ALBERT VERMES

EXPLICITATION PROCEDURES IN TRANSLATION

1. Introduction

There has been a fair amount of research done on explicitation in translation in the past sixty years. More or less detailed reviews of these research efforts can be found, for instance, in Klaudy (1998), Laviosa (2002), Olohan (2004) and Murtisari (2016). In this present study[1] my aim is to take a look at only some of the most essential questions concerning explicitation, including its nature, how it can be realized, and its causes in translation. After defining explicitation and expliciteness, I will present the place of explicitation in the toolbox of the translator, after which I will take account of the possible causes of performing explicitation and of the different types of explicitation that can be distinguished as a result.

2. Explicitation and expliciteness in translation

The concept of *explicitation* in translation was introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet ([1958] 1995) in the following way:

> A stylistic translation technique which consists of making explicit in the target language what remains implicit in the source language because it is apparent from either the context or the situation. (Vinay and Darbelnet [1958] 1995: 342)

When explicitation occurs, it may do so in order to ensure that the target text can be made sense of and that its interpretation does not require more effort from the reader than is appropriate. As Pápay (2002: 488) says:

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> [The] translator, in order to make the interpretation easier/more secure, spells out/brings to the surface certain pieces of information in the target text which in the original are non-explicit: implied, allusive, or ambiguous.

In other words, certain elements of content that the reader of the original can only access through inference are included in the target text by the translator in linguistically encoded form. The ensuing increase in the level of *expliciteness* of the translated text thus means that it contains more linguistically coded information than the original text.

The amount of linguistically coded information, however, cannot be directly related to the number of words in the text. According to Heltai ([2011] 2014: 171): "The more linguistic elements or, rather, the more independent linguistic elements (free morphemes) there are in a text, the more explicit the text is" (my translation). While this statement may hold true in many cases, it cannot be taken as a general rule. If, for instance, the Hungarian expression *paprikás krumpli* is translated into English as *Hungarian paprika potatoes*, the English expression will, as a result of the insertion of a lexical element, contain more free morphemes and, also, more information. But if the Hungarian expression öcsém is translated into English as *my younger brother*, while the English phrase contains more free morphemes, it still cannot be considered as more explicit than the original as the amount of linguistically coded information has not changed. The difference is that in the English expression the same amount of information is distributed over more free morphemes than in the original. The reverse statement does not hold either: an increase in explciteness is not necessarily coupled with an increase in the number of linguistic elements. For example, if the English word *brother* is translated into Hungarian as the more concrete *báty* ('older brother') in a particular text, the number of words does not change and yet the translation is more explicit, as it encodes more information. The point thus is not an increase of the number of free morphemes but an increase of information encoded in the text and, as a result, a decrease in the amount of inferencing necessary in working out the content of the utterance (the message).

3. Explicitation as a supercategory

Klaudy (2004: 72) considers explicitation (and its opposite, implicitation) to be a "supercategory" in the sense that it can be realized with the help of several different translational operations. Such operations include lexical concretization, splitting and addition, and grammatical concretization, splitting and addition. (The opposite of explicitation, implicitation, on the other hand, can be realized through lexical generalization, contraction or omission, and grammatical generalization, contraction or omission.) Concretization and addition clearly result in an increase of linguistically coded information. However, as we have seen above through the example of a lexical item, this is not necessarily the case with splitting. And this holds true for grammatical splitting as well. Consider the following example: *Az autó megállt, de senki nem szállt ki belőle. → The car stopped. But no-one got out of it.* The translation breaks up the original sentence into two, but this does not result in any increase of information. Thus, while there may be cases when splitting leads to explicitation, it does not necessarily do so. What is for certain is that explicitation (and implicitation) can be realized by applying various lexical and grammatical translational operations and can thus rightly be called their supercategory.

