

### **3 Sociocognitive Constructs in Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS)**

Do We Really Need Concepts  
Like Norms and Risk When We  
Have a Comprehensive Usage-  
Based Theory of Language?

*Sandra L. Halverson and Haidee Kotze*

#### **1. Introduction**

Across the human and behavioral sciences, scholars have, over the past twenty or thirty years, shown a renewed and more targeted interest in the integration or interaction of the social and cognitive domains in theorizing complex human behavior. Detailed investigations query the specific ways in which human thought and action represent an intricate weave of implicating factors that spread across the two domains and interact in complex and important ways.

This development is demonstrated in a dual and reciprocal motion, with cognitive scientists seeking to incorporate the physical and social environment in accounts of cognition, and social scientists seeking to understand the relationships between culture, society, and mind. An analogous motion is visible within some of the fine arts, for instance, in the rise of cognitive poetics (Tsur, 2008) and cognitive studies of music (Johnson, 1997). This intellectual evolution is exemplified in the development of particular schools of thought such as situated cognition or 4EA (embodied, embedded, enacted, extended, affective) cognition within cognitive science, behavioral economic theory (Thaler, 2016; Kahneman, 2011), cognitive legal studies (Winter, 2001), cognitive anthropology (D'Andrade, 1995; Shore, 1998; Strauss & Quinn, 1997), or cognitive sociology (Brekhus & Ignatow, 2019). Perhaps closer to the disciplinary home of Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS) is the emergence of cognitive sociolinguistics (Geeraerts et al., 2010; Harder, 2010; Kristiansen & Dirven, 2008).

Within TIS, the clearest evidence of this movement is found within the subdiscipline of Cognitive Translation and Interpreting Studies (CTIS). In an important philosophical discussion within CTIS, Muñoz (2016a, 2017; Muñoz & Martín de León, 2020), Risku (2014, 2020; Risku et al., 2013; Risku & Rogl, 2020), and Robinson (2020) have called for an approach to translational cognition that recognizes cognitive processes as

“situated” or as “embodied, embedded, enacted, extended, and affective”. Theories within this approach “attribute a central role in human cognition to the body and to physical and social interaction rather than to the notion of mental representation” (Risku & Rogl, 2020, p. 481), and adopting this perspective requires theoretical constructs that are irreducibly sociocognitive.

The need for a detailed sociocognitive perspective is also evident from the perspective of TIS at large. Within empirical TIS, there has been an increasing movement towards integrating multiple data types and methods within a single research design (for review and references, see Neumann & Serbina, 2020; see also Halverson, 2015, 2017; Kajzer-Wietrzny et al., 2016; Serbina, 2013, 2015; Szymor, 2017, 2018). Much of this work demands explanatory theories that can integrate sociological and cognitive factors (for review, see Hansen-Schirra & Nitzke, 2020). In a rather different but related development, both sociological and cognitive explanatory factors have been brought together within multifactorial designs in corpus analyses (Kruger, 2019; Kruger & De Sutter, 2018).

Finally, in a recent theoretical discussion within TIS, the “tension” between the social and the cognitive domains in theorizing has been described in detail (Kotze, 2020a). In her discussion, Kotze outlines a development toward what is described as “an integrated empirical translation studies” (p. 354), and she provides a detailed presentation of the conceptual and methodological strands within this broad evolution. Kotze concludes that TIS would benefit from engaging in more detail with work in linguistics that tackles the same issues. A related point is raised in Halverson’s (2020) call for a linguistic commitment in CTIS.

The body of work sketched out here serves as a backdrop for the discussion in this chapter by bringing together these three lines of argument: the broader philosophical movement demonstrated across the human and behavioral sciences, the convergence of empirical paradigms within TIS, and the specific theoretical needs of TIS. From this starting point, the objective of this chapter is to analyze two influential concepts available within TIS, *norm* and *risk*, to see whether they meet what might be considered the epistemological need to account for the interwoven relation between the cognitive and social in translation. The motivation for the selection of *norm* and *risk* for our analysis is twofold: First, both concepts have been described as sociocognitive, or as encompassing both the cognitive and social domains, by the scholars who advocate them. Second, both have been promoted as the basis for broad theorization.

In the chapter, the analysis of *norm* and *risk* is framed by a set of parameters proposed by Marín (2017, 2019), building on Mulkay (1975) and Laudan (1977). These parameters will inform our analysis, though the framework will not be applied in a check-list type fashion, as different parameters may be more or less relevant in each of the two cases. According to Laudan, the problems that scientific activity aims to solve may be of two main types: conceptual and empirical. Conceptual problems, in Laudan’s framework,

may be either “internal” or “external”. An internal problem is identified when a theory or construct is inconsistent or vague, for example, while an external problem involves relationships between theories (Marín, 2017, p. 37). Empirical problems, for Laudan, are “first order problems; they are substantive questions about the objects which constitute the domain of any given science” (1977, p. 15).

As Marín points out (2017, p. 43):

Although Laudan did not elaborate on the appraisal and evaluation of constructs – or concepts – it is not difficult to introduce them into his model of scientific progress. First, constructs are used to design research proposals and elaborate models and theories and therefore participate in the ontological and methodological requirements of research traditions. Second, constructs are models themselves, and as models, they are subject to relative comparison in terms of conceptual and empirical problem-solving, not of absolute truth. Constructs are essential instruments in the elaboration of theories and models and so key elements in their capacity to solve problems.

Marín (2017) proposes that four criteria be used in the assessment of constructs. These are clarity, adequacy, consistency, and simplicity (pp. 43–45). The first is defined as follows: “For a construct to be *clear*, it needs to be well defined in such an explicit way that there is no doubt as to what evidence or empirical or conceptual problem it refers to and with which assumptions” (2017, p. 43). For a construct to be *adequate*, its definition must allow it to fulfill its designated purpose in either theoretical or empirical terms. Moreover, if the construct is to be used in empirical problem-solving, it must be possible to operationalize it in a way that allows the theory to be tested empirically. For a construct to be *consistent*, it must be situated relative to other elements of the theoretical complex in such a way that conceptual problems do not arise. For Marín (2017), if a construct is *simple*, it contributes to the resolution of a broader scope, or number, of conceptual or empirical problems.

In this chapter, we focus primarily on conceptual problems associated with the constructs of *norm* and *risk*, only occasionally commenting on empirical problems. While these are equally important, and closely linked to conceptual problems, this is a topic so substantive that it requires separate treatment. The specific analyses of the two concepts are given in the two following sections. The analyses are structured along three (interrelated) lines of critique that have emerged in our analysis of the types of conceptual problems outlined earlier. These are: 1. a central ontological and epistemological<sup>1</sup> ambiguity or slipperiness, 2. a problematic and unresolved view of the translator as a rational actor, and 3. the elision or backgrounding of language from the central ontological picture.<sup>2</sup> Precisely how these issues manifest in each of the two concepts will be demonstrated in the sections to come. In the final

section, these three lines of critique will be drawn together as we present a usage-based view of language as a means of resolving the issues raised. Finally, in the concluding remarks, we ask whether the concepts of *norm* and *risk* are needed in a general theory of translation.

