Explicitation as a Translation Universal: Some Controversial Issues

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Abstract

The historical trajectory of the field of translation studies has demonstrated the rapid expansion of this field in research methodology as well as in incorporating ideas from other disciplines in order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of translation. Early studies in the field have limited themselves to comparing translated texts with their source texts. Even Zohar's (1979) poly-system theory as well as Toury's (1995) idea of the centrality of the translated texts opened new horizons in the field, one of which is to find specific features of translated texts or 'universals of translation' as Baker (1992) puts it. Recent developments in linguistics as well as the introduction of corpus linguistics have helped translation scholars to study translated texts independent from their source texts in order to find unique features of translation language. This study intends to review the idea of explicitation as a translation universal and propose some controversial issues regarding its nature and definition.

Key words: Explicitation, Universals of translation, Translated texts, Language of translation

Introduction

Many studies have been conducted so far on the features of a good translation. Early theories of translation took prescriptive approaches to translation practice; however, with the advent of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) translation scholars have begun to study translated texts independent from their source texts and regarded translation as a norm-governed human activity. As Baker (1993) puts it, the availability of corpus linguistics in translation studies helped translation scholars study translated texts apart from their source texts in an attempt to find features that are specific to translated texts.

Corpus studies fed translation studies in many different aspects one of which is to help translation scholars to find translation universals or 'features of translation' in Olohan's word (Olohan, 2004). Thanks to the corpus-based translation studies, a great volume of research has been conducted to identify unique features of translated texts. The following, according to Steiner (2005), are some of the studies that have been conducted to find the unique features of translated texts: 1. Levy (1963) sees the result of translation a text that suffers from lexical impoverishment 2. Berman (1984/ 2000) considers translation as a process of rationalization, clarification, expansion, ennoblement, and popularization. 3. Blum-Kulka (1986) focuses on explicitation in translation. 4. Toury (1995) considers growing standardization as a product of translation. 5. Baker (1996), Laviosa-Braithwaite (1998), and Olohan (2001) regard translation as simplification, normalization, explicitation, and sanitization. 6. Englund Dimitrova (2005) sees a relationship between expertise and explicitation.

Klaudy (1993) believes that explicitation occurs when translators choose to be more explicit and elaborate in the process of translation while other less explicit choices are available. According to explicitation hypothesis originally proposed by Blum-Kulka (1986), explicitation is a translation universal. Blum-Kulka believes that "all translated texts exhibit a higher degree of explicitness than non-translated target language texts of a comparable type" (1986: 19). Explicitation is claimed to be a characteristics of translated texts regardless of the source and target languages, and the direction of translation. One often cited piece of evidence is that translations tend to be longer than non-translated source texts. Corpus studies such as Olohan and Baker (2000), Papai (2004), and Puurtinen (2004) have found proof for explicitation. On the other hand, some studies raised doubts about the universal nature of explicitation (Puurtinen, 2004). In this study, the researchers will dig deeper into the phenomenon of explicitation in order to gain a deeper understanding of its nature.

The idea of explicitation as a translation universal

The idea of explicitation was first introduced by Vinay and Darbelnet in 1958. They defined explicitation "as the process of introducing information into the target language which is present only implicitly in the source language but which can be derived from the context or situation" (1658:8). They point out that explicitation strategy is usually seen as addition strategy. That is to say, in the process of translation the translator always loses or gains something. For example, Persian pronoun system is

not marked for gender so in translating English pronoun "she" into Persian some parts of meaning will be lost. Explicitation was regarded as a method, technique or procedure in Vinay and Darbelnet's opinion.

The concept of explicitation was further developed by Nida in 1964. Nida believes that explicitation should be regarded as the subcategory of the general concept of 'addition'. In his endeavor to explain the techniques used in translation, Nida came up with three main strategies of adjustment: addition, subtraction and alteration. Additions are of 9 types in Nida's view one of which is the concept of explicitation "which was referred to as amplification from implicit to explicit in the process of translation" (1964: 227). Nida provides some examples from Bible translation for this type of addition. For example, "the queen of the south" was translated to "the woman who was ruling in the south country" to receivers who are not familiar with queen and the south (1964: 229). However, Nida did not use the term 'explicitation' in his studies. It should be pointed out that throughout the 1970s and 1980s most studies in translation studies followed Nida's example. They regard explicitation and implicitation choices as addition and omission strategies. In another attempt to identify different types of shifts that occur in translation, Barkhudarov (1975, cited in Baker, 1998) came up with four different types of changes that may occur in translation. These changes are omission, transposition, substitution and addition.