At this point it might be worth considering the following terminological question. As we have seen above, Vinay and Darbelnet ([1958] 1995) call explicitation a translational technique, while other authors refer to it as a shift or operation. In fact, we can call it anything as long as it is clear what exactly we mean by explicitation, but it may be helpful if we can agree on using a term that can relatively clearly characterize its nature. If we agree with Klaudy (1994) that concretization, splitting, addition etc. are lexical or grammatical *operations*, and if we agree that explicitation and implicitation are supercategories of them, representing a higher level in the hierarchy of translational actions, then for the sake of terminological clarity we should not refer to explicitation and implicitation as operations but, rather, as something else. For instance, they could be called, as is done by Vinay and Darbelnet ([1958] 1995), translational techniques. The word *technique* refers to the method or the skill of applying materials and procedures needed to achieve a particular goal. In this general sense, explicitation (and implicitation) may rightly be called a translational technique. As we will see, however, explicitation has various forms, and it is the totality of these different forms that we can describe as a *technique*. The various individual forms of explicitation, I suggest, could be referred to by the term *procedure*.

4. Causes of explicitation in translation

In translation, i.e. in bilingual interpretive communication, the secondary communicator (the translator – and for ease of expression, let us assume from now on that it is a female translator) re-encodes the message (her interpretation of the source text) in the target language with the aim of creating a target text that optimally resembles the original (Gutt 1991: 101). She may run into several obstacles in doing this.

One is that she has to use a language (lexical and grammatical system) different from the original, in which "expressive possibilities are different" (Heltai [2011] 2014: 174). What is obligatory to express in one language may not be so in another, and vice versa. To illustrate this with a trivial example: while there is only one third person singular personal pronoun in Hungarian (*ő*), in English we need to make a choice between the masculine and the feminine form (*he* or *she*). This means that in translating from Hungarian into English we have to encode more information in the target text, making the translation more explicit than the original.

The second obstacle is that differences can be observed not only between the linguistic systems as such but also between habitual ways of language use and text organization (cohesion-making). For instance, while in English present participle clauses are used quite frequently, Hungarian speakers seem to prefer finite dependent clauses, in which the conjunction and the finite verb encode more information, i.e. are more explicit, than the corresponding English form: *Knowing that…* → *Mivel tudta, hogy…* ('As [he/she] knew that...')

The third obstacle is that the target reader's cognitive environment (Sperber – Wilson 1986: 39), including all the assumptions that the reader is able to formulate in his or her mind at a given moment, is different in a typical translational situation from that of the source reader, to some degree at least. Thus the translator has mostly to work in a secondary communication situation (Gutt 1991: 73), in which some of the contextual assumptions necessary for the interpretation of the source text are not readily available to the target reader, who would therefore not be able to infer certain pieces of information. In such a situation the translator, aiming at optimal resemblance, can make available the inaccessible contextual information in linguistically coded form, through explicitation.

Finally, according to Klaudy (1999), there are cases of explicitation that cannot be seen as motivated by any of the above reasons but follow instead from the characteristics of the translation process. Klaudy thinks that since translators are keen on ensuring the interpretability of the target text, they are inclined to perform explicitation even when it would otherwise seem unmotivated. These different possible causes of explicitation are described in a lucidly systematic way and illustrated in detail with examples in Heltai ([2003] 2014).

5. Types of explicitation

Klaudy (1999: 12–13) distinguishes four types of explicitation, based on the fundamental causes explained above. (1) *Obligatory explicitation*, which is made necessary by differences between linguistic systems, and without which no linguistically correct target text could be produced. (2) *Optional explicitation*, caused by differences in norms of language use and text organization, which does not influence the linguistic correctness of the text but can influence its conformity to readers' expectations. (3) *Pragmatic explicitation*, also being a form of optional explicitation, which is performed because of differences between the background knowledge of the source and the target reader. (4) *Translation-inherent explicitation*, which is motivated by the nature of the translation process and the translator's inclination to be on the safe side in ensuring the interpretability of the text. As obligatory and optional explicitations are caused by differences between linguistic systems and usage norms, these can be regarded as language-specific procedures. Pragmatic and translation-inherent explicitations, on the other hand, are motivated by the circumstances of the secondary communication situation.