## 2. Norms

In this section, we focus predominantly on the construct of norms as put forward by Toury (1995, 2012), with reference also to the views of Chesterman (1993), contributors in Schäffner (1999b), Malmkjær (2005), and a recent reappraisal by Robinson (2020). The construct of norms has undoubtedly had considerable influence in TIS. Its “success” as an analytical and explanatory construct (see Hermans, 1999, p. 51) is, in part, to be ascribed to its (ostensible) simplicity and conceptual accessibility, and the highly systematic way in which it has been developed in the work of particularly Toury (1995, 2012) and Chesterman (1993), presenting simplified models of different types of norms that offer a set of conceptual tools to “impose” order on the messy realities of translation. Combined with this, the norm construct has wide applicability, and can be enlisted to describe virtually all aspects of translational choice-making.<sup>3</sup> This combination of generalizing power and flexibility, systematicity, and ostensible simplicity likely accounts for its “evolutionary” success among contesting concepts in the discipline; in Marín’s (2017) terms, the construct of norms would appear to be both *simple* and *adequate*. However, as we will show in the discussion that follows, despite its analytical benefits, these qualities also paper over many conceptual cracks that primarily have to do with the *clarity* and *consistency* of the construct, but that also call into question its apparent *simplicity* and *adequacy*. There is a central ontological and epistemological slipperiness, which is centered in the instability of the relation between regularities, conventions, and norms (a problem of *consistency*). To a large degree, this results from a fundamental unresolved tension between the cognitive and social dimension of norms. At the same time, the tension between norms as “negotiated” or “emergent” signals an underlying problematic construal of the translator as (primarily) a rational actor. As we will argue, we believe that these problems are strongly related to the backgrounding of the linguistic nature of translation in norm theory.

The most-cited definition of norms within translation studies, by Toury, is that norms are “the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community – as to what would count as right or wrong, adequate or inadequate – into performance ‘instructions’ appropriate for and applicable to concrete situations” (Toury, 2012, p. 63). In the further discussion, this metaphoric “translation” from values to behavioral “instructions” is conceptualized as taking place through a (largely unconscious) socialization and intersubjective alignment process in the course of which members of a community reach (mostly non-verbalized) agreements on appropriate behavior in particular contexts, based on general shared values (Toury, 2012, p. 64).

Toury (2012) argues that conventions (p. 63), or behavioral routines (p. 62), are the outcomes of norms, which he sees as the “missing link” (p. 63) in accounting for regularities in translational behavior. He thus makes an ontological distinction between conventions and norms – which has emerged as a recurrent point of contention in discussions of norms. Toury (in Schäffner, 1999b, p. 46) argues that conventions and norms belong to two different levels of observation: norms are the mechanisms through which conventions are realized. In contrast, others like Chesterman (1993), Hermans (1999), and Schäffner (1999a) see conventions and norms as ontologically similar, the only difference being that the former are “purely probabilistic expectations, there are no sanctions, whereas norms have a binding character” (Hermans, in Schäffner, 1999b, p. 46). At the same time, in some views, norms are clearly also linked to authority, and codification: some kinds of linguistic (and translational) norms are (also) explicitly encoded in textbooks and training programs, where they are given weight by authorities (Chesterman, 1993, p. 5).

The instability of the norm construct is further compounded by variable views of its relations to other related constructs among which it is situated, like *regularities*, *strategies*, and *laws* (see also Chesterman, 1993), and different conceptualizations of the relations of these with the already unstable distinction between *norms* and *conventions*. A full discussion of these problems of internal consistency falls outside the scope of the chapter; what is evident is that right from the outset, therefore, there is a large degree of epistemological slipperiness in and among the concepts of regularities, conventions, and norms, combined with an ontological instability, which, taken together, raises the specter of circularity (see also Robinson, 1999 for similar points). This central instability ripples outwards into the further theorization of aspects of norms, such as how they arise, how they are acquired, and why they are adhered to (or not). Among norm theorists, the verb “negotiate” is most often used to describe these processes, though Toury (2012, p. 64) also makes clear that neither the “negotiation” of norms nor their status as “instructions” requires that they be expressed or codified in language.

The choice of “negotiated” (with its connotations of rationalism and conscious deliberation amongst actors) as the verb to describe the emergence, acquisition, and influence of norms suggests a teleological construal, made clear also by Hermans (1999, p. 52):

I like to think that the teleological aspect of translator behavior comes into its own as translators consciously or unconsciously negotiate their way through and around existing norm complexes with a view to securing some form of benefit, whether personal or collective, material or symbolic.

This quotation also highlights a duality within the notion of “negotiation”, in explicitly activating the double meaning of negotiation (to negotiate may mean to obtain or bring about by discussion; or to find a way through a

difficult terrain). Nevertheless, in both construals of “negotiation”, the actors involved are rationally working towards a particular goal (to reach agreement on norms; to make their way through the existing social complexes of norms to accrue benefits or avoid sanction).

More often than not the notion of “negotiation” has defaulted to the former sense. Pym (1999), for example, highlights that the notion of “negotiation” implies active human agents – people doing things, and specifically “someone is arguing with someone else” (p. 110). Chesterman (1993) likewise emphasizes translators as rational actors in relation to their engagement with norms: “human translators are rational beings, and . . . their translation behavior is governed by rational decisions” (p. 13). This rational-actor view of translation is also evident in the ways in which the aims of descriptive translation studies (and norm theory) are usually described: as an attempt to account for translational “decision-making”.

However, in the limited explorations of norm acquisition in, for example, Toury (2012), these processes are actually conceptualized as non-teleological, largely unconscious, and fundamentally emergent – dependent on usage, exposure, interaction, and gradual conventionalization, rather than (primarily or only) rational decision-making. Toury (2012, p. 284) highlights that translation is fundamentally “*interaccional* in its very nature, involving – as any kind of interaction does – *environmental feedback*.” In early stages, feedback is predominantly overt and external (as a novice has few internalized norms) – but, as this process continues:

Little by little, however, translators may start taking into account *potential* responses too, e.g., by imagining an audience of a particular kind. They thus develop an *internal* kind of monitoring mechanism, which can operate on the (interim) product as it is coming into being as well as on the very act of translation. Socio-culturally speaking, what emerging translators thus undergo is a process of **socialization as concerns translating**. During this process, parts of the normatively motivated feedback they receive are assimilated by them, modifying their basic competence and gradually becoming part of it.

(pp. 285–286, original emphasis)

Toury (2012) further comments on the importance of the actual contexts of translation practice, which will shape the development of norms in particular ways (pp. 286–289), in that the particularities of text types and contexts of translation encountered are likely to lead to routinized sets of solutions for typical processes and problems (p. 287).

This description of the interplay between social interactions that underpin norms, and their cognitive representation in the individual clearly reflects an emergent view of norms, in which usage, experience, and intersubjective “feedback” processes constitute the development of norms. This appears to be at odds with the notion of norms being “negotiated” in the sense

of rationally agreed upon, a point also taken up in Robinson (2020), who critiques the emphasis on conscious, logical, rational decision-making processes, and raises the question of how intuition and habit factor into this.

