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PRAGMATIC EXPLICITATION IN TRANSLATION

1. Introduction

This study[1] is a summary of how phenomena of translational explicitation can be described with the help of the conceptual framework provided by relevance theory. It argues that within this framework translational explicitation can be explained in a natural manner as a particular means of ensuring the relevance of the target text in a secondary communication situation and that in this sense all explicitations are motivated by pragmatic considerations.

In the past decades, several researchers have devoted attention to the problems of explicitation. These research efforts are summarized in a more or less detailed manner in, for instance, Klaudy (1998), Laviosa (2002), Olohan (2004) and Murtisari (2016). Various questions of explicititation in a relevance-theoretic framework are discussed in Heltai (2003, 2005, 2009 and 2011). A brief overview of the concept, causes and types of translational explicitation can be found in Vermes (2019).

The paper is built up in the following way. The next section introduces the concept of explicitness in relevance-theoretic terms. Section 3 defines translational explicitation and discusses the question of what changes concerning the level of explicitness in the target text may occur as a result of explicitation. Section 4 describes what essential goals explicitation may have in translation. Section 5 explains what causes can lead to the application of explicitation procedures. The concluding section summarizes the most important points and raises some further questions.

2. Explicitness in linguistic communication

In interpreting a linguistic utterance, the audience has to infer the communicator's informative intention, i.e. the set of assumptions intended to be communicated, by combining the linguistic meaning (*logical form*) of the utterance with an appropriate

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context. The first step is the decoding of the linguistic meaning of the utterance. Since linguistically encoded meanings are often ambiguous, the process must also involve *disambiguation*, i.e. choosing the semantic representation that seems the most probable in the context of interpretation. Referential expressions (linguistic variables) need to be linked with appropriate referents in the context (*reference assignment*), and the meaning of vague expressions (such as *soon*, for example) needs to be made more precise (*enrichment*). As a result, the audience will be able to associate a semantically complete form (*proposition*) to the utterance. A linguistic utterance, however, does not simply express a proposition but also the communicator's attitude towards this proposition: whether the communicator intends it as a statement, a question, a request etc. Since this attitude is only partly encoded by linguistic means expressing modality, it also needs to be inferred (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 180). A crucial point to remember is that this whole process involves contextual inferencing (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 179).

At this point the audience has reached an assumption which, although partly the result of a series of contextual deductions, contains as its part one of the logical forms encoded by the utterance. The process that leads the audience to this point is called the *development of the logical form* (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 181). Based on this, the expliciteness of an assumption can be defined in the following way:

> An assumption communicated by an utterance *U* is *explicit* if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by *U*. (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 182, italics as in the original)

For example, John says the following to Mary: "I'll be happy on the 31st of January." Making sense of the utterance, Mary can deduce the following assumption: (John says) John will be happy on 31 January 2020. If John in fact wanted to communicate this assumption, then he did it in an essentially explicit form. Such an assumption is called an *explicature* (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 182). But he may have wanted to communicate more than this. Based on the context, Mary may be able to infer, for instance, the following assumption: John is a Brexiter. This will obviously be an implicitly, rather than explicitly, communicated assumption. An assumption communicated in such an implicit manner is called an *implicature* (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 182). The interpretation of an utterance, then, consists of a set of explicatures and/or implicatures: assumptions communicated explicitly or implicitly.

An assumption, however, is not simply explicit or is not. Since an explicature is always the result of combining linguistically encoded and contextual information, based on the relative amount of these two types of information different degrees of explicitness can be distinguished. The lesser the role of contextual information in interpreting an utterance, i.e. the greater the relative amount of linguistically encoded information, the more explicit an assumption is (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 182).

