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**Defining explicitation in translation**

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# DEFINING EXPLICITATION IN TRANSLATION

The development of descriptive translation studies in the 1980s has enabled the observation that certain linguistic phenomena typically occur in translated texts, irrespective of the language from which the text was translated. Referred to collectively as 'translation universals', such phenomena as simplification, avoidance of repetitions present in the source text, explicitation, normalization and the distinctive distribution of lexical items became the object of further study, first through the use of parallel corpora (consisting of source language texts and their target language translations) and later through comparable corpora (consisting of translated texts and original texts written in the same language for analogical pragmatic situations). Observed already in the pre-descriptive and pre-corpora period of translation studies (e.g. by Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Levý (1963), Nida (1964) and others), explicitation was one of the translation universals that attracted the greatest amount of attention from the start, both as a SL universal (explicitatory shifts between the ST and TT were studied in parallel corpora) and a TL universal (the overall degree of explicitness was compared in translations and non-translated texts in comparable corpora) – and since the formulation of the so-called 'explicitation hypothesis' by Blum-Kulka in 1985 (Blum-Kulka 1985, see below), the discourse on explicitation has become a very lively one.

Despite prolific coverage in the literature, with many papers summarising the history of the concept and its definitions, there seems to be a lack of recognition of the fact that the interpretation of the term itself varies from one researcher to another. Explicitation is spoken about as if reference were being made to the same set of phenomena while the opposite is true. The following paragraphs will attempt to clarify some of the – often reiterated – misunderstandings regarding the delimitation of explicitation and show that explicitation, as well as its counterpart, implicitation, should be recognized as prototypical categories with a core and a periphery. Our main concern will be with the explicitation hypothesis itself and the relation between explicitation, implicitation, specification/generalization and addition/omission.

While defining explicitation can be bypassed by comparable corpora studies focusing on certain selected types of explicitation (such as Olohan and Baker,

2000; or Olohan, 2001), clarification of which language phenomena are actually regarded as covered by the term is essential to any study of explicitation based on parallel corpora. Since combining both approaches will certainly benefit descriptive translation studies, issues surrounding definitions of explicitation can hardly be set aside for too long.

## The explicitation hypothesis

In order to elucidate the situation, it seems reasonable to start with a discussion of the statement probably quoted most often in this context– the so-called explicitation hypothesis, first formulated by Blum-Kulka in 1986:

> The process of translation, particularly if successful, necessitates a complex text and discourse processing. The process of interpretation performed by the translator on the source text might lead to a TL text which is more redundant than the SL text. This redundancy can be expressed by a rise in the level of cohesive explicitness in the TL text. This argument may be stated as *"the explicitation hypothesis"*, which postulates an observed cohesive explicitness from SL to TL texts regardless of the increase traceable to differences between the two linguistic and textual systems involved. It follows that explicitation is viewed here as inherent in the process of translation. (Blum-Kulka 1986: 19)

Formulating this statement in 1986, Blum-Kulka was not concerned with defining explicitation. At that point in the history of translation studies, explicitation appeared to be a fairly well-established term, grounded mainly in the prescriptive approach. Should this formulation of the so-called explicitation hypothesis be considered with a view to establishing a corresponding definitional basis for explicitation, Blum-Kulka's definition would probably have to be based on the concept of "an increase in redundancy in the TL text compared with the SL text". Blum-Kulka, however, does not specify what it is that this redundancy concerns. Another significant feature of her observation, already pointed out by Pym (2005), is that she immediately narrows her claim down to cohesive explicitness in a rather loose way: "This redundancy *can be expressed* by a rise in the level of cohesive explicitness in the TL text" (Blum-Kulka 1986: 19, emphasis RK). Blum-Kulka's concern with explicitatory shifts of cohesion is motivated by cohesion being an objectively detectable overt textual relationship, which lends itself to quantitative analysis (Blum-Kulka 1986: 23), an aspect of explicitation which has since attracted the attention of researchers (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1986; Pápai 2004; Puurtinen 2004). However, discussing Blum-Kulka's formulation of the explicitation hypothesis is essential for any discussion on definitions of explicitation, especially because it has become a strategy for a number of authors writing on this translation universal to avoid any strict definition of explicitation

by referring to Blum-Kulka's statement, concerning cohesive explicitation only, and then extending their discussion to explicitation in general.