This tension, to a large degree, replicates (and, we argue, arises from) the unresolved tensions between concepts of conventions and norms. We propose that a necessary distinction is to be made between two perspectives on normativity made in usage-based linguistic theories: the notion of bottom-up *norms-as-conventionalization* (i.e. conventions), and that of top-down *norms-as-legitimization* (i.e. norms proper) (see Kruger & Van Rooy, 2017). These two processes are interconnected across the cognitive and social domains, and loop back into one another in a feedback cycle, but are nevertheless distinct. We outline these views in more detail in Section 4, where we show how such a usage-based theory of language allows for the conceptual and terminological tools to describe these distinctions in a nuanced way.

The relation between the cognitive and the social dimensions of norms remains a key area of ontological slipperiness in current theorizations of norms. Toury's (2012) discussion of norms clearly signals an awareness of the complex interplay between the individual and society, and cognition and social interaction. This is expressed most overtly in the notion of translation acts (cognitive) and events (social), and he identifies norms as bridging these two domains (p. 67). Muñoz (2016b) has pointed out, however, the indivisibility of translation acts and events (as also developed in Chesterman, 2013). Moreover, *how* this interplay works, and gives rise to norms, remains largely unarticulated, and is an issue that Toury deliberately skirts: "One thing I would not venture to do here is tackle the intriguing question of how, and to what extent, the environment affects the workings of the brain, or how the cognitive is influenced by the sociocultural" (Toury, 1999, p. 18). Yet this is *the* relation that *defines* the construct of norms, and the inability to account for these mechanisms is a fundamental epistemological problem of the norm construct, as also pointed out by Robinson (2020), who asks the question of how norms "work cognitively and affectively in and through Human individuals" (p. 128).

Malmkjær (2005) and Robinson (2020) in different ways attempt to address this problem. The title of Malmkjær (2005) sets up a conceptual comparison between "norms" and "nature", within which she works out the distinctions between norms, Gricean principles of communicative cooperation, and (linguistic as well as translation) universals. She concludes by describing norms as "socially constrained", while communicative cooperation and "universals" are described as being cognitively constrained or determined (p. 15). The fact that norms must necessarily have a cognitive dimension too, if they are to influence language production, is left unexplored.

Robinson (2020) is, to the best of our knowledge, the first overt attempt to place the notion of norms in a cognitive domain, specifically in the framework of 4EA cognition. Robinson first sets up a (it should be noted, highly reductive, straw-man-like) set of definitions of norms primarily from Toury

and Chesterman, which (in his reconstruction) rests only on the “top-down” socially determined, rationalist view of norms. He frames this by drawing on the distinction of behavioral economists Thaler and Sunstein (2008) between *Econs* and *Humans*, where *Econs* are constructs of humans as rational decision-makers, and *Humans* construct people as largely irrational. He then drives home the point by describing his aims:

In Thaler & Sunstein’s terms, the norm theory outlined by Toury and Chesterman is a theory of the normative behavior of translators as Econs; what I essay in this paper is a theory of the norm-formations of translators as Humans.

(pp. 123–124)

The misrepresentation of Toury is startling – as is the fact that the differences in the views of Chesterman and Toury on norms are simply swept away in the generalization here (it could be argued that Chesterman’s norm theory is more overtly aligned with a view of translators as Econs, whereas Toury clearly focuses on the norm-formation of translators also from a Human perspective, as evident from the discussion earlier). That Robinson’s (2020) explanation of norms is actually largely convergent with Toury’s views (despite being framed as a radical departure) becomes evident as the paper continues to unfold its proposal of norms as emergent from incremental adjustments of cognitive representations to experience; part of what Kahneman (2011) calls “System 1”, the mode of cognitive processing that depends on fast, routinized processes. The way in which Robinson (2020), drawing on Kahneman, thus describes the emergence and usage of norms is, actually, quite similar to the description of norm acquisition and use of Toury (2012), outlined earlier:

This would be a model of norms in which every translator and every interpreter develops norms for the work s/he does, based not on “rational, norm-directed strategies” observed in competent professionals but on that “pattern of associated ideas [that] comes to represent the structure of events in [their] life.”

(Robinson, 2020, p. 125)

In short, “norm-formation emerges out of the mind’s encounter with socially experienced repetition” (p. 129). Like Toury (2012), he emphasizes that the experience of translating in different contexts leads to the emergence of norms, and that such sets of norms may thus be different for different translators who do work in different contexts and with different text types. What Robinson proposes is thus not altogether different from what Toury proposes – engagement with the content of Toury (2012) makes that very evident. What *is* new in this account is the explicit, foregrounded emphasis on the 4EA nature of this process (with positive and negative *affect* revealed



as the driving force that underpins “sanction”), in contrast to the rationalist actor-oriented focus that has typically been the default reading of the “negotiating” processes underlying the development, acquisition, and use of norms.

In this sense, despite the fact that Robinson (2020) presents itself as a radical rethinking of norms, what he in fact accomplishes is to draw into focus the cognitive and emergent nature of norms, certainly present, but hidden, underplayed, and even masked by the conceptual instability between conventions and norms in Toury (1995, 2012) and others. In this respect, Robinson (2020) represents an advance in refining the construct of norms; however, there is much in his arguments that raises questions. For the sake of the argument here, we will highlight only two points. First, it is not clear whether Robinson (2020) makes a distinction between conventions and norms; it appears from the discussion that conventions and norms are more or less the same thing: habitualized and automated patterns of behavior incrementally developed in response to experience. This simply replicates some of the fundamental tensions already highlighted earlier. Second, Robinson (2020), like the majority of norm theorists, does not take any substantive or overt account of the specifically *linguistic* nature of (translational) norms, although the commentary that he does provide is suggestive, and quite clearly usage-oriented:

What we take to be normal or idiomatic usage in English or any other language we know well has (obviously) been conditioned by a very long sequence of encounters with the language, with infinite possible variations but enough repetitive continuity to help us normalize or normativize (and even rationally objectify as *language*) hundreds of thousands of subtleties of syntax and usage. That normativization and even objectification is conditioned by our encounters not only with texts but with other speakers of the language – a beginning of an answer to the question of collective norm-formation.

(p. 130)

In the more established socioculturally and sociologically inspired views of norms, the notion of normativity *in language* specifically is not given sufficient attention (most translation studies scholarship on norms refer to Bartsch (1987) and stop there). In choosing to frame translation as social behavior, often in reaction against older linguistic traditions, many norm theorists have failed to engage with thinking about how norms play out in linguistic production specifically – an area in which there is considerable theorization in linguistics. This is more than a mere theoretical or paradigmatic “oversight”. There is a fundamental epistemological contradiction in the lack of attention to the linguistic dimension of norms. In norm theory, “translational behavior is contextualized as social behavior” (Schäffner, 1999a, p. 5),<sup>4</sup> while the linguistic (or semiotic) activity at the heart of translational behavior is elided. And yet, the approach relies on linguistic evidence as its point of departure

and attempts to use norms as a conceptual bridge from linguistic evidence to social explanations – but without making explicit exactly the construction of this bridge. The question is still how norms “get into” the text (see also Schäffner, 1999a, p. 7), and for this, an understanding of how language production itself is shaped by (among other things) normativity is necessary.