In a like manner, Vaseva (1980, cited in Baker 1998) studies the syntactic additions in Bulgarian-Russian translations. In Vaseva's view, 'missing categories' are one of the important reasons for addition.

Apart from previous studies, Blum-Kulka conducted the first systematic study on explicitation in 1986, which is also known as 'explicitation hypotheses'. Blum-Kulka draws attention to the explicitation of cohesive markers in translation. These items are discourse markers such as conjunctions and ellipsis that are rendered explicit in translation. According to Blum-Kulka (1986), changes in cohesive markers can be explained due to different grammatical structures or it may be attributed to different stylistic preferences for specific kinds of cohesive markers. However, according to Blum-Kulka (1986), it is the very process of translation that can explain the reason behind explicitation. As she puts it, the reason for explicitation can be the process of interpretation done on the source text by the translator. This process may lead to a redundant text that manifests itself in the increased level of cohesive explicitness in the target language. Blum-Kulka calls this process 'explicitation hypotheses'. According to her, one of the features of translated texts is the rise in the frequency of cohesive markers.

According to Blum-Kulka, explicitation is inherent in the translation process. Vehmaslehto (1989, cited in Baker 1998) supports explicitation hypothesis in her study of translations from Russian into Finnish and vice versa. In her study, she compared the recurrence of connective markers in Finnish journalistic translated texts with their recurrence in writings initially composed in Finnish. She concluded that connective markers are more explicit in translations than originally written texts.

Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) see explicitation as a technique that is used by translators to produce a text that is easy to process and comprehend. In order to achieve this, according to Shuttleworth and Cowie, translators add explanatory notes and make connectives more explicit to increase readability. Delisle, Lee-Jahnke and Cormier (1999, cited in Englund Dimitrova 2005: 34) view explicitation as a translation process where "the translator introduces precise semantic details into the target text, either for clarification or because of the constraints of the TL."

Englund Dimitrova (2005), in her study, examines explicitation of different kinds of connectives in Russian-Swedish translation. She concludes that the strengthening of logical links in the text, for instance by explicitation of implicit contrasts, is a norm-governed activity favored by the language community of Sweden since the majority of professionals do indeed explicitate.

In another study, Papai (2004) maintained that explicitation is a technique that intends to produce a less ambiguous text that enjoys increased cohesiveness by including extra linguistics clues in the translation. Therefore, according to Papai, translation involves shifts of cohesive markers in the process of translating. Puurtinen (2004), in another study, compared translated and originally written texts in Finnish in an attempt to find out how clause connectives are rendered in children literature. The results revealed no clear overall tendency to explicitate clause connectives in translated texts. Therefore, the study could not support explicitation hypothesis.

Overas (1998), in another study, attempted to find out how cohesive markers are treated in English-Norwegian translation. He found that cohesive markers are rendered explicit in translation and the translators used more explicit cohesive markers, and added different conjunctions into the translations. The translators also replaced cohesive markers with more explicit ones in translation. Overas also found that numerous cases of additions and metaphorical neutralizations are found in translated texts. Changes of metaphors to similes are also witnessed in English-Norwegian translation. In another effort to test explicitation hypothesis, Mauranen compares translated and non-translated Finnish texts in a corpus based study (Mauranen 2000, cited in Puurtinen 2004). The results reveal that the number of cohesive markers and connectives are more or less the same in Finnish-English translation and the connectors' recurrence rates are approximately equal in translations and originals.

In another attempt to find out whether explicitation is inherent to the process of translation, Baumgarten et al. (2008) investigated the parallel corpus of German-English popular scientific texts. They concluded that explicitness is not intrinsic to the process of translation and other factors such as communicative preferences and conventional differences between English and German need to be taken into account.

In his article, Dosa (2009), discusses explicitation techniques in the translation of accounting texts from Hungarian into English. As opposed to the common assumption that translations are more explicit that original texts, Dosa's analysis proved just the contrary in the case of Hungarian to English translation. She argued that the reason for

this can be the specific requirements of accounting texts and the particularities of the two languages involved.

Different types of explicitation

There has not been full agreement about the exact definitions and kinds of explicitation. Frankenberg-Garcia (2004), divides explicitation into two types: obligatory and optional. Obligatory explicitation occurs when the grammar of the target language necessitates the addition of information that is not present in the ST. Optional explicitation occurs when the translator distances himself from the source to make the target text intelligible and comprehensible. Other scholars such as Pym (2005) and Klaudy & Karoly (2005) distinguish between symmetric and asymmetric explicitation. In symmetric explicitation, there exists one case of implicitation for every case of explicitation. While in asymmetric explicitation, the explicitation occurred in translation does not necessarily correspond with the implicitation in the original text.

