Risk Management as a Method of Translation Criticism

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Abstract

Risk management has been occupying a central place in Translation Studies in recent years. Perceiving the Source Product as a material with number of risks moving from credibility to uncertainty to communicative ones, risk management focuses on the way the translator deals with these different risks. It has first been suggested by Anthony Pym in the field of professional translation. A number of studies tried to apply this approach to translation teaching, interpreting training, and translation assessment. Hence, the present study aims at exploring risk management in the literary translation area. It tends to answer the following question: 'how can risk management approach be applied in assessing and analyzing literary translation?' The research opens with a theoretical introduction tackling the concept of risk management, the different kinds of risks, strategies of dealing with risks as well as a literature review of literary translation. Then, it sheds light on Yasmina Khadra's translated novels (English and Arabic versions) revealing risks and the various strategies adopted by translators. Methodically, the paper adopts a qualitative method taking each example aside, analyzing it from a communicative point of view and suggesting potential alternatives.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation criticism has been tackled by many scholars. From Berman (1984) to Leuven Zwart (1989) to Toury (1995) to Reiss (2000), approaches and methods of criticism have flourished. Each one suggested a method from a different perspective. The present paper aims at testing the applicability of "risk management" approach in criticizing literary works. In fact, the concept of risk management as a new approach to translation knows significant interest. It has been explored in different fields of translation studies (professional translation, translation didactics, interpreter's training,… etc). In literary translation, risk management tends to be a grueling task in the sense that the specificity of literary translation (which mainly lies in the aesthetic norm) is significantly different from the other types of translation. Hence, the paper sheds light on the concept of risk management as well as its main concepts

and tried to apply the principles of this approach to the English translation of Yasmina Khadra's novels.

2. Translation as a "risky" activity

The wide range of translational concepts (fidelity, equivalence, ethics, adaptation localization, AVT,…etc) dichotomies (free VS literal, formal VS dynamic, covert VS overt, semantic VS communicative, domesticating VS foreignizing,..etc), and problems (meaning, loss, ideology, culture, power, patronage, invisibility,...etc) are the striking proofs that translation had always been perceived as a risky activity either as a practice or as a field of study. In fact, scholars have explored translational phenomena as difficulties and, therefore, suggested strategies and solutions that might be useful. Dealing with the Hermeneutic motion, Steiner (1975) has best summed it up:

> *"We venture a leap: we grant ab initio that there is "something there" to be understood, that the transfer will not be void. All understanding and the demonstrative statement of understanding which is translation, starts with an act of trust. This confiding will, ordinarily, be instantaneous and unexamined, but it has a complex base. It is an operative convention which derives from a sequence of phenomenological assumptions about the coherence of the world, about the presence of meaning in very different, perhaps formally antithetical semantic systems, about the validity of analogy and parallel."*(p.186).

Also, the multidisciplinary aspect of this field shows how complex and highly-risky translation is. Throughout its development, translation was tackled by different disciplines (Hatim and Munday, 2004). It was handled by philosophy (dealing with hermeneutics, deconstruction, poststructuralism,…etc), linguistics (applied, contrastive, pragmatics, corpus,… etc), cultural studies (power, acculturation, ideology, gender,…etc), literary theory (style, rhetoric, poetry, comparative literature,…etc), language engineering (lexicology, memoirs of translation, corpora, machine translation, computer-assisted translation,…etc).. Each discipline explored translation from a different perspective. The interdisciplinary nature of translation makes it a risky task in the sense that a huge sum of theories and hypotheses tackled translation from different perspectives. Hence, the real nature of translation is still uncertain.

Moreover, translation studies knew multiple strategies and techniques of transfer. There were uncertainties strictly related to the nature of translation itself. From Cicero's sense translation to Saint Jerome "non verbum e verbo sed sensum exprime de sensou", to Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) direct and oblique translation (borrowing, literal, word for word, transposition, equivalence, modulation, adaptation), to Newmark's strategies (1989): transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, descriptive equivalence, componential analysis,..etc, the different strategies suggested by Hervey & Higgins.(2002): exoticism, calque, cultural borrowing, communicative translation, cultural transplantation,… though some strategies tend to be similar (difference of names), the majority of them reflect how complicated and multidimensional translation is.