Robinson (2020) takes a step further in not asking only how social norms “get into” the text – but how they emerge and influence communication through the cognition of the translator, how “stylistic repetitions [are] experienced cognitively as norms” (p. 131). He also addresses the question of the relation between individual and collective norm formation. Striking in his discussion is the fundamentally usage-based and emergentist views in which he describes these processes; however, while there are oblique references to language, these views are not brought into direct conversation with areas in linguistics that deal with these topics directly. The next step, in our view, is to make the connection with usage-based theories of language.

In this section, we have shown how the construct of norms, despite its ostensible simplicity and adequacy, is destabilized by fundamental internal problems (with particularly clarity, consistency, and adequacy). All in all, it is not clear what the ontological status of norms as sociocognitive constructs is (clarity), and it is used in epistemologically inconsistent ways (inconsistency), with slippage not only in its own meanings, but also in its relation with other terms. We additionally raise questions about its adequacy in accounting in particular for the interplay between cognitive and social factors, and for understanding the nature of translational choice-making as a process that may be less strategic and rationalist than is imagined. We also suggested some external problems with the construct, in particular its limited engagement with the construct of normativity in language. In the following section, we turn our attention to an analysis of the risk construct.

### **3. Risk Management**

In a number of papers, Pym and colleagues have advocated risk management as an approach to theorizing translational “decision-making” (Hu, 2020; Hu & Pym, 2019; Matsushita, 2019; Pym, 2004, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2015, 2020; Pym & Matsushita, 2018). Of interest in the current context, Pym has also stated that the program includes both social and cognitive domains: “One of the potential advantages of the approach is thus that it can extend from the cognitive to the social (and back), bringing many disciplinary perspectives to bear on translation phenomena” (Pym, 2020, p. 445).

For the purposes of this discussion, it is necessary to provide a brief sketch of the main components of Pym’s risk management program. The constituent elements of the approach are outlined in most detail in Pym (2004, 2005, 2008a, 2015, 2020), and the account to follow builds on all of these. In some of the more recent work, the risk concept is situated within a broader theoretical ambition, a “translator ethics”. In the discussion here, we focus

on the work in which the emphasis is on risk analysis as “a model of how translators make decisions while translating” (2004, p. 69).

The overarching claim of the risk management approach is that translational “decision-making” involves an assessment of the risks associated with particular (alternative) choices, which, in turn, motivates the selection of a translation solution. The idea is that different solutions may represent different “risk management strategies”. Within this approach, translation risk can be classified as one of three types: *credibility risk*, *uncertainty risk*, or *communicative risk* (Pym, 2020, pp. 448–449). According to Pym, “credibility risk . . . concerns the need to gain and maintain trust relationships with the other parties involved in the communicative act”; “uncertainty risk . . . concerns the translator’s doubts about how to render a start-text item”, while “communicative risk is . . . the risk of the translation not fulfilling the desired communicative function” (2020, p. 448). The risk management strategies available to the translator include: *risk reduction*, *risk transfer*, *risk taking*, and *risk mitigation* (Pym, 2020, pp. 449–450). The first of the four is relatively straightforward. Risk transfer involves cases in which “a party other than the translator is in some way made responsible for a decision” (p. 450). Risk taking is also self-explanatory, while risk mitigation is taken to involve cases where one (smaller) risk is accepted in order to avoid another (larger) one (p. 450). In addition, in a more prescriptive application of the approach, it is suggested that translators should adopt risk assessment as a means of optimally distributing translational effort, expending most effort on those linguistic choices which bear the highest risk (Pym, 2015, pp. 72–75). In sum, translational “decision-making” is taken to consist of a series of risk assessments and choosing the most appropriate risk management strategy in a given context, ensuring an economical expenditure of effort along the way.

In the discussion that follows, the risk concept will be interrogated using the framework for conceptual analysis outlined in the introduction. The first issue of concern is the ontological and epistemological status of the risk concept itself, which is linked to its *clarity*. In Pym (2004), risk is situated within a set of “propositions on cross-cultural communication and translation”, whose aim is to “synthesize an approach that runs from an analysis of cross-cultural communication to a description of professional intercultural, their sources of power, and the reasons for their apparent lack of power in a globalizing age” (p. 1). These propositions on intercultural communication constitute a programmatic view of translation in which risk is “understood as the probability that a particular option will lead to success conditions not being obtained” (p. 12). “Success conditions”, in turn, are defined as “criteria that make the communicative act beneficial for all or some of the participants concerned” (p. 3). Risk assessment is presented as a rational “decision-making” process, and communication (including translation) as driven by benefit-seeking (also referred to as “cooperation” in a Gricean sense in Pym (2015, p. 72)). On this point, the concept shares several important features with some of the norm concepts outlined in the previous section (most explicitly in Chesterman):

the aim of accounting for translational choice-making through the assumption of the translator as a rational, benefit-seeking “decision-maker”. The latter point will be further elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The broad outline given in the 2004 propositions does not provide an answer to a central set of ontological and epistemological questions, namely what kind of “thing” risk is understood to be and, consequently, how we might go about trying to understand it. The definitional comments make reference to “probabilities” and “success conditions”, but it is not specified whether these are understood to exist in the mind of the translator or in the actual configuration of communicative circumstances, or perhaps in some specific interaction between the two. As this question is not directly addressed, we must look for indirect evidence in the discussions. In Pym (2004), for instance, risk is linked to “messages”; in other words, the “possible options” to be assigned risk values are “messages”. The actual identification and valuation of risk thus involves the communicator’s assessment of specific linguistically encoded “messages” and “extra-textual information on the nature of the success conditions and the communication participants in each particular act” (Pym, 2004, p. 12). It would appear that risk is somehow both a cognitive state and a feature of a very specific configuration of textual and situational factors. There is no clear position articulated for this.

In addition to the slipperiness of the ontology at the holistic level, it is also difficult to nail down a detailed characterization of central elements of the whole, such as what constitutes a “message”, or, how a “message” may be related to the relevant “extra-textual information” in a principled way in a given act of communication. “Communicative acts” as such are quite broadly conceived, as exemplified by the discussion of “an immigrant family’s deci[sion] to adopt a new language in its home domain” or even “a marriage” (Pym, 2004, p. 6) as instances of communicative acts. Indeed, not only are communicative acts broadly conceived: their extension is portrayed as an individual matter: “each participant projects the desired extension of the communicative act in terms of the benefit to be obtained” (Pym, 2004, p. 6).

There are some changes in the 2005 publication, though they do not provide answers to the questions we are posing. In this paper, Pym defines risk as “the possibility of not fulfilling the translation’s purpose” (2005, unpaginated). One development in the 2005 chapter is that risk is associated with “textual elements”, rather than “messages”. It is emphasized that risk as such is not difficult to assess; rather, it is the translational purpose which is hard to identify and evaluate. Similarly, in Pym (2008a), risk is presented as “the probability of non-cooperation” (p. 326), and this definition is also found in Pym (2008b). In all of these publications, risk is described as “a probability” that is situated at the nexus of “textual elements”, communicative purposes, and translators’ assessments of all of these, though the precise ontology of this nexus is not developed at either a holistic or a more specific level.

