

## **Towards integrating conflict management strategies as a theoretical framework for translation**

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### **Abstract:**

Anthony Pym (2005) is a forerunner in introducing economic concepts in translation studies. His risk management as a theoretical framework for translation is very significant. Departing from his observation, we think that The Thomas-Kilmann conflict management styles offer a set of techniques to overcome conflicts in business contexts and respond adequately according to the situation. These techniques shift between assertiveness and cooperation. This paper studies the contribution of the Thomas-Kilmann strategies in translation. Conflict resolutions strategies can also be a cornerstone in economic and business translation in particular. In fact, we have noticed the similarity between human conflicts in a business environment and linguistic conflicts. A conflict emerges from the use of power to an individual's will but also inability to meet his needs that are in the hands of another individual. Conflicts are the consequence of concentration of interests on one side and misunderstandings are attributed to the lack of communication. Thomas-Kilmann strategies vary from a cooperative to assertive methods and these are: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. We strive here to integrate these conflict management strategies in specialized translation, notably the economic text, and see to what extent they can be practical in translation.

**Keywords:** Conflict management, Risk management, Thomas-Kilmann strategies, Translation theory.

### **Résumé:**

Anthony Pym (2005) est un précurseur dans l'introduction de concepts économiques dans les études de traduction. Sa gestion des risques en tant que cadre théorique pour la traduction est très importante. Partant de son observation, nous pensons que les styles de

gestion des conflits de Thomas-Kilmann offrent un ensemble de techniques pour surmonter les conflits dans les contextes commerciaux et répondre de manière adéquate à la situation. Ces techniques évoluent entre la détermination et la coopération. Cet article étudie la contribution des stratégies de Thomas-Kilmann à la traduction. Les stratégies de résolution des conflits peuvent également être la pierre angulaire de la traduction économique et commerciale en particulier. En fait, nous avons remarqué la similitude entre les conflits humains dans un environnement professionnel et les conflits linguistiques. Un conflit émerge de l'utilisation du pouvoir à la volonté de l'individu mais aussi de l'incapacité à répondre à ses besoins qui sont entre les mains d'un autre individu. Les conflits sont la conséquence de la concentration des intérêts d'un côté et les malentendus sont attribués au manque de communication. Les stratégies de Thomas-Kilmann varient d'une coopérative à des méthodes assertives et sont: rivaliser, collaborer, chercher un compromis, éviter et céder. Nous nous efforçons ici d'intégrer ces stratégies de résolution des conflits dans la traduction spécialisée, notamment le texte économique, et de voir dans quelle mesure elles peuvent être pratiquées en traduction.

**Mots clés:** Gestion des conflits, Gestion des risques, Stratégies Thomas-Kilmann, Théorie de la traduction.

### **Introduction**

Anthony Pym (2015) is a forerunner in introducing economic concepts in translation studies. His risk management as a theoretical framework for translation is very significant. In fact, Pym introduces credibility risk, uncertainty risk and communicative risk. (Pym, Translating as risk management, 2015) Pym acknowledges the confusing application from one level to another of his risk management theory.

One application concerns the specificity of translation, where risk is primarily the probability of the translator losing a translation-specific kind of credibility; it concerns relations between people and can be called 'credibility risk'. A second kind of risk ensues from the translator's uncertainty when making decisions about how to render an item; it involves cognitive processes and can be called 'uncertainty risk'. A third kind of risk then has to do with the way texts are interpreted and used in contexts, where some elements are high-risk because they are key to communicative success,

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while others are low-risk; this kind of risk applies to the different parts of texts and can be called 'communicative risk'. (Pym, Translating as risk management, 2015).

Departing from his observation, and Mona Baker's conception of translation as a conflict (2006), we think that The Thomas-Kilmann conflict management styles (1972) offer a set of techniques to overcome conflicts in business contexts and respond adequately according to the situation. These techniques shift between assertiveness and cooperation.