Another aspect of the risk of this field is related to the different backgrounds of translation scholars. Unlike other academic disciplines, translation was not a "matter" of translators. In fact, scholars who explored translation and contributed to its development were of various backgrounds; philosophers (Shcleirmacher, Ricoeur, Derrida..), literary scholars (Borges, Berman, Walter Benjamin..), religious men (Saint Jerome, Martin Luther, Albert Nida..), linguists (Vinay and Darbelnet, Mounin, Pergnier, Federov,..), cultural and gender studies

scholars (Basnett, Lefeverer, Sherry Simone,..), but also translators and interpreters such as functionalists (Reiss, Vermeer, Munttari and Nord) and interpretive tenants (Lederer, Selesckovitch, Delisle,…)… They have all contributed to the development of translation but it made the nature of translation fuzzier and more ambiguous.

3. Risk Management

Any project contains four elements related to risk and management: an event which is a negative occurrence that takes place when working on a project; a risk that is defined as an uncertain event; the condition which is the situation that caused the event; and the effect, the negative or positive result of the event. Tackled from a translational point of view, the project is the process of translation itself; it can imply a set of events like difficulties related to misinterpretation of the content, policies of publishing, deadlines, the ideology of the author and the receiver, the difficulties of rendering the aesthetic dimension, the problem of implicature and allusion,…etc. The risk, in a project of translation, is mainly related to the uncertainty of the event like the translator's doubts about his right/wrong understanding of the text, or his doubts related to the accurate choice of equivalents in the target language; the condition, then, is the whole situation that led the translator to understand the utterance in that way. It can be the psychological state of the translator; pressure, stress, rush, or environmental like working in a publishing house that has a given ideology and policy to be respected. Lastly, the effect can be apprehended when proofreading, evaluating or criticizing translations in order to test the accuracy and the quality of the outcome.

Facing a potential risk, the translator ought to cognitively deal with three primordial steps; identification and prioritization, which means that he has to determine and be fully aware of the risk he is coming across. This operation is of paramount importance in the sense that it introduces all the following steps. When the translator identifies the risk, he will be able to accurately handle it and use the appropriate strategy of translation. In this context, Lammers (2011) reckons that: "Identifying project risks enables us to gain insight into the unknowns of a project and better understand what could potentially happen during a project that would negatively impact the ability to meet the project goals in terms of timeline, budget and quality"(p.218). In a translation project, risks of loss or potential misunderstanding of the target outcome might be previously identified by the translator for example the following passage from *Les Anges Meurent de nos Blessures* of Yasmina Khadra: *"Ma mère se releva, griffée de partout. Avec un calme sidérant, elle alla chercher une grosse clef de geôlier et la glisser dans le poing de la veuve – une pratique courante que l'on destinait aux personnes tombées dans les pommes des suites d'un malaise ou d'un choc »* (Khadra, 2013, p.34) The translator must underline the fact that the phenomenon described in this excerpt is culturally bound. "The fact of putting a key in the hand of a fainted person" must be clarified in a literary and aesthetic way in the target language. Prioritization is a result of identification. It consists in organizing the risks already identified in a list so that it will be easier to deal with later. Prioritization of risks is based on two main principles: 1- the probability of the frequency of the risk, and 2- the impact of this risk on the accuracy of the translation. As a second step, response planning is mainly concerned with the choice of the appropriate strategy. The translator tries to use one of the following strategies: avoidance, mitigation, contingency, transfer and acceptance. The main difficulty of risk response step lies in the fact that literature in this field did not suggest methods and techniques of applying a strategy for a given kind of risks, hence, it all depends on the translator's vision and skill of dealing with such problems. Risk monitoring is a final step dealing with the classification and documentation of all the risks faced in a project of translation once it has been accomplished in order to use it as a reference in future project (Lammers, 2011).

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of risk management

in any project design. The Project Management Istitute (2004) defines risk management as a framework that consists of a: "continuous process whereby an organization identifies and prioritizes new project risks, decides if and how it will respond to those risks (through planned risk response strategies of avoidance, mitigation, contingency planning, transfer or acceptance), monitors and controls identified risks, and seeks to identify new risks throughout the course of the project. Thus, the risk management framework is a means by which an organization can lower the likelihood that known risk events will occur over the course of the project, and minimize the impact of those risk events if they do in fact occur, thereby increasing the chances of project success" (p.218). It became quite evident that the necessity for risk management lies in its pragmatic side, hence it offers a set of strategies and techniques: avoidance, mitigation, contingency, transfer and acceptance.

One must ask the following question: to what extent are these strategies efficient in the translational project management?