Later publications (Pym, 2015, 2020) make less reference to the general model of (intercultural) communication and are more concerned with the

elaboration of types of risk and risk management strategies. In this broadening, the ontological and epistemological ambiguity is also compounded. The early definition is incorporated under the new label of “communicative risk”, and two new types are added. Credibility risk “concerns the need to gain and maintain trust relationships with the other parties involved in the communicative act” (Pym, 2020, p. 448), while uncertainty risk is identified when translators have doubts about “how to render a start-text item” (ibid.). This type of risk is described as “internal to the translator’s decision-making processes” (Pym, 2015, p. 71). Pym and Matsushita (2018) present translational “decision-making” as attempts to “avoid communicative failure while retaining trust in the translator” (p. 1). The new risk types represent an extension of the risk concept in two different directions: towards the communicative act, or more precisely the relationship between its participants, and towards the translator’s cognitive processes. In terms of the ontological status of risk, these extensions indicate at the same time a move towards the cognitive domain and a move toward the social domain. Unfortunately, however, there is little to suggest how this complex ontology is to be understood.

The second line of critique we would like to pursue is the view of the translator as rational actor inherent in the risk management view. As pointed out in the presentation of the model, Pym suggests that translators assess risk and adopt risk management strategies in a rational attempt to minimize cost and maximize benefit. This is most clearly demonstrated in the early work, for instance in the 2004 emphasis on “transaction costs” (p. 4) or the calculation of communicative success in terms of a cost-benefit analysis (point 3.7, p. 4). This view has also survived into the most recent work in, for instance, the 2020 discussion of “calculated distributions of effort” (p. 455). This position is quite similar to some norm theorists’ claims that norm adherence represents the attempts of rational actors to accrue benefit or avoid sanction.

It is unfortunate, however, that an entire body of research and critique of the theory of rational choice is not brought to bear here. Indeed, in the most recent chapter, Pym (2020) states that “the presupposition of rationality has nevertheless been tempered by studies in the psychology of risk” (p. 445), but this is thus far the only acknowledgement of the issue that we could find. And this statement does not, in fact, reflect either the seriousness of the critique of the rational choice model of decision-making, or the breadth of the intellectual debate on this matter. Indeed, work in several fields has queried the relevance of the model for the study of real human behavior. Within the context of economics, Thaler is quite unequivocal in describing the need for a new approach to economics: “Let’s be blunt. The model of human behavior based on the premise that people optimize is and always has been highly implausible” (Thaler, 2016, unpaginated). “Fierce” criticism has been and is being directed at this model across the social sciences (Chaserant et al., 2016), and in many quarters there is broad agreement that much human choice-making is based on processes other than rational assessment of cost-benefit (for survey, see Kahneman, 2011). A similar point is raised in

Robinson's (2020) critique of some of the work on norms. The point we would like to make here is that some approaches to norm theory and Pym's risk management model inherit the problems of rational-actor theory, further adding to the central ontological instability. We might also add that this relationship exemplifies a so-called "external" problem – that is, a problem that originates in its relationship with other theories.

The third line of critique concerns the relationship between the risk management program and a theory of language. We have already seen that all empirical studies using this approach rely on linguistic analysis in their identification of risk. Regardless of whether the risk-bearing elements are referred to as "messages" or "textual elements", they are all linguistic. As demonstrated in the beginning of this section, the risk management approach requires an underlying model of cross-cultural communication (Pym, 2004, 2015). More specifically, all of the three risk types and the proposed risk mitigation strategies require this underlying model to provide detailed content (e.g., what is communicative failure? What does it mean to cooperate in communication? To whom might risk be transferred?). The risk management approach may thus be characterized as an addendum to the communication model, one that Pym and colleagues claim is necessary to account for translational choice-making. To make this quite clear: the entire apparatus of risk management rests on a model of communication whose core seems to be the Gricean notion of "cooperation" (Pym, 2015, p. 72) and whose realization in translation is linguistic in nature.

In presenting the program, Pym takes considerable pains to argue that the risk management program can illuminate translational "decision-making" in ways that linguistic approaches to translation cannot. For example, in the most recent chapter, Pym (2020) states that:

In the same years, Pym (2004/2005) argued that attention to risk management could explain translation processes in ways that mainstream linguistics and uncertainty analysis (i.e. the number of possible translation solutions) were unable to: three noun phrases may have exactly the same status as linguistic problems (let's say each with three possible renditions), yet only one of them might be high risk for achieving the translator's communicative purpose. Sentence-level linguistics and uncertainty counts cannot see that risk.

(p. 447)

To our knowledge, linguistic approaches to the study of translation were definitely not using "sentence-level linguistics" in the early years of this millennium. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any mainstream linguistic approach to the study of translation of the past generation that could be fairly characterized in this way. Indeed, in our view, it is this use of a straw-man argument that lies at the base of the risk management program: that linguistic approaches are incapable of catering for choice-making that is motivated by

consideration of the communicative context in all its complexity. Similarly, in the 2015 paper, Pym argues that:

Twentieth century Western theories of translation . . . can be seen in terms of a struggle between essentialist or Lockean views of meaning transfer, where one and the same thing is ideally uttered in different languages, and non-essentialist or deconstructionist views, where translation necessarily involves transformation of the thing uttered. Although various compatibilist positions have been envisaged, notably within the frame of relevance theory, no stable consensus has emerged around a unified view of translation.

(p. 67)

The continuation of this argument is the proposal of the risk management approach to translational “decision-making” as a means of moving translation theory forward. In our view, also here the so-called “compatibilist positions”, in which one might expect to find a number of relevant linguistic theories, are rapidly dismissed. Both of these characterizations represent an overly dismissive view of current linguistic theory, which, in turn, is used to motivate a need for the risk management program. In the concluding remarks we will provide a brief account of usage-based linguistics, an established approach to the study of language which, we will argue, makes the risk management framework as much as the independent theorization of translational norms (largely) superfluous.

#### **4. Language as the Interface of the Cognitive and the Social**

The discussion of norms and risk management raises (in addition to all the other issues) also the matter of the relation between the two constructs, prompting questions like: how is the construct of risk really all that different from norms? Norms are followed, or broken, based on “decision-makers” assessment of the relative benefits and sanctions involved, or, in other words, their assessment of risk. We have shown how both concepts are ontologically and epistemologically murky, and, at least in some versions, rest on problematic inherited assumptions. While there have been attempts to overtly link the notions, as in Hu (2020), these by and large continue the lineage of problematic assumptions.

As we have suggested earlier, we believe that many of these problems arise from the fact that the linguistic (or semiotic) nature of translational communication has either been collaterally backgrounded (in the case of norms) or actively rejected (in the case of risk). While the motivations for this are different for the two constructs, the end result is the same: the linguistic nature of translation has largely been rendered invisible in these predominantly social perspectives. In turning away from linguistic approaches to translation,

perceived to be too limited and limiting in their view of translation, language itself has been elided from the construct of translation. And yet translation, in its most prototypical and typically acknowledged form, is not just any kind of behavior – it is *linguistic* behavior and choice-making. But to a large degree, productive engagement with contemporary linguistic theories (and empirical work) that emphasize precisely the profoundly intertwined nature of cognition, affect, usage, and social context has remained comparatively rare. Often, this almost automatic dismissal of linguistic theorization, based on a limited engagement with contemporary linguistics, leads to superficial, questionable statements on linguistic aspects of (for example) norms, as outlined earlier.