This paper studies the contribution of the Thomas-Kilmann strategies in translation. Conflict resolutions strategies can also be a cornerstone in economic and business translation. In fact, we have noticed the similarity between human conflicts in a business environment and linguistic conflicts. A conflict emerges from the use of power to an individual's will but also inability to meet his needs that are in the hands of another individual. Conflicts are the consequence of concentration of interests on one side, and misunderstandings are attributed to the lack of communication. Thomas-Kilmann strategies vary from cooperative to assertive methods and these are: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. We strive here to integrate these conflict management strategies in specialized translation, notably the economic text, and see to what extent they can be practical in translation.

What comes below is not a theory, but a methodological approach that enables the translator to frame and collect his working tools and his cognitive baggage in order to set a methodological rule to achieve two fundamental supports in the field of specialized translation in general and the economic translation in particular. These are: Gain time and participation in the productivity and profitability of the institutions. Thus, the translator in an economic institution transforms into an active element that takes part in stirring up the indicator of gain and loss. There is no difference between him and any other employee in the institution. For instance, in the field of advertisement translation, his performance can be well measured among teams of creativity in order to conceive a publicity

campaign or to translate it to other languages. He is the mediator between the company and the consumer. This allows the institution to enter the market and gain respect and fame. The economic consequence is that advertisement/ publicity translation becomes an economic factor determined by the market laws and the ability to attain the economic objectives.

**The conflict concept between management and translation:**

A conflict can be defined as the interaction between interests and goals wherein an entity or individual does not want to give away or drop his part. It can be a clash or sharp disagreement because of difference, conflict in ideas, interests, or intentions. However, poor communication can always be a source of conflicts between people. Similarly, unclear or vague communication, or sending opposite messages may create ambiguities and start conflicts. At this level, translation quality assessment is very often performed because of conflictual spectrum.

A qualitative translation assessment is a cornerstone in any translation. The idea of loyalty remains controversial from the ST to TT. Conflicts emerge when changes are operated within ideas (communication) and stylistics. In parallel, conflict management strategies are approaches to communication and can be a framework to any translation, but the conflict between essentialists and non-essentialists would not be tamed. The economic text proves to be difficult to translate because of the technical terminology and the quality of the sentences it uses. Thomas-Kilmann conflict strategies can be applied as resolution techniques when we understand how they introduce both concepts: cooperativeness and assertiveness.

Human conflicts arise from interest appropriation. In our context, they also arise from the translator's experience and attitudes towards the ST. It is not the interpersonal conflict that interests us, but the conflict that emerges when the translator deals with the text, technical terminology and (comparative) stylistics. Conflicts are inherent within the translation process and can be even through an effective communication, as in interpersonal conflict management. Mona Baker states that 'In

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its broadest meaning, conflict refers to a situation in which two or more parties seek to undermine each other because they have incompatible goals, competing interests, or fundamentally different values' (Mona Baker, 2006:01). She even goes on considering 'translation and interpreting are part of the institution of war and hence play a major role in the management of conflict' (Mona Baker, 2006:01).

G.G. Scott, while introducing the Thomas-Kilmann's kit, suggests they would go along three easy steps she names the ERI model (Graham, 2008: 03). These are emotions, reason and intuitions. Any conflict would be worse if emotions, especially negative emotions of the conflict, are introduced because 'a real conflict might develop if the emotions become engaged or hostility is expressed' (Graham, 2008: 03). These emotions may also parallel with Gideon Toury's 'laws of conversion' and 'laws of interference'. (Pym, 2008: 315). Emotions in translation may lead to a competing situation to use Thomas-Kilmann's strategies because the text breeds and evolves in a 'hostile' socio-cultural environment and develops features that belong to the language and its world vision, to the culture and its relativity. We are in an Oedipus complex situation. To what extent are we going to be mimetic? And are we going to kill the author/text-father?