Klaudy (1998) distinguishes between different kinds of explicitation in translation. According to her, when the changes in the source text are required by the grammatical and syntactic structures of a language, it is called obligatory explicitation. However, if these changes are not derived from the structural differences between languages, it is called optional explicitation. Optional explicitation is needed by differences in the textual make up and stylistics preferences between languages. She also identities pragmatic explicitation which becomes necessary when cultural concepts in two languages do not correspond with each other and explicitation is needed to make these concepts intelligible to the readers.

Papai (2004), identifies 16 types of explicitation in his analysis of English-Hungarian translations. These types range from logical-visual level explicitation to textual and extra textual levels. He considers changes in punctuation markers as shifts at logical visual level. These changes include addition of punctuation markers to translated texts and replacing punctuation marks with more explicit ones. For textual-level explicitations, using lexical repetitions instead of substitutions is an example to consider. At extra textual level, making source texts' cultural references explicit is an instance of explicitation.

Similarly, Seguinot (1988) explains that explicitation can take three types. The first type happens when the information inserted into the target text does not exist in the source text. The second type is the explicitation of implied information or presuppositions in the target text. The third type happens when through focus, emphasis, or lexical choice an element in the source text is given more weight in the translation.

Generally, in discussions about the concept of explicitation, two approaches can be identified. First, linguistically-oriented approaches to explicitation (e.g. Steiner 2005; Fabricius-Hansen 1996, 1999, cited in Baumgarten et al. 2008), which usually view explicitation as a linguistic activity which involves some modifications in the translated texts to make the text more explicit. Second, translation-theory and

translation-practice-oriented approaches (e.g. Weissbrod 1992; Olohan & Baker 2000), which tend to consider explicitation as a cognitive activity that is carried out to make the text more intelligible and comprehensible to the readers.

Explaining explicitation

In an attempt to explain the reasons behind explicitation, Papai (2004) conducted a study on English-Hungarian parallel and comparative corpus of translated and non-translated texts. He argues that factors such as conscious and unconscious strategies of translators, styles of translators or language communities, genre conventions and translation norms are among those factors. Papai argues that at every point in history there was a translation norm in action, in which translators tend to conform to the standards of the target text and readership. In other words, he believes that the ultimate function of explicitation is to produce a text that conforms to the standards of a particular reading community.

In another study to grasp why translators resort to explicitation, House (House 2004, cited in Saldanha 2008) maintained that communication preferences between languages are one of the factors to consider. By analyzing German-English discourse structures, she argues that German speakers and writers tend to be more explicit than English speakers do. Therefore, it can be concluded that communicative preferences of German is a determining factor in resorting to explicitation.

In her study of translations, Saldanha (2008) put a great emphasis on the translators' different stylistic preferences in the process of translation. To her, some translators provide excessive textual information to facilitate readers understanding of the text. This may be an indicative of a tendency to facilitate readability. Some translators on the other hand show their willingness to challenge their readers. In their study, Baumgarten et al. (2008) demonstrated that explicitness does not necessarily result from the very act of translation and other factors such as conventional differences between languages should be taken into account. Therefore, explicitation occurs if it is in line with the communicative preferences of languages.

Weissbrod (1992:155) showed that explicitation and implicitation strategies result from an interaction of several factors: "the universal tendency to accompany translation by explicitation, the position of the languages involved in the act of translation on an orality/literacy scale, and the translational norms operating in a certain section of a given culture at a given time." In a study to find explicitation markers in English to Hebrew translation, Weissbrod refutes that explicitation, as Blum-Kulka suggests, is an inherent feature of translation process. He contended, "explicitation is not solely a universal tendency or a function of translation on a literacy/ orality scale. It is norm dependent and thus changed with historical circumstances and according to the position of the translated literature"(Weissbrod 1992:153).

Overas (1998) argued that translators, as mediators between languages are readers and writers at the same time. Therefore, in mediating between languages they try to be as informative as possible so as not to damage or reduce the transfer of information to the readers. According to Overas, translators try to make sure that sufficient information is conveyed to the readers and it seems that it is better to end up

with some redundancy than major losses in the translated text.   Similarly, Pym (2005) argued that risk management is an important factor that encourages translators to be more explicit. To avoid being noncooperation and unintelligible in communication, translators tend to be risk–averse and render explicit the information that can be understood implicitly in the source text.