At the same time, there is an exceptionalism in theorizing translation that cuts across both these approaches. While, of course, there are aspects of the linguistic production or choice-making of translators that *are* distinct, it is also undeniable that their linguistic choice-making is, of necessity, largely *similar* to those of other kinds of language producers. This is a point already made by Chesterman (1993):

It is worth stressing that the scientific status of translation laws is no different from that of sociological laws, or indeed laws of linguistic behavior of any kind. We might say that translation laws are simply a subclass of the set of general “texting” laws of language behavior: translation is “texting” under specifically restricted conditions.

(p. 16)

The most parsimonious approach to understanding translational linguistic choice-making is by starting with what is held in common with other language users: by and large, we should be able to account for a large proportion of the kinds of processing/choice-making in translation by invoking the same mechanisms that play a role for other language/text producers – but of course with certain explanations/accounts added for the areas in which translation *is* subject to *different* constraints. In other words: What do we know about the irreducible sociocognitive nature of language production, generally, and how are translators’ linguistic production and choice-making mostly the same but also significantly different in some respects than that of other language producers?

#### **4.1 Overview of Key Principles and Concepts of the Usage-Based Approach to Language**

A full discussion of usage-based linguistic theory falls outside the scope of this chapter. Here, we focus on key points relevant to our argument: that a usage-based theory of language provides the theoretical (and empirical) apparatus for understanding the complex sociocognitive nature of translation, resolves unresolved tensions in discourse on this topic in translation studies, and allows us to reassess the interpretation of and need for separate theorizations



of constructs like norms and risk. In this overview of key principles, we draw primarily on the work of Beckner et al. (2009), Bybee (2010), and Diessel (2017); where we extend the discussion to how normativity is seen within this framework, we draw primarily on Backus and Spotti (2012) and Harder (2012).

The foundational principle of usage-based approaches is that grammar (or linguistic knowledge) is considered to be “the cognitive organization of one’s experience with language” (Bybee, 2010, p. 8). In other words, “the structure and organization of a speaker’s linguistic knowledge is the product of language use or performance” (Diessel, 2017, unpaginated). There are several important implications of this statement. First, and fundamentally, language is emergent, or in other terms a dynamic system (Diessel, 2017), complex adaptive system (Beckner et al., 2009), or evolutionary system (Harder, 2010, 2012), which develops and constantly adapts in response to socially contextualized usage. It is from the interplay between socially embedded communicative events, and the general cognitive faculties of the individual, that linguistic structures emerge:

Language consists of fluid structures and probabilistic constraints that are shaped by communication, memory, and processing. Challenging the widespread assumption that linguistic structure is built from a predefined set of innate linguistic concepts, usage-based linguists conceive of language as a dynamic network in which the various aspects of a language user’s linguistic knowledge are constantly restructured and reorganized under the continuous pressure of performance.

(Diessel, 2017, unpaginated)

The relationship between the cognitive and the social is fundamental to usage-based approaches; as Diessel (2017, unpaginated) puts it, “it is the general goal of usage-based linguistics to develop a dynamic theory of language that accounts for the effects of interactive and cognitive processes on the emergence of linguistic structure and meaning.”

In the usage-based paradigm, language is seen as organized in a network of units (sometimes called constructions, or by other terms; for our purposes the theoretical implications of these distinctions are not important; see Diessel, 2017). Usage-based approaches in general do not maintain a strict distinction between lexis and syntax: units are “bits” of language, of any size, that are processed as form-function entities. They can be more fixed in nature (as in words or idioms), or can be more schematic (as in phrases with “open” slots, or syntactic constructions). These units are cognitively “stored” and organized in complex, emergent networks, in which connections are shaped by the individual’s experience with language. Such units are “rich memory representations” (Bybee, 2010, p. 14), which “contain, at least potentially, all the information a language user can perceive in a linguistic experience” (Bybee, 2010, p. 14), including not only its form and denotative meanings,

but also its typical context of use, its association with style, ideological connotations, and so on (see Backus & Spotti, 2012, p. 189).

Key in the development of a linguistic network is the notion of frequency: frequency of usage (or exposure) leads to entrenchment. Frequency “strengthens the representation of linguistic elements in memory, it facilitates the activation and processing of words, categories, and constructions, which in turn can have long-lasting effects on the development and organization of the linguistic system” (Diessel, 2017, unpaginated).

Diessel (2017) outlines in more detail the wide range of cognitive and social processes involved in language use, which he divides into three general domains: social cognition, conceptualization, and memory and processing. For reasons of space and relevance to the argumentation, we focus only (briefly) on the first here. The usage-based approach highlights that “language use is a very particular form of social interaction” (Diessel, 2017, unpaginated) – highlighting the point we have also made earlier. This kind of social interaction is driven by cooperation, which, in turn, “involves a set of cognitive processes that concern the ability to take other persons’ knowledge, intentions, and beliefs into account” (ibid.) – and that, ultimately, takes a specifically linguistic shape. The work of, particularly, Tomasello (e.g., 2010) is key in this respect, and he highlights the role of joint attention, perspective-taking, and assessment of common ground in molding human language. Tomasello (2010, p. 103) sees this as the primary force in shaping linguistic conventions: “Linguistic conventions thus basically codify the ways that previous individuals in the community have converged upon to manipulate the attention and imagination of others in specific ways.”

In some usage-based approaches, attempts have been made to more closely integrate perspectives from sociolinguistics into the paradigm, as for example in cognitive sociolinguistics (see e.g., Geeraerts et al., 2010; Harder, 2010; Kristiansen & Dirven, 2008), in which the traditional cognitive linguistic focus is expanded “from properties of the individual mind to the properties of minds in interaction” (Harder, 2012, p. 294). In this, one strand has involved a focus on the notion of normativity, where the emphasis has been on the complex interplay between the kinds of patterns of bottom-up conventionalization or entrenchment discussed earlier, and norms as socially constructed and legitimized collective agreements. Backus and Spotti (2012, p. 187) emphasize that “the cognitive and the social are visible in the two different ways in which the term ‘norm’ can be used.” They describe the typical patterns of usage of an individual as the individual internal norm of a user (and individual users may show variation in their usage patterns or individual internal norms). However, such *individual internal norms* (Backus and Spotti’s term, which can be seen as equivalent to conventions) can also be studied as a social phenomenon – in other words, considering the aggregate similarities across individual internal norms, it is possible to distinguish a “recognizable language or variety” (ibid.). This Backus and Spotti refer to as the *cumulative internal norm* (again, one could substitute “convention” for this term); Harder

(2012, p. 300) refers to “aggregate complexes of individual minds”. At both these levels, Backus and Spotti (2012) emphasize that “these distribution patterns are largely the result of unintentional communicative behavior that follows conventionalized patterns of pragmatic cooperation, politeness, group conformity and cultural transmission” (p. 188) – the kinds of forces we outlined earlier and explored in the work of Tomasello (e.g., 2010). There is also a circularity between the individual internal and cumulative internal norms, in that users, individually, cognitively represent knowledge of cumulative norms (what is typical, or common ground, in a particular speech community). In other words, cumulative internal norms (or collective norms) are not only an epiphenomenon of aggregates of individual internal norms – they also represent a “target” that individual internal norms under certain conditions aim to adapt to (see also Harder, 2012).