In fact, avoidance, which is the fact of not transferring the word/passage that might be ambiguous or risky into the target language, had already been explored in translation studies. Various are the scholars and the approaches that highlighted the issue. Newmark (1988) talks about deletion when translating authoritative texts (legal documents, opera, poetry…), Hervey and Higgins (2002) names it translation by omission, and links it to translation loss… many examples can illustrate avoidance strategy in translation, as the one taken from Khadra's *Ce Que le Jour Doit à la Nuit* (2008): "*Le temps s'était arrêté pour nous. Bien sur, le jour continuait de se débiner devant la nuit, le soir de se substituer aux aurores, les rapaces de tournoyer dans le ciel mais, en ce qui nous concernait, c'était comme si les choses étaient arrivées au bout d'elles-mêmes.* » (p.17) In the English version, the translator prefered to avoid the translation of "*comme si les choses étaient arrivées au bout d'elles-mêmes* »(p.17) Thus, he omitted the risk by avoiding it: « *For us, time stood still. True, the day still bowed before the night, darkness still gave way to dawn, vultures still wheeled in the sky, but to us it was as though all things had ended.*" (Khadra, 2011, p.09). Another example of risk avoidance is the translation of the following sentence from the same novel: "*si le savoir consiste à rabaisser les autres au ras du sol, je n'enveux pas.*" (Khadra, 2008, p.45) into: "*if being educated means belittling others, I want nothing to do with it.*" (Khadra, 2011, p.34). In fact the translation of the idiomatic expression "rabaisser les autres au ras du sol" into one simplified word "belittling" is a kind of avoidance from the translator.

A second solution to risk is mitigation. Mitigation is the fact of making something less dangerous, less severe. In risk management, It can be defined as a plan done by the translator to reduce either the probability or the intensity of a risk. Dealing with a cultural specific concept, for instance, the translator has multiple kinds of mitigating the risk; finding a close cultural phenomenon in the target culture or using footnotes as in the translation of *Les Anges meurent de nos blessures* into English. Yasmina Khadra (2015) used the word "*Araberbers*" that he created to refer to the population of North Africa. The translator used the same word but with the following footnote: "*word coined by the author to indicate the unity of the Arab and Berber peoples*" (Khadra, 2015, p.77). It is clear that the translator's aim behind using this footnote is to reduce the intensity of the risk of misunderstanding the word in English. Also, the translation of the following expression: "*Il dit, la mort dans l'âme*" into an equivalent one in English: "*"with a heavy heat he said*" is a successful risk mitigation from the translator.

The third strategy of risk management is risk transfer. It is strictly related to the literal translation of the risk with all its potential consequences in the target text. The translation of "*Il me montra le douar*" into "*Showed me the Douar*" without any explanation of the word

"*Douar*" for the English reader is a risk taking from the translator who preferred to transfer it as it is. Many examples of risk transfer can be cited, from *la dernière nuit du Reiss* (Khadra, 2015), Khadafi is talking about Benghazi City: "*Rien qu'à ce nom, j'ai envie de vomir jusqu'à provoquer un tsunami qui raserait cette ville maudite et l'ensemble des hameaux alentour. Tout est parti de là-bas, pareil à une pandémie foudroyante, possédant les âmes comme un démon. J'aurai du l'anéantirdès le premier jour, traquer les insurgésvenelle par venelle, bâtisse par bâtisse*» (p.19) he is expressing his anger and hatred toward Benghazi which is considered as the first city that rebelled against his rule. The translator transferred the excerpt as it is into English: "*Benghazi! Just the sound of the name makes me want to throw up so violently I would set off a tidal wave that would flatten that damned city and all the villages round it. It all started there, like a devastating pandemic that infected the people's souls like the Devil himself. I should have flattened it, on the first day of the insurgency; I should have hunted its renegade insurgents alley by alley, house by house*".(Khadra, 2015, p19). It is noteworthy that risk transfer consists in the translation of all the elements that constitute the risk in the source text, even the imagery and the rhetoric purposes of the author. Also, in *Angels Die* (Khadra, 2016), the translator kept the word "*Graba*" (p.21) that the author used to refer to this kind of miserable houses without any explanation to the target reader.