### **The nature of the economic text:**

Before introducing the Thomas-Kilmann's strategies, it is worth stopping at the nature of the economic text. It is one of the most complex written discourses for translation. It has imbrications with a variety of other discourses emanating from a wide range of environments stretching from negotiation, banking, trade, production, marketing, and distribution. It can even touch journalistic economic surveys or political decisions. This particular kind of discourse can also belong to financial, accounting and business fields with business analysis, numerals, and very often hard currencies time determined especially in business contracts. It can be theoretical but applied as well. This imbrication of the economic discourse makes it even richer from a field to another hence the difficulty to deal with it. In fact, the

peculiarity of the discourse can be neuter but at the same time, it can involve emotions depending on the nature and type of the economic discourse. The definition and tracing the borders of the economic discourse helps us to understand, a first step towards translation. The peculiarities of the economic discourse seem to hop from technical lexis, complex style with complex and long sentences. The translator's risk resides in his misunderstanding and can generate money losses. I believe that the economic consciousness of a developed nation is reflected in its language, and finding the equivalent in a less developed nation or in its language is not a mere linguistic affair.

***Thomas-Kilmann conflict strategies:***

This kit of conflict management tools was introduced by Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, both professors of management at the university of Pittsburgh, USA, and are widely used in business management. Their strategies remain important approaches to study the human behavior during a conflict situation.

It is a behavior analysis tool during a conflict that permits the conflict resolution people in charge or the human resources experts to choose a model from the following strategies. These consist of five tools, which are **competing**, **collaborating**, **avoiding**, **accommodating** and **compromising**. No style is better than the other, but they depend on the nature of the conflict, and that of the two individuals involved. Their use is determined by the determinacy of the individual to communicate, deal with the conflict and settle the end of the conflict. These tools are based on two important dimensions: assertiveness and cooperation. The table 1 below explains the strategies on both dimensional axes.

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Conflict Handling Styles Matrix

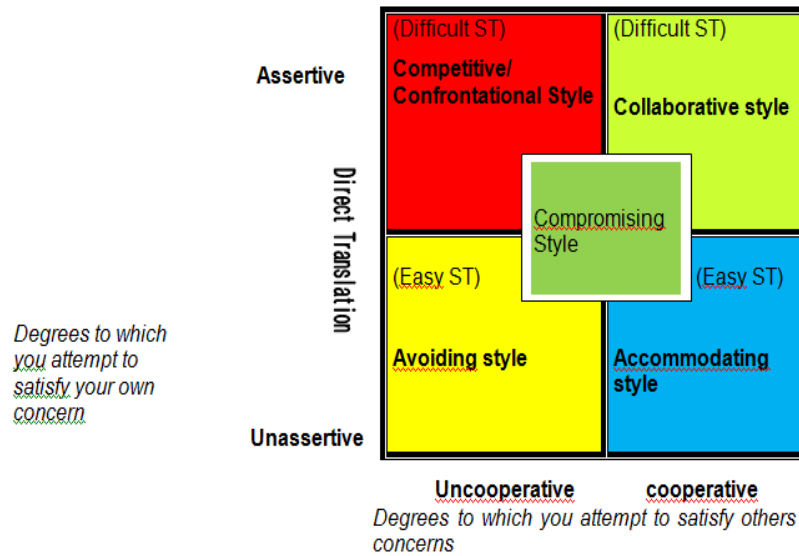


Table 1.: Graham, 2008 :115)

In fact, human behavior is determined by two elements during a conflict either assertiveness or cooperation:

In the assertiveness mode, the individual's main concern remains the satisfaction of his own concerns, interests and goals. Assertiveness displays the individual's will to prove his assertions and will on the outcome of the conflict, direct the conflict towards his own goals and objectives.

Cooperation shows the willingness and behavior of an individual during the conflict from accommodating, which falls in the unassertive sphere, to collaborative which is in the assertive sphere. The goal of these tools is to match each approach with the conflicting situation. If an individual does not cooperate, he can have two styles. The first is the avoiding style, which is unassertive, and the competitive style, which is the most assertive style. In the cooperativeness mode, the individual is mostly concerned with the satisfaction of the person's goals and objectives. Cooperation shows the individual's willingness to allow the other practice his assertiveness.