Backus and Spotti (2012, p. 188) set these types of norms (which could therefore also be called conventions) apart from prescriptive norms, which they call *external norms* (or norms proper). These often exist in codified form and are “usually the result of explicit institutional agreement on how language either should or should not be used in a given linguistic interaction” (ibid.). In their view, these kinds of norms are “not located within people’s minds”, although “for some people some parts of their individual internal norms are quite close to the external norm, and this gives them social advantages” (ibid.).

The distinction made here is, we think, a relevant one, but at the same time we do not agree that external norms are not located in people’s minds (not cognitively represented). They must be, or else they cannot influence usage. Many users certainly have cognitive representations of “rules” about correct and wrong usage, learnt formally in school or elsewhere (the prevalence of the so-called complaint tradition attests to this; see also Milroy & Milroy, 1999; Curzan, 2014). Harder (2012, p. 297) usefully highlights this in his distinction between explicit versus implicit norms, where implicit norms are seen as emergent conventions, and explicit norms are seen as cognitive representations of “part of the ‘common lore’ of the community”. Harder (2012, p. 197) makes the relation between these two types of internal/external or implicit/explicit norms clear:

Just as you can have (more or less shared) representations of the way the world actually is, you can have representations of the way it ought to be, and the two do not have to coincide with each other, or with the way the world actually works.

Nevertheless, the sociocognitive nature of norms is clear:

Returning to the individual mind, if I reject the degree of conscious awareness as the critical factor in the individual, what is it in the individual that corresponds to an operational norm? I suggest that the relevant

factor is the neurocognitive infrastructure that enables and prompts individuals to respond in accordance with the norm. Norms could not drive practices unless individuals in the community had the neurocognitive apparatus to respond readily and to some extent automatically when norm-relevant occasions arise. This response apparatus consists largely of spontaneous and non-volitional aspects, including motor routines and experiential qualia, in the case of linguistic as well as non-linguistic behavior. When someone speaks what in your community is the “right” way to speak, it automatically triggers understanding as well as a sense that this is the appropriate way to speak.

(Harder, 2012, p. 298)

Kruger and Van Rooy (2017) argue that prescriptive norms may be particularly saliently cognitively represented for certain groups of people who for reasons of their experience with language are particularly attuned to them, such as editors, writers, or teachers – or, indeed, translators. It is thus not so much a matter that these kinds of norms are not cognitively represented; instead, it is that they do not emerge from usage in the same way as conventions do. Rather, they emerge from social negotiation processes that have much to do with institutional processes of control and power relations in language.

Kruger and Van Rooy (2017) propose a distinction not only between these two types of norms (which they refer to as bottom-up *norms-as-conventionalization* and top-down *norms-as-legitimizing*), but also set out an argument for how they are related: where legitimizing norms are cognitively salient, and aligned with bottom-up conventionalization norms, this may drive frequency of usage and lead to further conventionalization (which may further bolster legitimization of particular usages). Conversely, where legitimizing norms are in conflict with bottom-up conventionalization norms, a tension emerges that (depending on various factors) may reduce frequency, weakening entrenchment and constraining conventionalization or slowing it down – or, alternatively conventionalization may simply win out over legitimization. Kruger and Van Rooy (2017) call this a conventionalization-legitimization feedback loop that plays out between the individual cognitive processing of users and the social contexts of communication, driven by frequency effects.

We conclude this section by highlighting the notion of intentionality and affect in respect to the interplay between conventionalization and legitimization norms. Backus and Spotti (2012) make clear that

[t]he cognitive basis of linguistic knowledge argues against attributing excessive intentionality to speakers: many of the things we say we say “without thinking”: we produce words and constructions rapidly because they are very entrenched in our minds. Hence we may not always be aware of the indexicality inherent in everything we say, and,

thus, the intentional identity marking often called agency in current linguistic anthropology should not be assumed to play a role too easily.  
(p. 192)

In addition, conventionalized norms also have a fully embodied and affective nature:

A norm that is fully internalized (i.e. one that the individual is fully adapted to) means that what is good feels good, not just that it comes out as good when tested against an explicit mental model. The way you respond to it is part of who you are, not just an aspect of what you think.  
(Harder, 2012, p. 298)

In the next section, we consider how these ideas from the usage-based framework can be applied to translation, and how they relate to (and resolve) the problems of the norm and risk constructs we analyzed earlier, rendering the former fully integrated into a general theory of language that can also account for translation, and the latter largely obsolete.

#### **4.2 A Usage-Based Account of Translation**

The usage-based model has been applied to contexts of bilingualism, such as L2 acquisition and language contact (see Zenner et al., 2019; Backus, 2020). There are few studies that have applied usage-based approaches to translation (e.g., Čulo, 2013, 2017; Halverson, 2017, 2019; Kotze, 2020b, 2022; Redelinguhuys, 2019; Rojo and Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013; Szymor, 2017, 2018; Vandevoorde, 2020); however, in these studies the emphasis has typically fallen more on the cognitive-linguistic side, and less on the interface between the social and cognitive. In this section, we set out a proposal for applying the basic principles of a usage-based approach to translation, specifically with a view to how it addresses the relation between the cognizing individual and the communicating collective.

Fundamentally, we assume that translators are (mostly) just like other (bilingual) language users, and therefore most of their linguistic processing and choice-making can be accounted for in the same way as in the general account earlier – but with particular explanation needed for the areas and ways in which translators are differently constrained to other language users (see Kotze, 2022). Translators are a specific subtype of bilinguals. It should be noted that, in the usage-based view, the *fact* of bilingualism (in principle) requires no special explanatory mechanisms; the same underlying mechanisms underpin the acquisition, organization, and change of additional languages (see e.g., Wulff & Ellis, 2018). There are, of course, some cognitive differences and some different patterns of use (e.g., codeswitching), but no theoretical add-ons are needed to accommodate them. The network structure of linguistic organization applies across the two (or more) languages; the degree to

which people “keep their languages apart” (and how) is a question of much interest across psycholinguistics and contact linguistics (see e.g., Backus, 2020; Costa, 2005; de Groot, 2011; Matras, 2009; Meuter, 2005; Zenner et al., 2019). The network organization of language also accounts for the possibility of cross-linguistic priming to take place (see e.g., Gries & Kootstra, 2017; Hartsuiker & Berneollet, 2017). The fundamental characteristics of linguistic interaction are also the same in the translation case, for instance with assumptions of communicative intent and the construction of common ground: we have no need of a distinct construct to capture participant credibility.

The usage-based framework prompts us to recognize that the degree to which rationalist actor-type decision-making (assumed to underlie normative or risk-avoidant translator choice-making) really drives linguistic production in translation is likely to be overstated. Much translational language production (just like language production more generally, irrespective of whether by monolinguals or multilinguals) is convention- and entrenchment-driven. The processes by means of which this happen are the same as for other language users, but since translators have specific types of usage experience (not shared by language producers more generally), these are likely to shape their cognitive representations, their embodied and affective responses, and their language and languaging, in somewhat different ways.

