

# Who's afraid of translation risks?

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What kind of risks does a translator take? The focus of Translation Studies research in the field of risk management has primarily been on the difficulties and challenges for the translator with regard to the texts to be translated (Pym 2004, 2015; Wilss 2005) and on the processes which could go wrong (missing deadline, translator's lack of expertise, etc.) (Ardelean 2013, 2015, Martin 2007).

At the beginning of Translation Science (Leipzig School), the only person scholars were interested in was the translator. They barely considered other agents.

Then new agents entered the scene when Skopos Theory was developed. These scholars pointed out that the client and the user are important factors for the way the translator plans the translation. What is interesting at this point is that the translator was still in the centre of interest.

In the newer models (Situated Translation), even more agents played a role. Now, translation scholars took into account that the translation situation can be very complex: as Leona Van Vaerenbergh and Klaus Schubert (2010) have pointed out, the translator has to cope with numerous controlling influences.

Within this context, some translation scholars made risk management their subject, for example Anthony Pym, Carmen Ardelean, Wolfram Wilss.

If we talk about risk management, we normally want to know what is the worst thing that may happen – what is the worst-case scenario. In this scenario, though, the translator is still in the centre of interest. So, within this “risk management universe”, the worst case is damage to the translator. This is a very interesting and important view, but certainly not the only one, if we consider translating a complex process with numerous agents.

The question of what kinds of risks a translated text itself poses and the consequences thereof has not been considered in Translation Studies yet. It has been widely discussed that translation is a very complex and interactive task with multiple agents and dimensions. To look at risk management only from the perspective of the translator is therefore one-dimensional.

So, what do we have to do if we want to establish a Risk Management for Translations that embraces multiple agents?

With Risk Management for Translations the focus shifts from translator to translation. There are risks the translator cannot know about and certainly cannot avoid. The consequences of these risks can be far worse than just damage to the translator. For example: if someone loses their life due to a translation error.

Therefore, in Risk Management for Translations, translation is at the centre of interest, so we should focus on the risks a translation poses to anybody. This could

be the client and their company, the end user/reader of the translation or anybody else associated with the translation.

If something goes wrong, then all the agents can be damaged. Translation risks can affect ALL agents: client, user, translator, project manager, reviewer, technical writer etc. Therefore: Risk Management for Translations must deal with ALL risks connected to a translation.

Possible risks of translated texts are:

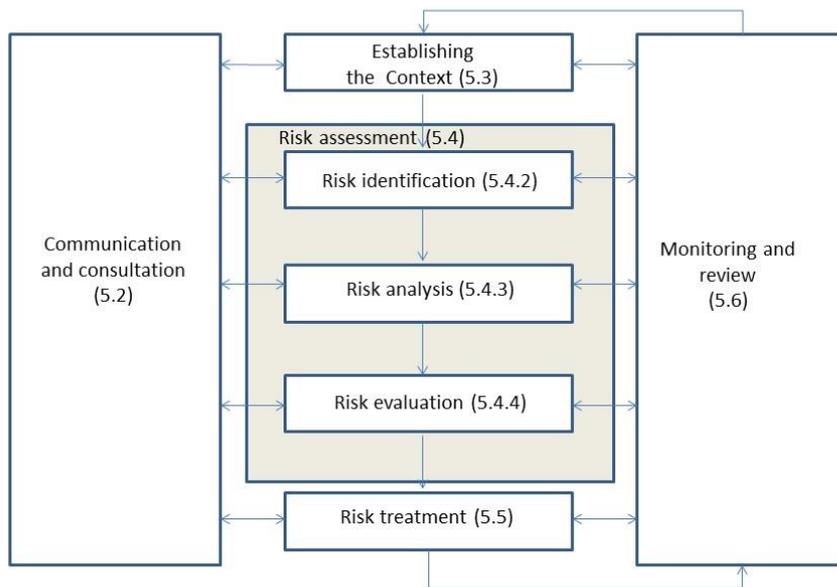
- Impaired communication
- Loss of reputation
- Product hard to use or not usable
- Property damage
- Financial damage
- Injury
- Death

Let's have a closer look at just two of these risks:

<b>Communication is impaired or irritated</b>	For example, the employees of a company spend time to clarify which spare part is to be delivered because the term used in the translation of the operation manual is different from the term used in the bill of material. Here the consequences would be a waste of time and money.
<b>Reputation of company is damaged</b>	Imagine a company like Coca Cola. If people get hurt because of translation errors in the operating instructions of a bottling line, and there are parts in the bottle that could hurt the people drinking Coke, this falls back on the image of the company, which might result in loss of revenues.

These are just examples of possible risks which could be associated with a translation. The important point is that the consequences of each risk are very different.

Bearing this in mind, a model of comprehensive Risk Management for Translations is needed. If we want to establish a Risk Management for Translations, we need a structured process which we find in the international standard ISO 31000.



(Source: ISO 31000:2011-1, Section 5.1)

In our model for Risk Management for Translations, we have applied the theory of ISO 31000 to translations.