Another strategy in dealing with risk is risk contingency. It is related the plan B of the translator in handling a low-priority risk such as a linguistic difference between the source and the target language; expressing the difference between male and female structures in English and French, or the difference between uncles and aunts from father or mother sides in Arabic and English…

Anthony Pym (2015) explores the different ways risk management can be applied upon the translational action. He puts forward that the two concepts overlap in three kinds of areas: "credibility risk", which is related to the specificity of translation itself; "uncertainty risk", related to the translator's decision making and the inherent cognitive operations; and "the communicative risk", mainly concerned with the way texts are used in contexts.

As for credibility risk, Pym (2015) points out that the "specificity" of translation has long been a controversial issue in TS. In fact, equivalence and fidelity took the largest space of translation thought. Then, interest was brought on norms (Toury, Chasterman), the function of translation (Skopos, text-type theory,..) Thus, credibility risk results from the relativity and indeterminism of translation specificity. In this perspective, Pym (2015) highlights:

> "*What is the most calamitous way that translators can run aground? Since the Western translation form depends on a shared illusion, the worst thing that can happen is surely the shattering of that illusion: when the translator's communication partners no longer accept (possibly among much else) that there has been a language crossing, that the discursive first-person belongs to a distant author, and that the length of the translation depends on the length of a start text. Then, the translator has lost the one thing that enabled the illusions in the first place: trust, or more exactly the attribution of credibility on these particular issues.*" (p.49)

Accordingly, the first type of risk is mainly concerned with trust between the translator and his target reader, his purpose lies in keeping this relationship with his reader.

In many cases, the translator feels uncertain about the translation of some words or expressions. Hence, the second type of risk is uncertainty. It is related to the feeling of; not using the accurate equivalent, losing the reader's understanding, betraying the main purpose

of the source text. However, Pym (2015) suggests that translation research must go beyond this concept for three main reasons:

- It is not specific to translation but related to all operations of understanding and interpreting;
- It is not related to the social and cultural environment but peculiar to the translator himself, hence, it cannot be a generalized rule or principle;
- It is regarded more as a mistake, a lacuna rather than a phenomenon.

Moreover, the third type of risk is called "communicative risk". It is the concretization of the supreme purpose of translation which is the achievement of efficient communication between the author and the target reader. In this context, Pym (2015) points out: "When applied to communication, risk management is not just a matter of avoiding cliffs and rocks; it is a way of creating benefits by working together" (p.71).

4. Why risk management in literary translation?

Though it has been developed for pragmatic and professional purposes, risk management approach can be of paramount importance in assessing and analyzing literary translation too. In fact, studies have, till now, tackled this approach in translation didactics, interpreting training, professional translation, and freelance,… etc. literary translation, a type regarded as specific and exceptional with regard to its style, language, aesthetic dimension as well as the form, requires specific criteria in order to tackle the way it must be assessed or analyzed. Risk management can be invested in literary translation for:

- Offering new insights to literary translation criticism in the sense that it bolsters the study of the translated literary work as a project, not as a purely linguistic material;
- Making literary translation more pragmatic and concrete through the investment of financial and economic insights,
- Working on the development of the translator's invisibility since it deals with translation as a project including the editors, the patronage and the environment of translation;
- Not neglecting the linguistic and cultural issues which constituted the basic concepts of translation studies. Hence, risk management is continiuity not rupture.

5. Limitations of risk management in literary translation?

There are a set of difficulties in applying risk management approach to literary translation. They can be summed up as follow:

- Risk management does not offer solutions or techniques to deal with the different problems of translation. Instead, it focuses on practices such as uncertainty, credibility…
- The aesthetic and stylistic characteristics of literary translation make the application of risk management more grueling than the other types of translation.

6. Recommendations

The present study focuses on the introduction of risk management approach in literary translation analysis. Yet, further studies are to be done. They may tackle:

- The study of risk management focusing on low, medium, and high-risks and the strategies that can be adopted to deal with each one;

- The application of risk management in poetic and authoritative texts;

- Ideology as a kind of risk and its impact on translation;

- Dealing with the Translator's choice from risk management perspective.

7. CONCLUSION

The present work highlighted the potential application of risk management approach to the study, analysis, and assessment of literary translation. It tackled the essence of this approach; its key-concepts, types, and strategies. The examples were taken from different Yasmina Khadra's novels and their translations into English. Besides, the study tried to show at the end the limitations of this approach and the main obstacles of applying it to literary translation. Risk management can open horizons to a new era of research in translation studies. It is pragmatic and concrete but also too vague and economic. Further studies are to be done in order to explore more this new perspective.

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