Now it would be tempting to think that to ensure that their message gets across, communicators tend to formulate their utterances as explicitly as they can. This is definitely not the case, however, for a number of reasons, including the following. How does the audience find out what contextual assumptions are needed in interpreting an utterance? As is clear from the fact that we so often misunderstand each other, this needs to be seen as a kind of guesswork which, according to relevance theory, is guided by the audience's natural and subconscious inclination to presume that the utterance satisfies the requirement of *optimal relevance* (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 158). Here optimal relavance is defined as the function of two factors. The first is that the utterance provides such *contextual effects* that are worth the audience's attention and the second is that the *processing effort* needed to work out these effects is not unreasonably high. The amount of effort needed to process an utterance in a context depends on a number of factors. According to Wilson (1992: 174) the three most important among them are the following: the linguistic complexity of the utterance, the accessibility of the context in the audience's *cognitive environment* (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 39), and the amount of the inferential effort needed to work out the contextual effects in that context. Thus if the communicator intends to keep the amount of processing effort at a reasonably low level for the audience, then they need to use a linguistic form that is easy to decode, avoid ambiguity and vagueness, make sure that the contextual assumptions needed are available for the audience, and keep the number of inferential moves as low as possible. All this, of course, is normally the result of automatic, subconscious, decisions. As a consequence, a rational communicator does not in general aim to make the utterance as explicit as possible but, rather, to achieve a balance between processing effort and contextual effects. A rational communicator will keep the processing effort of the audience at a reasonable level and will encode only as much information in linguistic form as is necessary to ensure that the intended contextual effects can be recovered (Carston 2002: 130). If the communicator assumes that a particular assumption is available to, or recoverable by, the audience, they will not encode this assumption linguistically because this would only cause an unnecessary increase of processing effort. For example, if John knows that Mary is aware of the date of Brexit (and assumes that Mary knows that he knows), then it would be unnecessary for him to say: "I'll be happy on the 31st of January because I'm a Brexiter" – unless he hopes to achieve some extra effect by saying this explicitly.

3. Explicitation in translation

Encoding a linguistic utterance as well as interpreting it involves a series of choices. It is in fact the possibility of making choices that carries information in linguistic communication. In encoding an utterance, the choices are made by the communicator. These also include choices as to how much information will be encoded and how much information will be left unencoded, leaving it to the hearer to make choices and infer such implicit information. The more information is encoded linguistically, the less room for choices to be made by the audience and the smaller the role of inference in interpreting.

Based on this, *translational explicitation* can be defined as the procedure of encoding in the translation certain pieces of information which the audience of the original text can only have access to through inferencing. The increased level of *explicitness of the translation* thus means that it contains more linguistically encoded information than the source text, as a result of which the role of the context, and the amount of inferential effort required in interpreting the text, is decreased. In other words: certain elements of content that the reader of the original text can only access through inference are included in the target text by the translator in linguistically encoded form.

A typical case of explicitation in translation is when an implicature communicated by the source text is rendered as an explicature in the target text. This is what happens if John's English utterance, "I'll be happy on the 31st of January" is translated into Hungarian as, for instance, "Január 31-én boldog leszek, mert én Brexit-párti vagyok" ('I'll be happy on the 31st of January as I'm a Brexiter').

However, as we have seen in Section 2, even an explicature is normally the result of combining linguistic with contextual information. Therefore, based on the relative degree of linguistic and contextual information used in the process of contextual development, even explicatures can be seen as being at different levels on a scale of explicitness. The greater the amount of linguistic information and the lesser the role of contextual information, the more explicit an assumption is. Then explicitation can also take the form of increasing the level of explicitness of an explicit assumption, meaning that the communicator decreases the amount of inferential effort needed to work out the assumption by increasing the amount of linguistically encoded information.

Consider the following Hungarian example, taken from Heltai ([2005] 2014: 115): *Kék a szeme*. The sentence consists of the following morphemes: *kék* 'blue', *a* 'the', *szem* 'eye', and the possessive suffix *-e* 'his/her'. In such Hungarian constructions the copula is not used in the present tense, but as its use is compulsory in the past or the future tense, lack of its use implies a present meaning. Thus the sentence can be glossed literally as 'blue [is] his/her eye'. The use of the singular form of the noun *szem* is explained by the fact that in Hungarian the norm is to use the singular even for referents that come in pairs, unlike in English, where the norm is to rather use the plural form (e.g. *hands*, *legs*, *ears*, *pants*, *trousers* or *scissors*). An appropriate English translation of the sentence could thus be *Her eyes are blue*. It is easy to see that the English sentence is more explicit than the Hungarian one on three counts. The possessive form *her* encodes information relating to female gender which the Hungarian form does not. The copular meaning is encoded linguistically in English by the verb *are*, while the Hungarian sentence leaves it to be inferred. And thirdly, the plural form *eyes* also encodes more information, since the fact that the person has more than one (blue) eye is made explicit in English, whereas in Hungarian it also needs to be inferred. Now let us assume we want to use these linguistic utterances in both languages to communicate the same assumption concerning the colour of a female person's eyes. Clearly, while in both language versions the assumption is communicated as an explicature, the English translation is more explicit than the Hungarian original, and it thus represents a case of explicitation.