Cooperativeness is how the translator is going to meet the ST needs, from type to quality of text, and assertiveness is how much the ST assesses its own needs it wants to meet. The uncooperative mode is mostly related to direct translation because the text is either very difficult, and the translator does not find solution or the text does not pose important issues and therefore the translator does not make enough efforts in order to translate. He does not use complex styles and keeps the simplicity of the ST. In other words, to what extent is the culture going to adapt the invading culture, and how it is going to *say* its own ideas loyally.

**The Thomas-Kilman tools and their application on translation:**

This study remains theoretical and needs a practical side to validate its optic view. However, three notes need to be addressed, and all three of them are interconnected.

**First**, working in the field of translation theory helps us try new methods, and check their efficiency through conventions and rules. But how are we going to verify the validity of a translation? Is it through the concept of 'equivalence' or the acceptability of the translation in the TT? In other words, what are the agents that set the acceptability of a translation?

**Second**, it might seem that the Thomas-Kilman strategies work outside the text, but the conflict has its roots in the verb. The text remains ultimately the only space to found upon any translation theory, and the translator can use or modify his style whenever he feels the need to. In any conflict, the translator's mains consideration is gain and loss of meaning.

**Third**, applying such kit is apparently not always easy as all of the strategies seem to overlap each other; however, it is to mention that Vinay and Darbelnet's procedures pose similar issues although abandoned by most translators despite, to my humble opinion, their efficiency in terms of 'linguistic' and 'scientific' method.

Before introducing the translating kit, it is worth mentioning another concept introduced by Pym, that of



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decision-making. In fact, Arguing that ‘no stable consensus has emerged around a unified view of translation’<sup>1</sup>, A. Pym displaces the core conflict between ‘essentialists’ and ‘non-essentialists’ in their conception of translation, transfer of meaning or transformation of the speech act or even the text act. Avoiding the dispute, he introduces another concept, ‘decision-making’, that I think relevant to the conflict management framework I intend to introduce. However, it remains clear that the main issue in any translation is its quality.

1- The competitive style ‘approaches a conflict in a very forceful, confrontational way’ (Graham, 2008: 116). It is assertive and uncooperative. The competitive style seems to be valid for someone who is in a power position and knows that his choice is the best in a particular situation. The only disadvantage with this situation is that it creates alienation for the individual especially if he is in a less position. G. Graham provides us with some situations when to use this style:

- You have authority to make the decision, and it seems clear that this is the one best way.
- A decision has to be made quickly, and you have the power to make it.
- You feel you have no other options and you have nothing to lose.
- You are in an emergency situation where immediate decisive action is necessary.
- You can’t get a group to agree, you feel you are at an impasse, and someone must make the group move ahead.
- You have to make an unpopular decision, but action is required now, and you have the power to make that choice.’ (Graham, 2008 : 116).

In this approach, the ST is somewhat difficult and performs its authority while the translator is uncooperative because he does not make lots of efforts to find appropriate equivalences so he chooses the simplest translational solutions such as borrowing. Texts with specialized terminology difficult to translate can be a good instance. The translator’s only recourse is borrowing, to use Vinay and Darbelnet’s procedure in his direct translation. This occurs in Arabic, which is subject

to pressure under those developed languages that dominate economically, politically and intellectually. It is, in fact, facing a flood of specialized terminology because it is importing sciences and knowledge with its terminology especially that technical terminology that belongs to worldwide companies. If the ST is aggressive and shows authority and power, the translator seems to prefer peace and good relations with the text rather than create conflict and deal with it. For the translator, the 'Issue [is] unimportant, [and he] do[es]n't care about [the] outcome.' (Graham, 2008: 28) The outcome might also show interest for others. However, it remains a style to avoid conflicts for a translator. This approach is valid for the literal translation or direct translation far from interpretation or cultural equivalence in the TL, so as not to create conflicts with the text. The translator is simply content with the transfer of the apparent meaning.