Blum-Kulka's explicitation hypothesis thus presupposes a shared knowledge of what the term refers to. Was this assumption justified, or is there reason to worry about the accuracy of usage of this term?

### Specification and Generalization

Points on which authors tend to differ include especially the relation between explicitation and implicitation on the one hand and specification/generalization and addition/omission on the other.

Nida (1964), for instance, seems to list explicitation as one of his techniques of addition, i.e. he appears to regard addition as a hyperonym to explicitation (as noted e.g. by Klaudy (1998) or Perego (2003)), while a detailed study of his account of the techniques of adjustment in translation shows that equating explicitations with additions (and at least some of subtractions with implicitations) is a more accurate description of his approach (Kamenická, 2007). Øverås (1988), on the other hand, views addition as just one of the strategies of explicitation. Other authors mostly leave the relation between these concepts unresolved.

This is, nevertheless, not the case with Kinga Klaudy. Although her contributions to the discourse on explicitation are numerous, we will focus on her recent account of explicitation (and implicitation). Klaudy and Károly (2005), aware of the difficulties inherent in defining these terms, identify explicitation and implicitation as two broad concepts covering a number of obligatory and optional transfer operations:

> Explicitation takes place, for example, *when a SL unit with a more general meaning is replaced by a TL unit with a more specific meaning*; when the meaning of a SL unit is distributed over several units in the TL; when new meaningful elements appear in the TL text; when one sentence in the ST is divided into two or several sentences in the TT; or, when SL phrases are extended or "raised" to clause level in the TT, etc.

> Implicitation occurs, for instance, *when a SL unit with a specific meaning is replaced by a TL unit with a more general meaning*; when translators combine the meanings of several SL words in one TL word; when meaningful lexical elements of the SL text are dropped in the TL text; when two or more sentences in the ST are conjoined into one sentence in the TT; or, when ST clauses are reduced to phrases in the TT, etc. (Klaudy and Károly 2005: 15, emphasis RK)

Among other things, like Øverås (and unlike Leuven-Zwart (1989, 1990)), they thus subsume specification and generalization under explicitation and implicita-

tion, associating specification with explicitation and generalization with impliciation.

This is, in my opinion, an association whose validity is limited. Although the observation may be accurate in some cases such as (1) or (2), ST/TT units where the connection is reversed can also be found.

(1)  ST:   You could tell the men from Auburn by <u>the noise</u> they made. (*Falconer*)
      TT:   Trestance z Auburnu člověk poznal podle <u>řinčení</u>.
      TT*:  You could tell the convicts from Auburn by <u>the rattle</u>.

(2)  ST:   I <u>told</u> Swallow that nobody would come to Rummidge, but he wouldn't listen. (*Small World*)
      TT:   Já jsem Swallowa <u>varoval</u> – že do Papridge nikdo nepřijede – ale nedal si říct.
      TT*[1]: I <u>warned</u> Swallow – that nobody would come to Rummidge – but he wouldn't listen.

A number of examples where a more general rather than more specific reference results in explicitation can be found in the category of the so-called pragmatic (cultural) explicitation:

(3)  ST:   The job of check-in clerk at <u>Heathrow</u>, or any other airport, is not a glamorous or particularly satisfying one. (*Small World*)
      TT:   Registrovat cestující u přepážky na letišti, ať už v <u>Londýně</u> nebo kdekoli jinde, není atraktivní ani zvlášť uspokojivé zaměstnání.
      TT*:  Checking in passengers at an airport counter, whether in <u>London</u> or anywhere else, is not an attractive or particularly satisfying job.

At the time when the Czech translation of Lodge's novel was published (1988), air travel was still very much the privilege of a few select people in the Czech Republic and quite a number of Czech readers might thus have had problems identifying Heathrow as a London airport. The use of the more general toponym therefore reduced the processing effort on the part of the TL readers and the translation may be regarded as involving an explicitatory shift compared with a version preserving "Heathrow" as the identification of the place.