To sum up, explicitation in translation can take two forms according to the kind of change occurring in the level of explicitness: (1) qualitative change, turning an implicature into an explicature and (2) quantitative change, increasing the level of explicitness of an explicature. These two forms of explicitation are referred to in Murtisari (2013: 330) by the terms *categorical explicitation* and *scalar explicitation*.

4. Goals of explicitation in translation

Why do translators explicitate? To answer this question, let us first take a look at the nature of translation. In a relevance-theoretic framework, translation can be considered as an interlingual interpretive act of communication aiming at optimal resemblance with the source text. The *optimal resemblance* of the translation to the original means that, on the one hand, it gives rise to contextual effects that are similar to those of the source text and that, on the other hand, the level of processing effort required of the target audience to work out these effects is not unreasonably high (Gutt 1991: 101). The notion of optimal resemblance, thus, makes clear the double-faced nature of translation: a translated text is assumed to be in some interpretive relationship with the original and, at the same time, it is also a different text that needs to function in a different communication situation.

The ideal situation when the translation conveys the same set of assumptions is called *direct translation* (Gutt 1991: 163). Obviously, this is only possible if the translation is processed in the same context. However, it is often the case in translation that the original context is not readily available in the target reader's cognitive environment. In such a *secondary communication situation* (Gutt 1991: 73) direct translation is either not possible or can only be achieved at an increased level of processing effort. The relevance of the translation in both cases is lower than it would be in a primary communication situation. As Heltai ([2011] 2014: 174) points out, the translator can do two things to increase the relevance of the translated text. One is to ensure the contextual effects of the translation by increasing the number of assumptions that the audience will be able to work out for certain. This can be done, for instance, by categorical explicitation, i.e. explicitating certain implicatures of the original text. The second is to decrease in some way the level of processing effort required. This can be done, for instance, by scalar explicitation, i.e. increasing the explicitness of an explicature. In an ideal case, the two goals may be achieved simultaneously.

Let us examine the first example again. If John's utterance of "I'll be happy on the 31st of January" is translated into Hungarian as, for instance, "Január 31-én boldog leszek, mert én Brexit-párti vagyok" ('I'll be happy on the 31st of January as I'm a Brexiter'), the categorical explicitation can be explained along the following lines. The translator assumes that the assumption relating to the final date of Brexit, which is needed for working out the intended implicature, may not be available in the target reader's cognitive environment. To make sure that the implicature is not lost because of the missing contextual premise, the translator turns it into an explicature. The translation thus becomes somewhat indirect but, at least, manages to save an important assumption that was meant to be communicated.

Now let us return to our second example, in which the Hungarian sentence *Kék a szeme* is translated into English as *Her eyes are blue*. While the Hungarian sentence also communicates the intended assumption explicitly, the English version is definitely more explicit, on three counts, as we have seen. The question is why the translator decided to effect these explicitations. Could not something like *His or her eye blue* be used as an appropriate translation here? Not for two reasons. One is that since English offers a compulsory choice between the male and female form of the third person singular personal pronoun, the form *his or her* would suggest that the communicator is not able to make the choice, which in turn would suggest that the gender of the referent is unclear in the situation described. And since in our example this is not the case, as in the original Hungarian version the gender of the person can be inferred from the context, the translation would communicate an unwanted assumption. Second, in English it is compulsory to use the copular verb in such a construction in all tenses. If the copula is missing, this will make the audience ponder why it is missing: Is it simply a mistake? If it is, in what tense should the sentence be interpreted? And can it be, for instance, that the sentence is uttered by a non-native speaker of English? Or is it not a mistake but a conscious choice? Then is there some extra meaning communicated by the lack of the copula? In any case, interpreting the utterance would require more effort without an explicit copula and could also lead to unwanted effects. And third, as in English the default solution is to use the plural form of nouns referring to dual body parts, use of the singular form would probably lead the audience to look for further effects, as a result of which they might come to work out such implicit assumptions as THE PERSON ONLY HAS ONE EYE or THE OTHER EYE OF THE PERSON HAS A DIFFERENT COLOUR. Thus, here again, the translation would lead to unwanted assumptions. Now it may be obvious for the audience of the translation from the context of the utterance that these assumptions are not in fact meant to be communicated. In this case the audience would finally come to the conclusion that the unusual formulation of the translation was not meant to communicate any extra effect but was perhaps a lapse on the translator's part. This way the audience would finally be able to work out the intended assumption but would have to exert some unnecessary processing effort. To save the audience from having to do this extra computation, a rational translator would decide to use the plural form because, this being the norm, this is the form that would be expected and any deviation from it would make the audience perform some unnecessary inferencing in looking for unintended effects.