2- The Accommodating Style: This style is unassertive but cooperative. It occurs when one individual tries not to assert his power or concerns and lets the other accomplish his wants. In this situation, the concern is not as big for you as for the other person. 'You might be accommodating when you feel you can't win because the other person has more power; you just give in and go along with what the other person wants.' (Graham, 2008: 119). There is a sense of sacrifice of one's own concerns, according to Thomas-Kilmann. Accommodating is used in the following situations:

- When you don't really care that much what happens
- When you want to keep the peace and maintain harmony with others
- When you feel it is more important to maintain a relationship with someone than get the matter decided your way
- When you recognize that the outcome is much more important to the other person than to you
- When you recognize that you are wrong and the other person is right
- When you have little power or little chance of winning
- When you think the other person might learn from the situation if you go along with what he wants, even though you

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don't agree with what he is doing or think he is making a mistake.' (Graham, 2008 : 120).

The accommodating style comes diagonally opposite to the competing one. It is not assertive but cooperative. It is a lose-win situation. The accommodating text is rather easy. 'It's the type of approach to use when you feel you are not losing too much by giving something up.' (Graham, 2008 : 119). The translator feels in a powerful position to perform his translational act.

3- The Collaborative Style: it is both assertive and cooperative; it is the opposite of the avoiding approach. The implication is more important and take a longer time to settle issues between persons as it deals with all 'underlying needs' that can be in opposition with the surface interests. (Graham, 2008: 121). However, it seems the most 'thoughtful' because it tries to find solutions that meets the interests of both. This style can be used in the following situations:

- When the issues are very important to both or all parties, and no one is willing to let go entirely
- When you have a close, continuing, or interdependent relationship with the other party
- When you have the time to deal with the problem, such as on a long-term project
- When both you and the other party are aware of the problem and are clear about what you want
- When both you and the other party are willing to put some thought and work into finding a solution
- When you both have the skills to articulate your concerns and to listen to what others have to say
- When you and others in the conflict have a similar amount of power, or are willing to put aside any power differences to work together as equals in coming up with a solution (Graham, 2008: 121-122).

The collaborative style used by a translator enhances both his assertiveness and collaboration. It is a win-win strategy. The translator dives deeper in the underlying system of the ST to bring up unsuspected meaning even the text does not disclose easily. There is cooperation when the translator and the ST show

similar capabilities to express the same concerns and wants. The translator needs to have the skills to work to find a solution acceptable for the ST and the TT. The collaboration style is a long-term win-win relationship with the text. Although it seems an excellent strategy, it requires a long time that the translator of economic texts especially the one working inside an economic institution does not afford to waste. It might be an excellent strategy in literary translation.

4- The Compromising Style: The compromising style is the balance between (un)assertiveness and (un)cooperation, all four all together. It stands between both dimensions: assertiveness and cooperation. The individual needs to renounce or give up some of his interests in order to get the rest of them. The same would occur to the other person. There is some mutually consenting agreement. This style might sound like the collaborating style, but that resemblance is merely at the surface level. '[C]ompromise occurs on a more superficial level. You give up something, the other person gives up something, and you come to a resolution. You are not searching for underlying needs and interests as in collaboration. You are dealing only with what people say they want.' (Graham, 2008: 122). The situations in which compromise is recommended are:

- Have different goals, and goals not too important.
- Have similar power.
- Want resolution quickly; temporary resolution okay.
- Provides short-term gain.
- A fallback position when collaboration or competition don't work.
- Compromise is better than nothing. (Graham, 2008: 28)

The comprising style does not seem to be a long term settled resolution style but sounds interesting because of the time factor.

The compromising style used by a translator seems to be an ideal style as it tries to meet a consenting agreement. It is an expediting short-term win-win relationship with the text. 'Compromise is often a good fallback or last resort for achieving a resolution.' (Graham, 2008: 124). In a globalized economy or

at least world hegemonic international companies, cultural peculiarities tend to disappear. In fact, such huge companies use common advertisements regardless of the culture of the TT for material and time gain purposes. One advertisement for different world languages. The ST (or original text) bears the seal of a production itself, as it does not mind the taste and does not respect the culture of the TT since globalization is overwhelming the world. Otherwise, there is a simple literal translation. Translators gain time. The major aim is to reach as many markets as possible for the company product with fewer expenses. This is the deal of the market economy.