A similar illustration of an explicitation based on a more general meaning contrary to the assumed association between explicitation and specification may be:

(4)  ST:   On the shelf under her counter she kept <u>a Bills and Moon romance</u> to read in those slack periods when there were no passengers to deal with. (*Small World*)
      TT:   V přihrádce pod přepážkou měla vždy <u>nějaký zamilovaný román</u>, aby si přestávkách mezi náporem cestujících mohla číst.

>TT*:  On the shelf under the counter she always had <u>a romance</u> to be able to read in slack periods between one surge of passengers and another.

But to insist that the connection between specification/generalization and explicitation/implicitation is reversed in occurrences where some element of culture is involved while the specification~explicitation and generalization~implicitation equations hold true for other instances would be an over-simplification, for counterexamples are not too difficult to find.

Most people would probably agree that "that kind of man" is a more general reference than "Howard" as far as a fictional character of that name in *Small World* by David Lodge is concerned. Yet

(5)  ST:  No one can figure out how she can stand being married to <u>Howard</u>. (*Small World*)
     TT:  Nikdo nechápe, jak může <u>vedle takového mužského</u> vydržet.
     TT*: No one can figure out how she can stand living with <u>that kind of man</u>."

can be analyzed as an occurrence of explicitation where the speaker's attitude towards the said Howard is explicitated. (He is referred to as Howard in the Czech translation shortly before and the fact that he is the woman's spouse is clear from the co-text, too.)

Generalizing explicitations may also be found in instances where abstract meanings expressed in the ST by relatively long stretches of text within relatively complicated sentences are "summed up" and shortened in Czech:

(6)  ST:  "He is the most learned man who knows the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience, and that, <u>having been handed down through the greatest number of intermediate stages</u>, is the most full of uncertainty, difficulties and contradictions." (*Small World*)
     TT:  „Nejučenější je ten, kdo má nejvíc vědomostí o věcech co nejvzdálenějších běžnému životu a opravdovému pozorování, tedy o věcech nejméně upotřebitelných a nejméně ověřitelných zkušeností, o takových, které jsou <u>i po nejdelším zkoumání</u> plné nejistot, nejasností a rozporů."
     TT*: "The most learned man is the one who knows the most of things most removed from common life and actual observation, that is of things least practically utilizable and least verifiable by experience, those that even <u>after the longest examination</u> are full of uncertainty, difficulties and contradictions."

In the translation of the quotation from Hazzlit, processing effort is reduced compared with the ST version containing the longer and more specific segment and

the meaning of the whole utterance becomes more explicit. The occurrence can be regarded as involving both explicitation and simplification, as is sometimes the case with explicitation.

Generalizing explicitations not involving cultural references, however, need not be restricted to abstract meanings or complicated syntax, but may equally well involve 1:1 shifts, as in:

(7)  ST:   As he spoke they both heard a small, muffled explosion – the sound, distinctive and unmistakable, of a bottle of duty-free liquor hitting <u>the stone composition floor</u> of an airport concourse and shattering inside its plastic carrier bag; also a cry of "Shit!" and a dismayed, antiphonal "Oh, Howard!" (*Small World*)

  TT:   Vtom oba uslyšeli zdušenou explozi – výrazný, nezaměnitelný zvuk láhve s bezcelným alkoholem, která se v tašce z umělé hmoty rozkřápla o <u>tvrdou podlahu</u> letištní haly – a zároveň výkřik „Doprdele!" a konsternovaný protivýkřik „Ale Howarde!"

  TT*:  Suddenly, they both heard a muffled explosion – the distinctive, unmistakable sound of a bottle of duty-free liquor that shattered inside a plastic bag against <u>the hard floor</u> of the/an airport concourse – and a simultaneous cry of "Shit!" and a dismayed counter-cry "Oh, Howard!"

The shift in example (7) replaces a specification of the material of the floor with a general property most relevant with respect to the event presented in the sentence as part of the flow of events in the narrative (the shattering of the bottle). Since the material specification in the ST has the status of framing information in the message as termed by Gile (1995: 54–5), it is mainly the properties of the material relevant for the accident being described that the reader will infer from the surface structure of the sentence and use for processing the text – which entitles us to regard the shift as an explicitation.

These examples show that contrary to the assumption common to approaches to explicitation that acknowledge the existence of a relation between explicitation/implicitation and specification/generalization, explicitation cannot be universally paired with specification as opposed to generalization – and similarly, implicitation cannot always be associated with generalization, although examples of specifying implicitations are harder to find, especially due to the generally lower frequency of implicitation in translation.