5. Pragmatic explicitation in translation

Let us now summarize what we can learn from these examples. The first example illustrates the case of categorical explicitation: an implicature turned into an explicature in the translation. The cause of the explicitation is this: The translator assesses the cognitive environment of the target audience and finds that a contextual assumption needed for interpreting the utterance is not available for them. Taking account of this difference, the translator decides to make sure that the implicated assumption in question will be worked out by the audience and eliminates the need for the missing contextual premise by making the assumption explicit in the translation. The cause of the explicitation here is a difference between cognitive environments, which would potentially hinder achievement of the communicative goal. The aim of the translator is to ensure that the communicative goal is reached despite this obstacle. Such cases are often referred to by using the term *pragmatic explicitation* (or something similar) in the literature (for details see, for instance, Klaudy 1998 and 1999, Robin 2013, or Vermes 2019).

The second example illustrates the phenomenon of scalar explicitation. The English translation does not communicate anything other than the Hungarian original – it simply communicates the same explicature in a more explicit way. The explicitations here are partly caused by grammatical differences and partly by a difference in terms of norms, or conventions, of language use. In other words, they arise because "the possibilities of expression are different" in the two languages (Heltai [2011] 2014: 174). Such procedures are often called by names such as *obligatory* (or *rule-motivated*) *explicitation* and *optional* (or *norm-motivated*) *explicitation*, respectively (again, see Klaudy 1998 and 1999, Robin 2013, or Vermes 2019). Importantly, the translation, even in such cases, does not *have to* be more explicit than the original. However, a rational translator will take into account differences between the source and target languages concerning the grammatical systems as well as conventions of language use to avoid communicating unwanted assumptions or causing an unnecessary increase of processing effort.

As was pointed out in Vermes (2019), 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 translators choose to use particular linguistic forms. They can use grammatical or ungrammatical forms, and can use forms that do or do not conform to norms, depending on what seems appropriate. Decisions concerning what meanings to make explicit and what meanings to leave implicit always depend on the given communication situation and communicative goal. In general, when translators decide to explicitate some meaning, what they do, in effect, is reduce the number of choices that the audience can, or has to, make in interpreting the utterance. By doing so, they can increase the probability of correct interpretation or can decrease the amount of inferential effort required for interpreting the utterance. Translators (as any communicator) always aim to make their utterances optimally relevant for the audience. In order to achieve this goal, they need to take into account how an appropriate interpretation will be enabled by the cognitive environment of the audience. In other words: they make pragmatic decisions. In this sense, then, clearly all explicitations are pragmatic, as far as the goal of the explicitation is concerned.

Consider the second example again. The Hungarian sentence *Kék a szeme* can be translated into English as *Her eyes are blue*, but this is obviously not the only option. Imagine a situation where two investigators are talking at a crime scene. The first says: "Mit tudunk az elkövetőről?" ('What do we know about the perpetrator?') And the second answers: "Kék a szeme." Now, depending on the context, a number of translations may be possible, the one we have been examining so far being only one among them. Other options would include: *She is blue-eyed* or *It was a blue-eyed person*, or even an elliptical form such as *Has blue eyes*. Whether or not to explicitate because of the linguistic differences discussed above is a choice the translator needs to make, depending on the communicative goals.

Another interesting example, taken from the book *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and its Hungarian translation, entitled *Állatfarm*, by László Szíjgyártó, will show that there are cases when the different types of explicitation described in the literature cannot even be neatly distinguished from each other. In Chapter Seven of the book we read about Snowball, a young boar:

> Suddenly, early in the spring, an alarming thing was discovered. Snowball was secretly frequenting the farm by night! The animals were so disturbed that they could hardly sleep in their stalls. Every night, it was said, he came creeping in under cover of darkness and performed all kinds of mischief.

In the last sentence of the excerpt, the pronoun *he* is used as the subject of the verb *came*. It will probably cause no problem for any reader to assign the appropriate referent to the pronoun, as the name *Snowball*, which was used only two sentences previously, is still active in the reader's cognitive environment. The Hungarian translation is the following:

> Kora tavasszal váratlanul ijesztő dolgot fedeztek fel. Hógolyó éjszakánként titokban bejár a tanyára. Az állatok annyira nyugtalanok lettek, hogy alig tudtak aludni az istállóikban. Hógolyó a sötétség leple alatt állítólag minden éjjel beosont, és mindenféle gazságot művelt.