Controversial issues

Blum-Kulka's definition that explicitation is inherent in the process of translation goes under some criticism. Seguinot (1988) believes that Blum-Kulka's understanding of explicitation is too narrow. Explicitation does not necessarily express redundancy. Seguinot (1988) argues that translations are usually considered longer than source texts; however, not every case of this kind can be regarded as true explicitation. True explicitation occurs when the greater number of words in translations are not attributed to the structural and stylistic differences between languages. Therefore, when additions to texts are caused by structural, stylistics or rhetorical differences between languages, these texts cannot be called truly explicit. Seguinot believes that increase in explicitness can be also explained by editing strategies of the revisers as well.

In an attempt to redefine the notion of explicitation in translation, Kamenicka (2007) brings about some discussions about the notion of explicitation proposed by Blum-Kulka. According to him, Blum-Kulka was not concerned with the definition of explicitation in her statement in 1986. At that point, in the history of translation studies, explicitation seemed to be a deep-rooted concept. Pym (2005) puts that what is problematic with Blum-Kulka's definition of explicitation is that she narrows down her discussions on explicitation to the explicitation of cohesive markers. The reason for this can be the visible and detectable nature of cohesive markers, which lends them to quantitative study.

Heltai (2005) asks the question that if target texts manifest higher levels of explicitness than non-translated texts why it is often difficult to read translations. In her study, Heltai answers this contradiction. In Heltai's view, many translators are difficult to understand simply because they are translated by untrained translators. If translators fail to carry out explicitation where it would be required, the resulting texts are not likely to be either explicit or easy to comprehend. According to Englund Dimitrova (2005), professional translators are better at carrying out explicitation than novice translators. Translations are difficult to read also because explicitation and explicitness is to a large extend indifferent for ease of processing, or may even be counterproductive.

It should have emerged from the above discussion that linguistic explicitness is not identical with true explicitness, which implies easier processing; in this way, TTs may be more explicit but still difficult to process. Least processing effort does not always come from highest explicitness. In addition, increased explicitness may be a sign of cognitive complexity in the co-text, involving increased processing effort.

According to Heltai (2005), enhanced explicitness of TTs may conflict with the stylistic and linguistic norms of the target language. Divergence from the usual level of explicitness, in whichever direction, may increase processing costs. According to Sanz

(2003, cited in Heltai 2005), English tourist brochures use fewer connectors and discourse markers than Spanish tourist brochures; since, there are culture bound differences in marking textual organization by explicit means. Frequency and habituality are important factors in this regard. The processing of less frequent words is cognitively more demanding, and they are also associated with unfamiliar topics. Although research findings to date do not suggest that TTs contain more infrequent words than non TTs, it seems likely that they contain fewer habitual collocations and more unusual collocations than non TTs.

Discussion

It is a common belief in the field of translation studies that explicitation is a translation universal. Many studies that have been carried out in the field confirm this opinion. In other words, the assumption that translated texts are more explicit than non-translated texts has become a dogmatic opinion in translation studies. However, it should be noted that translated texts may not always be more explicit than original ones. The explicitation of textual elements in translation depends on other important factors such as the preferences and structures of each language, without considering them, no explicitation will occur in the translated texts.

Early research in translation studies viewed explicitation almost as adding an element to the original text. These studies hold a very stereotypical definition of explicitation and regard it as almost equal to 'addition'. The authors of the present article argue that explicitation occurs when it is in line with the norms and stylistic preferences of each language, without considering them, no explicitations will occur in the translated texts. Explicitation as one of the characteristics of translated texts should be exercised to the extent that it does not deviate from the stylistic and communicative preferences of each language. For instance, making the cohesive elements of deletion and substitution explicit should be done to the extent that it does not conflict with the preferences and writing styles of each language; in other words, explicitation happens only when the target language allows it.

The readers' expectations and the acceptability of the translated text are other reasons that require explicitation. If in the process of translation, all the cases of deletions and substitutions are made explicit, the text will eventually become an unusual one, in which case the translated text will not be acceptable among the readers of the target language. In order to produce a text that is natural and acceptable to the readers of the target language, other factors, apart from what Blum-Kulka considers as the main reasons for explicitation, should be considered. These factors are stylistic and textual preferences of the target text, readers' expectations and acceptability amongst others. Moreover, true explicitation does not necessarily result in a lengthy text, an idea that early translation theories insisted on.

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