## Addition and Omission

Another pair of concepts referring to translation procedures for adjusting the presentation of information in the TT is addition/omission. While prescriptive approaches to translation studies did not have to bother with situating the borderline between explicitation and addition on the one hand and implicitation and

omission on the other, the issue certainly is of some concern to descriptive translation research.

The distinction between the two pairs of terms is closely related to the concept of retrievability from context: we speak of implicitation or omission depending on whether the information that marks the locus of the translation shift in the ST surface structure can or cannot be retrieved from the TT context respectively, and similarly, we speak of explicitation or addition depending on whether the information that marks the locus of the translation shift in the TT surface structure can or cannot be retrieved from the ST context respectively.

Retrievability from the co-text, or the lack of it, are certainly less disputable, although deciding which of the terms should be applied to a certain translation shift may be complicated by the question of how much co-text is allowed for a shift to qualify as explicitation/implicitation. (The relative salience of the information present in the co-text and the manner of its presentation – its explicit or implicit status – may influence the answer.)

Some cases of omissions are easily identifiable (the information is not present anywhere in the co-text):

(8)   ST:   He was raking leaves <u>in yard Y</u> when the PA said that 734-508-32 had a visitor. (*Falconer*)
      TT:   Hrabal zrovna listí <u>na dvoře</u>, když megafonem hlásili, že 734-508-32 má návštěvu.
      TT*:  He was raking leaves <u>in the yard</u> when they were informed through the public address system that 734-508-32 had a visitor.

Other shifts are, on the other hand, easily identifiable as implicitations:

(9)   ST:   There were no pictures on the walls of the visitors' room but there were <u>four signs</u> that said: NO SMOKING. NO WRITING. NO EXCHANGE OF OBJECTS. VISITORS ARE ALLOWED ONE KISS. (*Falconer*)
      TT:   Na stěnách návštěvní místnosti nevisely žádné obrazy, ale byly tu <u>nápisy</u>: KOUŘENÍ ZAKÁZÁNO. ZÁKAZ PSANÍ. ZÁKAZ VYMĚŇOVÁNÍ PŘEDMĚTŮ. NÁVŠTĚVNÍKŮM JE POVOLEN JEDEN POLIBEK.
      TT*:  There were no pictures on the walls of the visitors' room, but there were <u>signs</u>: NO SMOKING. NO WRITING. NO EXCHANGE OF OBJECTS. VISITORS ARE ALLOWED ONE KISS.

We may thus be able to formulate a rule of thumb to distinguish between omissions and implicitations: Unlike omissions, implicitations allow a non-negligible likelihood that the segment in question will occur in a back-translation. In other words, the likelihood will be greater than for other choices of competing elements in the same "class"/position in the sentence.

The rule will enable us to identify the following as an instance of omission:

(10) ST:   The meeting was on the lower floor of <u>a new office building</u>. (*Falconer*)

TT:    Schůze se konala v přízemí <u>jakési úřední budovy</u>.

TT*:  The meeting was on the ground floor of <u>an office building</u>.

Given the TT and pushed to fill in an adjective modifying "office building", we might select any other adjective such as "old", "dreary", "noisy", "large" etc. with just the same likelihood. But what would our assessment of (11) be?

(11) ST:   He had recently completed a Master's dissertation on the poetry of T. S. Eliot, but the opening words of *The Waste Land* might, with equal probability, have been passing through the heads of any one of the fifty-odd men and women, <u>of varying ages</u>, who sat or slumped in the raked rows of seats in the same lecture-room. (*Small World*)

TT:    Nedávno napsal diplomovou práci o poezii T. S. Eliota, ale úvodní slova Pustiny by právě tak mohla prolétnout hlavou kohokoli z padesátky mužů a žen, kteří seděli či umdlévali na křivolace seřazených židlích v této přednáškové místnosti.

TT*:  He had recently completed a thesis on the poetry of T. S. Eliot, but the opening words of *The Waste Land* could just as well have crossed the mind of any of the fifty-odd men and women who sat or droopped on irregularly arranged chairs in this lecture room.