In the last sentence of the translation, instead of a pronoun, the name *Hógolyó* ('Snowball') is used as the subject, explicitating the referent of the pronoun *he*. How could this explicitation be explained? Contrastive studies have shown (Heltai and Juhász 2002, Jenei 2006 and Pápai 2001, cited in Károly 2007: 85–86) that in English-to-Hungarian translation personal pronouns are often deleted or substituted by nominal expressions. The reasons for deleting pronouns are the following. On the one hand, there is a grammatical difference between English and Hungarian, as in Hungarian the referential information of the pronoun subject is also encoded in the verbal suffix. On the other hand, there is also a difference in usage conventions between the two languages here, as unstressed pronoun subjects are normally deleted in Hungarian, since the verb form makes them redundant. The use of nominal expressions in translating English pronouns is often motivated by another grammatical difference between the two languages: the third person singular pronoun, unlike in English, has only one, gender-neutral, form in Hungarian and thus in cases when the gender of the referent has to be made clear, translators resort to using a suitable noun or noun phrase. This phenomenon was probably first described in a systematic way in Klaudy (1994), where it is discussed as a typical case of the translational operation called *grammatical concretization*. Klaudy also points out that use of this operation is by no means automatic but requires conscious decision based on a careful consideration of several factors (Kaludy 1994: 159).

Returning to our example: The unmarked Hungarian form of the sentence would thus be this, with no surface subject: *A sötétség leple alatt állítólag minden éjjel beosont, és mindenféle gazságot művelt*. However, since there is another sentence separating the one including the name *Hógolyó* and this one, and this intermediary sentence has a different subject, the translator probably felt that lack of a surface subject might cause an unjustified increase of processing effort for the reader in trying to assign the appropriate referent to the hidden subject pronoun. To avoid this, he decided to use a surface subject, but since the personal pronoun, for the reason explained above, would not have been an ideal choice, he opted for using the name instead.

In summary, what we can see here is this: The root cause of the explicitation is a difference between conventions of use. On this ground, it could be called a case of norm-oriented explicitation. However, as a matter of fact, the Hungarian norm would require the translator to delete the subject pronoun: that is, to use *implicitation* rather than explicitation. Which means, of course, that the real cause of the explicitation, overriding the norm-oriented implicitation, was the translator's pragmatic intention to avoid an unwanted increase of processing effort in the given context. Importantly, however, there would probably be no need for explicitation at all if there were no such difference in norms between the two languages. Thus, as we can see, this is a rather complex example: while the explicitation is triggered primarily by a difference in usage norms, it is definitely motivated by a pragmatic goal. And as such, it would seem to be a case of pragmatic explicitation.

6. Conclusion

Relevance theory provides a convenient framework for describing and explaining translation phenomena. The translator's task can be seen as deciding which assumptions communicated by the source text can be communicated in the translation in accordance with the principle of optimal resemblance and how: how much information needs to be encoded linguistically to ensure that the audience can work out the intended interpretation. To use a metaphorical term introduced in Heltai ([2003] 2014: 138): the translator has to *repackage* the message of the original. Repackaging may be hindered by various factors, the three most obvious ones being (1) grammatical differences between the source and the target language, (2) differences between conventions of language use, and (3) differences between the cognitive environments of source and target language readers (see, for instance, Heltai [2003] 2014: 138–139, Heltai [2011] 2014: 174). Such differences will, in many cases, have the consequence that the original message (informative intention) cannot be reproduced without losses in translation or can be reproduced only in an indirect way.

In this framework translational explicitation can be described in a natural manner as a particular means of ensuring the relevance of the target text in a secondary communication situation. Relevance theory also enables us to provide a coherent explanation of the causes and effects of translational explicitation. It enables us to explain, for instance, why it does not always seem possible to make a clear difference between the different types of explicitation described in the literature, including such categories as *obligatory*, *optional* and *pragmatic explicitation*. It may be that, just as in the case of many other aspects of language and language use, these are prototype categories, which cannot neatly accommodate all possible cases.

In fact, translation itself seems a prototype category with no clear boundaries. How far can one go, for instance, in explicitating meanings conveyed by a source text? Where is the point when the difference between the original author's informative intention and the translator's interpretation does not any longer sanction use of the term translation in reference to the target language text? Where is the boundary between translation and adaptation? There seem to be no clear boundaries. If translation is seen as a form of communication, then the fuzziness of the concept naturally follows from the fact that any decision made in translation is a dynamic function of the communication situation.

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