The core process of risk management is risk assessment. During risk assessment, risks must be identified, analysed and evaluated. What does that mean for translations? It means that all the risks which are related to translations – not only for the translator but for all the agents – must be identified, analysed and evaluated.

The main elements of the risk management process are:

<b>Risk identification</b>	This step includes determining the risks connected to a translation. It includes questions like: What kinds of risks can occur? Who would be affected?
<b>Risk analysis</b>	The next question is, what are the consequences of each single risk and how likely is it that the damage or loss occurs. Furthermore, the client who commissioned the translation has to decide which consequences the organization is willing to accept.
<b>Risk evaluation</b>	In the third step, the overall risk of a specific document or document type is determined, i.e., if the overall risk is low, moderate or high. Additionally, the priorities for addressing the risks must be determined.
<b>Risk treatment</b>	In risk treatment, the measures which should be taken to reduce the risks to an acceptable level will be established.
<b>Risk controlling</b>	In risk controlling, i.e. monitoring and review, it must be checked if the measures have been implemented and if they are effective.

It has been pointed out that during risk analysis we must determine the consequences, the likelihood and the priorities of each individual risk. A widely-accepted tool in risk management to visualize these dimensions is a risk matrix.

This is a risk matrix for translations that we developed for our model:

**Risk matrix for translations**

Likelihood of occurrence

Very likely						
Probable						
Occasional						
Remote						
Improbable						
	Communication impaired or impossible	Loss of reputation	Product hard to use or not usable	Damage to property or financial damage	Injury or death	<b>Potential consequences</b>

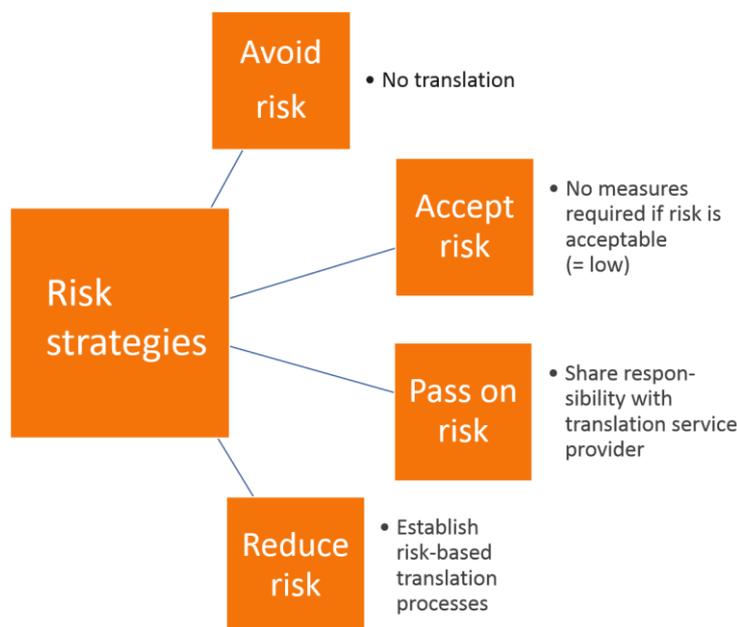
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The x-axis shows the potential consequences, the y-axis the likelihood of occurrence and the colours represent the priorities of the client. Green means that the risk level is acceptable, yellow means that the risk level is acceptable with mitigation and red means that the risk level is unacceptable.

Clients can develop an individual risk matrix for their organization and use it to classify their different documents. It is also useful if you want to know which risks you should address first (namely the red ones).

This risk matrix cannot be created by translators – they neither know all the risks nor the priorities of their client.

What can be done to treat risks in translation? These are the common strategies of risk management applied to translations:



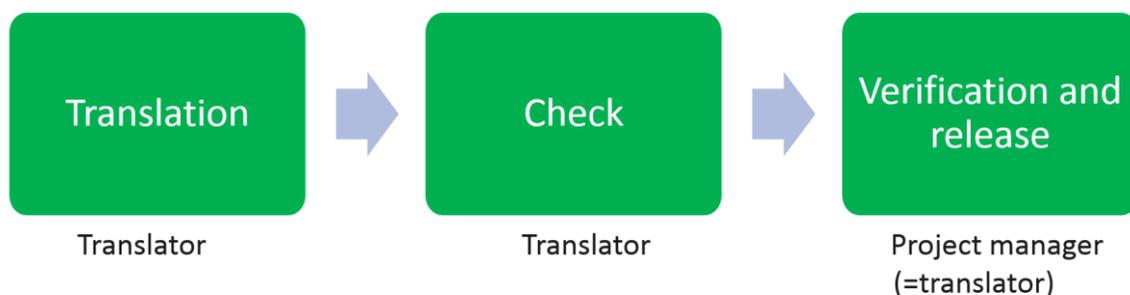
In principle, there are four strategies to deal with translation risks:

<b>Avoid risk</b>	If the risk is too high, the best decision might be not to translate at all.
<b>Accept risk</b>	If the risk is sufficiently low, no measures are required.
<b>Pass on risk</b>	The client can share the responsibility with the translation service provider. Another possibility would be to cover the risk by insurance.
<b>Reduce risk</b>	The fourth strategy is to reduce the risk, that is, to reduce either the consequences or the likelihood of occurrence.