The unique contexts of usage experience for translators are, most saliently, their (professional) practice of translating texts, of particular kinds, for particular purposes and for particular clients. It is these experiences that shape their linguistic representations and subsequent behavior in distinctive ways, where repetition of these unique experiences in transferring texts from one language to another have cognitive effects that are idiosyncratic to translators. Thus, the *same mechanism of repeated encounters* with particular types of language use shaping linguistic representation that accounts for linguistic structure and knowledge more generally also accounts for what is particular or unique about translational linguistic production and choice-making. The *same mechanism* also accounts for the ways in which a translator’s lack of (repeated) encounters with a particular structure in one language or another will result in uncertainty regarding use.

For example, repeated use of the same contact-influenced constructions (from words, to phrases, to collocations, to syntactic patterns) may lead to their entrenchment (see Halverson, 2019 on “default translation”); on the flip side, strategies to avoid such constructions where they are marked and translators are aware of them may likewise become entrenched and conventionalized in translational usage. All of this is highly dependent on the translator’s particular experience and is also dependent on the interactional nature of the translation activity – just like other users, translators receive (overt as well as covert) “feedback” of various kinds from other participants in the communicative process, and these “effects” are included in the rich representations of linguistic experiences. Through the largely unconscious encoding of the negative or positive responses to usage events, combined with processes of intersubjective alignment and accommodation, frequency

effects are also mediated by desirability (or acceptability) effects. This process, carefully described in terms of the interwoven relationship between cognitive representations and social experience, captures what Pym refers to as communicative risk. This is the general process of (norms-as-) conventionalization, slightly “tweaked” for translators’ linguistic experiences.

This description of the development of conventions in translators’ linguistic behavior as incrementally emergent from their experience with particular usage contexts (i.e., cognitive adjustments to repeated social experiences) is aligned both with the way in which Toury (2012) describes norm acquisition, and with the proposals of Robinson (2020), avoiding reliance on a rationalist decision-making (*Econ*) view of the translator. However, this framework has the advantage that it takes account of the linguistic nature of translation in a way that neither of these two do, and embeds these ideas in a well-developed, current theory of language and communication with substantial empirical evidence in its support. It thus offers a parsimonious explanation of the conventionalization processes that play a role in translational linguistic choice-making that avoids exceptionalism in thinking about translation, but simultaneously offers sufficient scope to account for what *is* unique in translational choice-making.

As for the feedback loop with (norms-as-) legitimization, here, too, translators may be similar to other language professionals in having particularly salient cognitive representations of prescriptions regarding not only “good” language in general, but “good” translation too. Through experience, they have internalized much about which linguistic choices are considered appropriate in particular contexts and which are favored. They are able to act on this knowledge without making conscious assessments of risk through a deliberative process. The prescriptions these professionals have met become “attached” to the rich representations of particular linguistic constructions (and their network-linked translations), thus becoming part of the conventionalization processes described earlier by sanctioning or inhibiting particular choices, which have effects on entrenchment. Likewise, translators may in the course of their experience with language be faced with linguistic constructions, text types, or contexts of communication that require greater efforts to ensure that expectations of cooperation are met; experiences with such contexts (and possible negative or positive consequences arising from them) are likely to form particularly salient parts of their cognitive representations, in which embodied and affective responses are included.

## **5. Concluding Remarks: Do We Still Need Concepts Like Risk and Norms?**

The starting point for the discussion in this chapter was the epistemological need for foundational concepts that are irreducibly sociocognitive to ground further theorization in TIS. We have analyzed two candidate concepts, *norm* and *risk*, on the basis of their theoretical ambitions, as professed by their

proponents, and on the basis of their underlying ontology, also as suggested by their advocates. We have made use of a set of criteria for analyzing concepts presented in Marín (2017), and revealed what we consider to be “internal” and “external” problems for both concepts: that is, problems that have to do with the constructs themselves and with their relationships to other theories and concepts. We structured our critique along three issues that apply equally, though in different ways, to both concepts: 1. an identified ontological and epistemological instability, 2. reliance on a rational-actor model, and 3. a backgrounding or rejection of a theory of language. Finally, we presented a usage-based theory of language and the broad lines of a theory of translation that emerges from it. In these final paragraphs, we will bring this all together in an outline of our main claims.

First of all, it is clearly demonstrated in the preceding analyses that the norm and risk concepts are fraught with conceptual problems related to a lack of clarity, consistency, and simplicity and that their underlying ontology is at best unstable. Both concepts rely heavily on a problematic assumption of the translator as a rational decision maker, thus inheriting the weaknesses of this view (an “external” problem). Finally, in our view the unintentional backgrounding or overt cancelling of the specifically linguistic nature of many (if not most) translational acts results in the repeated use of a theoretically and methodologically unarticulated bridge from linguistic translation data to social theories to explain linguistic choice-making. As mentioned previously, the precise relationship between these three issues will be the subject of later work, as it is beyond the scope of the current chapter.

In our view, the consequences of our analysis are quite clear. It bears repeating that the sociocognitive dimensions outlined in our account of translation are not absent from other language users’ experience with language and their linguistic representations. In other words, other language users also experience both bottom-up and top-down interacting processes of conventionalizing norms and legitimizing norms; other language users also experience contexts in which linguistic usage is particularly charged by an attunement to riskiness of various kinds. By adopting a usage-based view, it is possible to account for translational behavior by the same mechanisms as the linguistic behavior of other users – the usage-based view offers the parsimonious explanation that any differences in translational behavior may be accounted for by the ways in which translators’ experience with language is different from other groups of language users. In this framework, normativity as both a conventionalizing and a legitimizing force can be straightforwardly accounted for, thus resolving ontological and epistemological slipperiness; however, risk, as a construct, becomes largely obsolete. Its “effects” are already captured in 1. rich cognitive representations based on embodied and affective experiences in communicative contexts and 2. the general dynamic that forms part of the “background” of all human communication, defined by cooperation and intersubjective alignment. In this view, there is no justification to afford it a privileged position as the “driving force” in a theory of



translational communication (no more, indeed, than it would be afforded a privileged position in theories of linguistic communication more generally).

The account we offer here is based on a broad body of theory and empirical analysis and represents a parsimonious account built on a rich sociocognitive ontology. The brief presentation given previously is a starting point for further elaboration, starting from a philosophical discussion that we consider an important prerequisite to further theory building.

## Notes

1. We adopt a philosophical approach based on so-called “critical realism” (Bhaskar, 2008). According to this view, a scholar might posit an ontology of objects and relationships in the natural and/or social world and distinguish this from ways of knowing about them (an epistemology). At the same time, critical realism views epistemological claims as socially contingent and tentative in nature. Importantly, while ontology and epistemology are considered distinct, some approaches emphasize their “analytical interdependence and mutual co-construction” (Albert et al., 2020, p. 358).
2. The nature of the relationship among these three dimensions is complex and falls outside the scope of the discussion we can offer in this chapter. We foresee this as an important avenue for further work.
3. We decline to use the more common term, “decision-making”, as it is most often linked to a rational-actor model of cognitive activity. As we will discuss in later sections, this view of translation has important limitations.
4. In this context, it is also important to note that extensions of norm theory have more often ventured into sociological domains than cognitive, as in Inghilleri (2003) and Meylaerts (2008). Robinson (2020) is the first attempt to explicitly theorize the cognitive aspects of norms, to our knowledge.

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