One argument for classifying the reduction in the TT as implication might be that unless specified otherwise, we would expect such an audience (of a conference on literary theory, or any conference at that) to be of varying age. And not only that, we would be able to further specify that age range as something around the mid-twenties to advanced age, relying on our personal or mediated experience. The implicitated (?) segment does not say anything contrary to what would be expected. But is that enough to qualify the shift as an implication?
A similar example, (12), might help us clarify the issue:

(12) ST:   The conferees had, by that time, acquainted themselves with the accommodation provided in <u>one of the University's halls of residence</u>, a building hastily erected in 1969, at the height of the boom in higher education, and now, only ten years later, looking much the worse for wear. (*Small World*)

TT:    Krátce předtím zjistili, že univerzita je ubytovala <u>v kolejní budově</u> chvatně postavené v roce 1969, za největší konjunktury vysokoškolského vzdělání, a teď, po pouhých deseti letech, značně zchátralé.

TT*:  They had shortly before found that the University accommodated them <u>in a hall of residence</u>, hastily built in 1969, at the peak of the

> boom in higher education, and considerably dilapidated now, only ten years later.

The expectation certainly is for a university (unless it is a really miniscule one) to have more than one hall of residence. But again, should the mere fact that the implicitated (?) information does not preclude the inference indicate that the inference will be made at all?

My claim is that the concept of frames (Petruck 1996), previously used in literature on translation, for example, by Neubert and Shreve (1992: 59–65) or Gaddis-Rose (1997: 79–81), which conveniently highlights the contribution of word meaning to sentence and text interpretation, may be useful in finding the answer. To avoid confusion, I will consistently refer to Fillmore's later use of the term 'frame', in which frames were understood as cognitive structuring devices indexed by words associated with them that are part of particular texts, and evoked in the service of understanding – as opposed to his earlier approach contrasting frames as linguistic entities with 'scenes' as cognitive, conceptual or experiential entities (Petruck 1996: 1). Within this view, words presented as part of the text evoke the frame/s in the mind of the speaker/hearer while the interpreter of the text (translator, reader) invokes the particular frames on the basis of the words. The concept itself is an extension of the concept of case frames, characterizing small abstract 'scenes' or 'situations' in case grammar. The argument associated with case frames was that "to understand the semantic structure of the verb it [is] necessary to understand the properties of such schematized scenes" (Fillmore 1982: 115, qtd. in Petruck 1986). The concept of frames implies, among other things, that knowing the meaning of any of the words evoking a particular frame requires access to that frame, and that knowing the meaning of any of these words means, in a sense, knowing the meaning of all of them. In a similar context, Neubert and Shreve (1992: 56–9) speak of different kinds of co-presence: from immediate co-presence to prior physical co-presence and potential physical co-presence and, especially, linguistic co-presence on all of which frames may be based.

The frame invoked by the segment "v kolejní budově/in a hall of residence" in the TT in the above example is a complex and semantically rich frame of studying at a university, including various forms of accommodation in the place of study, implying that the participants of the conference are accommodated in rooms inhabited by students during the term. The elements of the frame will include a student, a university, a subject of study, a university teacher – and potentially some others. Discussing the Commercial Transaction Frame, Petruck (1996: 1) distinguishes between elements of a frame (a buyer, a seller, goods, money) and words indexing or evoking different parts of the frame (e.g. verbs such as buy, sell, pay, spend, cost, and charge). It is, however, not clear what property would it take for a frame-indexing word to qualify as an element of that frame, too.

Any more detailed discussion of frames must take into account the fact that frames are structured entities with elements that tend to be more central/salient

(i.e. linked to the frame by a salient contiguity) and thus likely to be mentioned in any account of that particular frame, and elements which are rather peripheral/ less salient (i.e. linked to the frame by a less salient contiguity) and may or need not be invoked depending on the indexing expressions. Individual and cultural differences in frames must not be disregarded, either. One person's frame related to study at a university will be more developed than that of another speaker of the same language if their direct and indirect experience in that domain differ substantially. The fact that frames are inseparably attached to culture/s is hard to overlook in discussing translation. The idea that a university is likely to have several halls of residence is likely to be not very central to the university study frame – which relativizes the classification of the segment quoted in (12) as an oc- currence of implicitation. The more central/salient an element of a frame indexed in the text to that frame, the more legitimate the claim of the segment to the status of implicitation as opposed to omission – and vice versa: the more peripheral/less salient the element of the frame indexed by the textual cue, the more appropriate the classification of the corresponding shift as an omission (as opposed to impli- citation). Explicitation and addition are in an analogical relationship.

