned by conference interpreters was their feeling that their performance was up to their personal standards—or not. Such an attitude is not compatible with a model of decision

making that minimizes one's translation effort on the basis of risk-reduction economics. It may apply in some specific situations but seems hardly appropriate as a general descriptor of translation behavior.

When Pym said that high-risk segments deserve more effort than low-risk segments, he probably meant that when facing source-speech segments that are difficult to translate, it is reasonable to devote more effort to them when they represent high stakes. But this interpretation applies to potentially high loss and potentially high gain and puts us back in a traditional gain versus loss decision-making perspective.

Moreover, this idea is a reasonable generalization when available "fuel" for efforts—typically, time, financial resources, or attentional resources—is limited to the extent that devoting efforts to one segment will take away resources from another. How often is this the case in written translation? Are translators not frequently in a situation where they have enough time and resources to find satisfactory solutions to most translation problems with reasonable effort expenditure and will be unable to find good solutions to other translation problems even if they devote considerable effort to them, regardless of the level of risk (including losses) they entail?

The parameters and variables involved in effort investment during decision making, including risk-related considerations, are numerous and can arguably be assumed to interact in complex ways. One point that should be kept in mind before making any attempt to generalize is that there are circumstances in which translators typically devote much effort to producing "good work," circumstances where they are more likely to succumb to the temptation of doing as little as possible to obtain acceptable results, and many cases in between. Examples of the first case are interpreting highly visible speeches by international personalities for TV (see Matsushita, 2019), translating in a competitive environment, interpreting under salient quality control, and translating or interpreting with affective involvement in the outcome of the mediated encounter or publication of a translated text. Examples of the second case can be found in highly repetitive translation of official documents (such as birth certificates). In the first case, it seems reasonable to assume that more than minimum effort will be invested in decisions, even if the potential risk associated with each of them is low. In the second case, it is more likely that translators will devote markedly more effort to decisions entailing high stakes—provided that their baseline knowledge of relevant information and the source and target languages is sufficient to identify them. This cannot be taken for granted.

The amount of effort invested in decision making in translation may also depend on the translator's state of fatigue, which in turn may depend on one's health, general resilience, or even one's biological clock.

A Few Nontrivial Examples of Risk in Interpreting

Much translation is partly automated, especially with regard to standard or very frequent terms and expressions. In written translation, first drafts are often produced spontaneously on the basis of more or less automated translinguistic mappings and self-revision decisions tend to result from comparative assessments of stylistic and terminological options. There is always the "risk" that one's final choice may be disliked by the reviser or an end reader, but in terms of risk management, this is trivial and does not call for a translation-specific theory. What might be more useful is to explore the frequency of and reasons for less than systematic assessment of various translation solutions by translators: fatigue, insufficient motivation associated with working conditions, insufficient awareness of the cognitive phenomenon of linguistic interference, and so forth.

One interesting case of nontrivial risk is found in a statement by an Arab female conference interpreter collected for a doctoral dissertation (Alhalaki, 2018). In formal conferences, speakers and interpreters are supposed to use formal modern Arabic, in which nouns and adjectives have declensions. One female student interpreter reported that teachers advised her not to vocalize declensions, because if she did, listeners would think "she is in a state of sexual excitation." According to Alhalaki, the explanation lay in the "music" of Arabic when declensions are pronounced, which may sound "sensual." Other Arab interpreters reported feeling hesitant to speak in formal Modern Literary Arabic for fear of sounding pedantic and being laughed at. In both these cases, complying with formal norms is believed to be face-threatening for the interpreters (see also Biagini, Boyd, & Monacelli, 2017).

A somewhat related case is that of signed language interpreters who, when interpreting into a sign language and encountering lexical gaps, select iconic solutions ("visual," in the spirit of sign languages) that can be costly in terms of time and attentional resources and thus interfere with the processing of neighboring segments and cause errors and omissions downstream, whereas less risky solutions, such as mouthing or fingerspelling the spoken language word or an abbreviated version thereof, would be more efficient informationally speaking—but might lead to rejection of the interpreter by deaf people because such methods are associated with the language of the "oppressor" (Pointurier-Pournin, 2014).