Heltai ([2003] 2014: 141–142, 2014: 183) suggests a somewhat different classification for the various types of explicitation. He makes a difference between obligatory and optional explicitations, breaking them down into the following categories:

Obligatory explicitation:
– linguistic (grammatical, lexical)
– text organizational (cohesive)

Optional explicitation:
– linguistic (grammatical, lexical)
– cohesive
– pragmatic (inserting pragmatic particles, explicating inferred meanings, explicit marking of illocution, adding background assumptions needed for the interpretation of the text)
– translation-inherent explicitation

Compared with Klaudy's system, there is a significant difference: in Heltai's classification pragmatic and translation-inherent explicitations are always optional, meaning that their application is always a function of the translator's decision, while linguistic and cohesive explicitations can be either obligatory or optional.

It is a question whether there are in fact such cases when it is obligatory to perform explicitation in order to ensure the cohesion of the text (by, for instance, inserting a conjunction). As far as I am concerned, I doubt this. It would mean that there are cases when the translator has no choice in a question concerning textual organization, explicitation being the only acceptable solution. This would entail that there are rules of textual organization, which is obviously not true. We can only talk about rules (i.e. a lack of choice) at the level of grammar. Heltai (2004: 416) himself says: "Rules primarily concern phonological and grammatical structure, while on other levels of language use there are norms rather than rules" (my translation – A. V.). Thus on the level of textual organization we are never faced with a necessity to conform to a rule (where explicitation is the only good solution), but with a need to choose from among a range of possible solutions. Of course, explicitation may be the preferred solution, i.e. the norm, but there may always occur such communication situations in which following the norm is not necessarily the best solution.

Another question concerns whether it is always possible to clearly distinguish obligatory from optional explicitation. Heltai ([2003] 2014: 139) notes that it is not always possible to tell one from the other. This is obviously true and follows from the fact that there is no clear dividing line between linguistic rules and norms. As Heltai (2004: 417) points out:

> [I]f a norm is considered to be a prototype concept, which at one end has as its peripheral members obligatory rules that are observed in a linguistic community without socio-regional restrictions (Tolcsvai 1998: 49–50), then at the other end of the scale it has conventional (unsanctioned but usual) forms of language use, including textual norms. The transition between rules and norms, on the one hand, and norms and conventions, on the other, is continuous. (My translation – A. V.)

There are thus such cases when it is not obvious whether the translator has a choice or not. If she does not perform explicitation, no rule will be broken and, yet, her solution may still be unacceptable because "it happens that explicitation is not obligatory, but if it is not carried out, it makes the translated text unintelligible or stylistically objectionable" (Heltai [2003] 2014: 183, my translation). Despite such transitory cases the distinction between obligatory and optional explicitations can be maintained with the provision that they are not absolute but prototypical categories.

Robin (2013) offers a modified system of explicitation procedures, based on the concepts of norm-governed and strategic explicitation, introduced by Englund Dimitrova (2005).

In Englund Dimitrova's interpretation, *norm-governed explicitation* is a procedure that can be considered as a norm because it occurs regularly in translation between particular language pairs and in particular text types. *Strategic explicitation* is a conscious procedure that the translator performs to solve particular problems, based on her interpretation of the text. These categories are broadly compatible with Klaudy's (1999) system: obligatory and optional explicitations (taking rules as a peripheral case of norms) can be regarded as norm-governed, while pragmatic and translation-inherent explicitations as strategic procedures. Based on this, Robin (2013: 52) suggests the following categories:

> *Obligatory explicitation*: a procedure made necessary by morphological, syntactic or semantic differences between languages. Without performing the explicitation, the translator could not produce a linguistically correct target language utterance.
>
> *Norm-motivated explicitation*: an optional procedure motivated by differences in language use, where the translator has a choice whether to perform it or not, although the text would not conform to target language usage conventions and target reader expectations without it.
>
> *Editorial explicitation*: an optional text-editing procedure with the help of which the secondary communicator intends to optimize the informational content, linguistic explicitness and processability of the text, based on the context.

Obligatory explicitation is identical with the category of the same name in Klaudy (1999). Norm-motivated explicitation can be linked with Heltai's linguistic and text-organizational optional procedures. Finally, editorial explicitation would cover optional pragmatic and translation-inherent procedures. This reorganization of the system of explicitations can be accepted since the cause of pragmatic and translation-inherent explicitations is the same: without performing them, the translator could not produce an optimally relevant target text in the given secondary communication situation. Thus I think that Klaudy's translation-inherent explicitation goes back to the same cause as pragmatic explicitation and there is in fact no difference between them.