5- The avoiding style is opposite of the competing/competitive style. It is neither assertive nor cooperative. The individual here does not assert himself, does not cooperate, and avoids the whole conflict in its entirety, when he feels that the object or the issues do not show real importance; otherwise, he feels he is not powerful enough to deal with it. An individual can use this style when he is 'unsure about making a decision and don't have to decide immediately', or he has not 'enough information to resolve a particular situation.' (Graham, 2008:118).

The different situations when one can use this style are:

- Tensions are too high, and you feel a need to cool down.
- The issue isn't very important to you or you feel it's objectively a trivial issue that's not worth dealing with.
- You know you can't, or probably won't, win in the conflict.
- You want to buy more time, perhaps because you need to get more information or get some assistance from others.
- The situation is complex and difficult to change, so you feel tackling it will just be a wasted effort.
- You have little power to resolve the situation or to get it resolved in a desirable way.' (Graham, 2008 : 118).

The avoiding style is both uncooperative and unassertive, and the translation issue is left as is. This is the worst of all situations for a translator. The translator ignores the main issue and does not cooperate. He does not even put a personal touch to the translation. The translator seems devoid of any power to decipher the text. He feels he cannot succeed because the text is

mute or does not communicate well or uses some vocabulary that refuses transfer as in specialized texts. The text or some words do not allow any form of cooperation. The translator does not make good efforts to perform translation as he leaves the reader look for the information, the message, or the connotation. This might occur when the translator does not understand the text, or the latter presents some ambiguities such as those belonging to the untranslatability sphere. The translator does not assert himself, avoid the whole conflict. He sometimes uses omission as a style to translation so as to avoid conflicts.

**Conclusion:**

The ‘context and the purpose’ are the sole strategy to perform a translation. The translator needs to deconstruct the type of conflicts the text poses. According to Baker ‘the context and purpose of translation will often rule some strategies and favour others.’ (Baker, 1992: 20) Baker (1992) goes on addressing the non-equivalence concepts sources and enumerates them. They fall under socio-cultural, conceptual and linguistic non-equivalences<sup>2</sup>.

Mona Baker’s context and purpose ideas facilitates the choice for any of Kilmann’s styles. There is no style better than another. Each is valid for a translation conflict situation; they may even overlap.

I have observed that the Thomas-Kilmann dimensions, notably assertiveness and cooperation coincide with mimesis and adaptation in the translational act.

If we take the Algerian case, our present cognition molded in a post-colonial ‘transition’ would inspire us towards a mimetic conception of translation. This would coincide with Norman Shapiro’s idea of ‘pane of glass’ when he ‘see[s] translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass’ (In Venuti, 1995: 01). Commenting the concept of transparency, Venuti claims that this concept provides ‘the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the “original.”’ (Venuti, 1995: 01) We think to

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understand the other, especially in our situation, there is no better way than providing his 'original' thoughts, ideas, and ideals. The immediate consequence is the invisibility of the translator. Therefore, the role of the translator is to allow the ST to be aggressive and assertive. On the other side, the translator, thus, would mind the interests of the TT in terms of culture, message and information.

### **Notes:**

1- Translating as risk management, Anthony Pym, Intercultural Studies Group, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, Spain, Version 3.5 February 11, 2015.

2- These are the culture-specific concepts, the source language concept is not lexicalized in the target language, the source language word is semantically complex, the source and target languages make different distinctions in meaning, the target language lacks a superordinate, the target language lacks a specific term (hyponym), differences in physical or interpersonal perspective, differences in expressing meaning, differences in form, differences in frequency and purpose of using specific forms, and the use of loan words in the source text. (See M. Baker, 1992:20 for extended explanation of all the non-equivalences instances). (The major example is that of Vinay and Darbelnet's borrowing and calque. The benefit of such strategy is that it enriches the TL with new lexis that might be of major importance for communication and ideas update. Besides that, the reinvigoration of language occurs with borrowing too).

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