But how can we change the consequences or the likelihood of occurrence of translations risks? The answer is: by establishing translation processes which take into account the individual risk of each document type.

The examples for risk-based translation processes presented here are just fictitious processes. The appropriate process must be determined for each document type in view of its specific risks. The examples are just to show how such risk-based processes could look like, they are not intended as any kind of standard processes that should or must be followed.

### **Risk-based translation processes: Low risk**

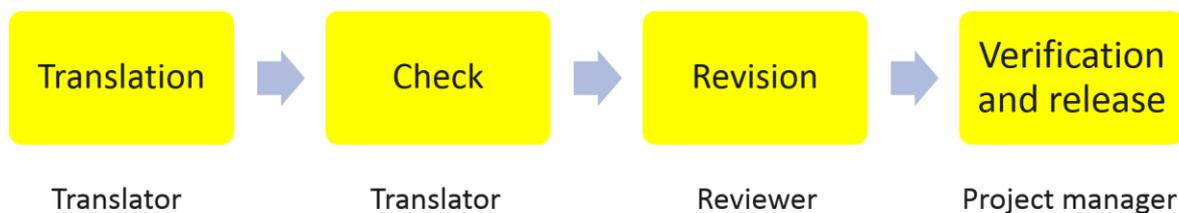


In our first example, we look at a low risk document type. The translation process could consist of only a few steps, all done by the translator himself, for example a freelancer who is his own project manager.

A low risk document type could be internal communication in a company or a message about breakfast times in a small B&B – even if the translation is not perfect, it will probably be understood – and if not, this will not have grave consequences.

It is our conviction that the obligatory ISO 17100 standard process (translation – check – revision – verification and release) is far too complex, time-consuming and expensive for low risk translations.

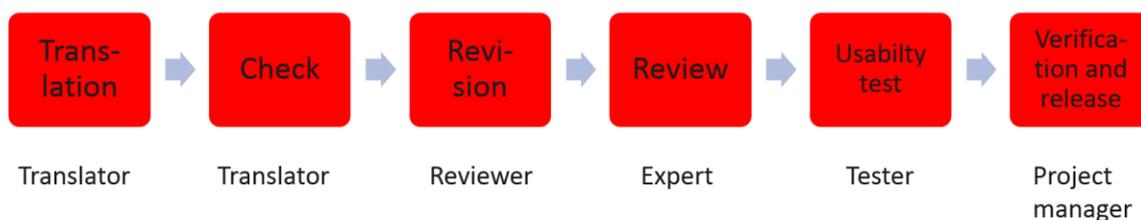
### Risk-based translation processes: Moderate risk



This could be a potential process for a translation with moderate risks. The process in the figure is identical to the process prescribed by ISO 17100. It comprises an additional translation revision by a second qualified translator.

A document type which poses moderate risks could be the user manual of a small kitchen appliance. Typical consequences of translation errors include breakage or malfunction of the appliance which result in complaints by customers which, in the end, might lead to a loss of money and maybe the loss customers, but not to injury or death.

### Risk-based translation processes: High risk



The last example is a potential translation process for a high-risk document type, for example operating instructions for a chainsaw. If the chainsaw is not properly maintained due to a translation error, users working with the saw might be injured or even get killed. It is obvious that additional measures are necessary to ensure risk minimization. In addition to the revision done by a second translator, we could imagine a review by an expert in the target country and in certain cases a usability test of the translation. In the case of a high-risk translation, the obligatory ISO 17100 process is – at least in our opinion – not sufficient.

Our model of Risk Management for Translations also provides for the inclusion of document-specific steps, for example:

- Checking figures in the translation of an annual report
- Checking style in a translated marketing brochure
- Checking the signal words of warning messages in operation instructions

To put it in a nutshell, there is no need to be afraid of translation risks if you develop a structured process to handle them.

- Our model for Risk Management for Translations reflects the complexity of the translation process. Its focus is, therefore, on the translation and not on the translator.

- There can be various risks associated with one translation and they can affect different agents of the translation process.
- The client is responsible for Risk Management for Translations, not the translator – but neither the client nor the translator can do it alone. They will have to co-operate or risk management will fail.
- Last, but not least, different risks require different processes, which means the higher the risk, the more complex the translation process has to be.

To consider risk management has significant impact on the discussion of translation quality and quality assurance, and on the design of translation processes. Furthermore, it provides new insight into the complexity and situatedness of translation.

The implementation of Risk Management for Translations will enhance professional cooperation among all agents and deliver a common framework for all kinds of decisions concerning translation. Thus, it will also provide criteria for the selection of translation processes depending on the risk of a specific text as well as for the selection of resources, such as translators and tools.

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