Translation-inherent explicitation as an independent category is also rejected by Becher (2010) on account of the fact that every instance of explicitation can be explained by some other factor. On the other hand, Heltai ([2011] 2014: 175) leaves the question open for the following reason:

> In order to be able to decide, we would need to compare the types of explicitation that occur in translation to those in other types of communication, including monolingual and bilingual communication and intralingual translation. This way we could decide which are the forms of explicitation that are characteristic primarily of translation. (My translation – A. V.)

In my view, however, even such comparisons would not be able to provide evidence for the existence of translation-inherent explicitations. Even if we can show that certain types of explicitation are more frequent in translation than in other acts of communication, this would still not prove that the *cause* of the explicitation is different than in other cases. The difference in frequency could also be the result of the *factor* causing the explicitation being more characteristic of translation than of other forms of communication. For example, as translation typically takes place in a secondary communication situation, this fact may be the cause of several instances of explicitation that are characteristic of translation. However, as Heltai ([2009] 2014) points out, explicitations performed because of differences in readers' cognitive environments is not exclusively characteristic of the translation procedure:

> It is likely that **explicitation is generally characteristic of communication** in every case when we interpret an earlier utterance in **a secondary communication situation** for an audience having **a different cognitive environment**, irrespective of whether the interpreting takes place in the same or in a different language. (Heltai [2009] 2014: 33, bold as in the original; my translation – A. V.)

Thus it is presumably not the case that translators as such are inclined to explicitate but that there is a more general phenomenon in the background. And this is that every communicator intends to ensure the optimal relevance of her utterance to the addressee.

Heltai ([2003] 2014: 147) offers the following example to illustrate a possible case of translation-inherent explicitation (italics as in the original):

> It is not commonly known that Charles Darwin intended to become a clergyman when he studied at Cambridge, or that the Church of England honored him with burial in Westminster Abbey near Isaac Newton.
>
> *Kevesen tudják, hogy Charles Darwin eredetileg papnak készült, amikor Cambridge-ben hittudományt tanult;* ***amikor pedig meghalt****, az anglikán egyház a Westminster Apátságban temette el, Isaac Newton sírja közelében*.

He argues that we cannot identify a difference between cultural schemata here since people are buried in both cultures, English and Hungarian, when they have died. (It would be difficult to argue with this point.) Consequently, the addition of the expression in bold type could be explained by the translator's inclination to explicitate. However, there is nothing to prove that this addition took place as a result of the translation situation. It might as well be the case that this translator has this inclination as part of his or her general style of communication, and would thus be more explicit than others even in a monolingual communication situation in order to make sure that his or her utterances are optimally relevant. In sum, I think it is quite likely that the merging of pragmatic and translation-inherent explicitation into one common category by Robin is well-founded.

The only problem here is the term that she chose to employ. The term *editorial explicitation* does not seem to be adequate. The other two terms (obligatory and norm-motivated) refer to the cause of the explicitation: namely that they are performed by the translator because of the existence of a linguistic rule or of a language usage norm in the target language. If we want to use a term that fits better into this line, we can return to the term *pragmatic* explicitation, originally suggested by Klaudy (1999). This term clearly indicates that such explicitations are carried out because of pragmatic reasons.

Finally, I would like to note that eventually even decisions about following rules and norms are motivated by pragmatic considerations in the sense that it is always on the basis of the given communication situation and informative intention that the translator chooses to use particular linguistic forms. She can use grammatical or ungrammatical forms, forms that do or do not conform to norms, or can even decide to omit elements (implicitation). As a result, it would seem more adequate to use the term *rule-motivated* explicitation, instead of *obligatory* explicitation. As a matter of fact, later, in her doctoral dissertation, Robin (2014: 50) also decided to use this term. Eventully, then, based on the cause of the explicitation we can distinguish three explicitation procedures: *rule-motivated explicitation*, *norm-motivated explicitation* and *pragmatic explicitation*.

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