Another example, perhaps even closer to the "omission pole" on the scale from implicitation to omission, describes a situation experienced by Philip Swallow in Turkey:

(13)  ST:   At private parties there would be food and drink somehow scrounged
            or saved in spite of the <u>endemic shortages</u> – at what cost and domestic
            sacrifice Philip hated to think. (*Small World*)

      TT:   Jídlo a pití na soukromé večírky vždycky nějak sehnali nebo ušetřili
            vzdor <u>zásobovacím potížím</u> – Philip raději nemyslel na to, za jakou
            cenu a s jakými rodinnými oběťmi.

      TT*:  Despite <u>insufficiency of supply</u>, they always somehow managed to
            get or save food and drink for private parties – Philip preferred not to
            think at what cost and sacrifice of their families [this was].

Although the meaning of "endemic", i.e. "of or relating to a disease (or anything resembling a disease) constantly present to greater or lesser extent in a particular locality" or "originating where it is found" (The Free Dictionary), fits the Short- age Frame well and most of it can be inferred from the frame upon invocation by "zásobovací potíže/insufficiency of supply" as the indexing expression (since shortages are generally conceptualized as unpleasant, linked to a smaller or great- er geographic area and potentially recurring), the collocational – metaphorical – association with disease is likely to be assessed as not very salient within the frame and not likely to be invoked without an explicit indexing expression; the translation shift is therefore more likely to be assessed as an omission rather than an implicitation, although the latter cannot be regarded as totally inappropriate.

Petruck (1996: 6) admits that the "practical matters" that Frame Semantics research still needs to address include determining the contents of a frame, deter-

mining the boundaries of a frame, and determining how frames interact. All these issues are of great interest to translation studies, too. Even before more is known in this respect, we may already admit that the borderline between explicitation/ implicitation and addition/omission is fuzzy and suggest that the relative salience/centrality of the aspects of the frame indexed by words in the ST or TT segment will determine the position of the translation shift on the cline between implicitation/omission or explicitation/addition respectively.

## Conclusion

All of the parts of the discussion above point to the intrinsic difficulties involved in delimiting explicitation, suggesting what was noted by Englund Dimitrova (2005: 33–41) as the first among the people involved in research on explicitation in translation studies:

> "at the present time in studies of translation, a host of phenomena with certain aspects in common are grouped together under the term "explicitation", which tends to be used as a kind of umbrella term to label certain phenomena of differences between the ST and the TT which seem to be permissible in translation." (Englund Dimitrova 2005: 40)

I would like to go one step further, arguing that explicitation is a prototype category, i.e. a category the membership of which cannot be defined by a single property shared by all of its members, but whose members are connected by family resemblances. (For a discussion of prototype categories in translatology see, for example, Halverson 1998). What translation studies can do instead of adding to the rather futile attempts at constructing definitions around single/individual attributes of explicitation is describe the centre and the periphery of the category, which, to my knowledge, has not yet been done.

Textual explicitness (in non-translated texts) was discussed by Hausenblas (1997: 46–53), who comments on the semi-terminological nature of the concept and specifies its relation to other concepts such as lack of ambiguity/ambiguity, denotation/connotation, direct/indirect form of expression, text/subtext, completeness/incompleteness of expression, and implication. None of the binary oppositions was found to stand in a clear-cut relation to explicitation/implicitation. Having undertaken this effort to delimit explicitation/implicitation with respect to phenomena that seem akin to it, we will perhaps learn better to appreciate one of the conclusions of Frame Semantics, this time applied to explicitation/implicitation as a twin concept rather than its individual instances: that in Frame Semantics with its U-semantics (semantics of understanding), a word is defined in relation to its background frame, not in relation to other words (Petruck 1996: 3).

## Notes

[1]    The asterisk marks a back-translation by RK – a close translation of the Czech text back to English, designed to highlight the translation shift.

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