What Has the Risk-Management Construct Contributed to Understanding Translation So Far?

Cases of nontrivial risks in Translation are interesting per se and could perhaps be analyzed as a sociolinguistic phenomenon. But do they call for distinct theoretical elaboration? More generally, what is the potential contribution of studies on risk management in TIS?

In translation project management, as addressed by such authors as Akbari (2009), if sufficient reliable data were available, insights could perhaps be gained into potential idiosyncrasies of the behavior of translation markets and translation actors, in particular clients. On this basis, valuable lessons might be learned beyond existing risk-management theories and practices in business. This would be mostly relevant to the distal part of the translation process.

As for the proximal part of the process, coordinating the work of the translators selected to participate in the project with appropriate guidelines, resources, and controls is a matter of quality management aiming at optimal translation more than a matter of risk management. But in the case of individual translation—on which the discussion by Pym and other authors has focused—the evidence presented so far has not demonstrated convincingly that more effort is devoted to high-stakes translation segments.

Beyond doubts as to the power of risk management to explain translation behavior, there is also an ethical issue. Do professionals not have an ethical obligation to seek satisfactory solutions to all translation problems and only give up after trying hard? In most prescriptive texts on translation found in the literature, especially didactic texts, this is at least implied and should be included as a factor when modeling translation, even though reality can be different, as indeed tends to be the case in all occupations when fatigue and other interfering factors set in.

It is not clear that the concept of risk management has contributed much so far, but it did draw the attention of translation scholars to a potentially productive research focus. The existing literature on the topic could even have counterproductive effects by favoring “defensive” risk avoidance and risk mitigation that put the translator’s interests first, not the “consumer’s” (e.g., Turner & Best, 2017), as opposed to a (positive) achievement-oriented translation approach. I would argue that this aspect deserves particular attention in translator training, which should put the focus on achievement, not risk, for at least two reasons:

1. Ethically, it is in the interest of all to maximize quality, even if finding solutions to some translation problems involving low stakes requires effort.
2. Achievement-oriented effort by trainees is an investment that can be expected to improve their knowledge and skills—and to reduce the effort required for future translations with similar challenges.

Conclusion: Operationalizing Research on Risk Management in Decision Making in Translation

The reservations formulated in this paper about the present contributions of risk and risk management should not be interpreted as a claim that risk management is unimportant in translation. When discussing (and criticizing) “defensive interpreting,” Turner and Best (2017) referred to some behavior patterns in community interpreting in spoken and signed language settings that are clearly the result of risk avoidance. Other examples were presented earlier. When this is the case, it would be interesting to find out what effects this has on the translator’s decision and behavior and what the implications are for the users of translation services.

It would also be useful to analyze risk-related decisions against professional and social norms and ethical considerations.

The very concept of “risk” deserves more solid conceptual reflection. It also deserves empirical investigation, especially regarding the link between the perceived magnitude of potential loss associated with risk and its influence in decision making.

In such exploration, it is necessary to go beyond speculative interpretations of behavior patterns to look for satisfactory indicators. These can come from introspection and retrospection, verbal reports in ethnographic studies, and the comparison of translation decisions in experiments where the level of risk is manipulated because risk may affect decisions without translators’ being aware of it (see the enlightening work by Kahneman, 2011, on factors that influence decisions subconsciously, although Kahneman did not mention risk as one of them).

As for the question of how much effort is actually devoted to solving translation problems, answers can sometimes be quantified with such indicators as the number of documentary sources consulted, the number of self-revisions of one’s translation, the time spent gazing at a particular text segment, the expansion of the diameter of one’s pupils while processing a text segment, or even brain-imaging techniques, and an increasing number of technological tools offer the possibility of accurate measurements with high time resolution that can be analyzed with statistical processing techniques.

The recent interest in the role of risk in translation behavior is therefore not unwelcome—provided that it gives rise to rigorous research, with critical reading of existing publications and inferences based on cautious assessment of available data.

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