

EXPLAINING EXPLICITATION

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Abstract: The general observation idea that translations tend to be more explicit than non-translations (the broad “explicitation hypothesis”) is one of the few purported apparent discoveries that have been made by Translation Studies. Developed by Klaudy in relation to translation directionality and processes of implicitation, the hypothesis has been refined in such a way that we can now distinguish fairly well between explicitation required by different language systems (where explicitation in one direction is ideally matched by implicitation in the other) and explicitation as a feature of the translation situation itself (where the relation between explicitation and implicitation is asymmetric). In these terms, specifically asymmetric explicitation has been hailed as a potential translation universal. In its wider formulations, the explicitation hypothesis nevertheless remains hampered by conceptual imprecision and idealisms of stable meaning, as if there were just one thing, obvious to all, that could then be made explicit or implicit. These problems in turn lead to a wide range of possible reasons why explicitation should be a feature of translation. Many of these reasons can nevertheless be regrouped within the frame of By adopting risk management as an analytical frame. One can nevertheless thus posit that translators expand or contract reference systems in order to manage the risks of communicative failure/non-cooperation in communication, and that they tend to be risk-averse because of the cultural reward system that often structures their professional tasks. This approach can offer a rationalist explanation for explicitation while doing away with considerable semantic idealism.

Keywords: implicitation, explicitation hypothesis, asymmetric explicitation, translation universal, risk management

AN OPTIONAL AND PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

I first met Professor Klaudy in... . No, the date would be irrelevant. She was far too auspicious and important, even exotic, for any meeting of minds. I remember being more than a little in awe. Slightly later, if my memory serves me well, I heard her speak in a freezing Hungarian town called Szombathely, at a conference organized in November 1992 by the charming and much regretted János Kohn. It was a small seminar room, everyone around one table, and Professor Klaudy was speaking, yes, about explicitation (cf. Klaudy 1993). Gideon Toury was at one end of the table. I suspect we were not understanding much about explicitation, for want of enough Hungarian and Russian to follow all the examples. We tried to keep up. It seemed all very, well, linguistic. The main players were language systems; they are the ones that tell translators to be explicit or

otherwise. Professor Toury asked about this at the end. Professor Klaudy replied, I think, that only systemic explicitation could be made an object of general study, or something like that. Therefore we should study the constraints of language systems. A good answer, perhaps, since Saussure had said as much in his *Cours de linguistique générale*: there can be no systematic study of parole. Or so I thought at the time.

More than twelve years have passed since then. There have been many contacts, many visits to Budapest. I could probably now call Professor Klaudy by her first name, although I tend to prefer some more respectful versions. Much has changed in Translation Studies as well. The problems of the explicitation hypothesis, which I only vaguely grasped in Szombathely, are now curiously central to the development of our discipline. We have learned to distinguish the study of translation from the study of comparative linguistics, so we have accepted that a whole range of explications translation shifts occur quite independently of the demands of language systems. So much for Saussure. Yes, we are may now indeed engaged in the systematic study of parole, of what translators specifically do with language. Explicitation is now bound to the study of the norms of translational behaviour; it is a firm candidate for the award of status as a universal or even law of translation. Further, the use of corpus linguistics has brought in new ways of testing the hypothesis (as we shall see below). And this in turn has led contributed to the observations of other things that all translators might tend to do: their texts are apparently longer, their language is said to have less variation, they are want to leave things out, and so on. Professor Klaudy's work on the explicitation hypothesis has been in the front line of these developments. It is in that wake that we dare risk ask a few simple questions.

LOCATING THE EXPLICITATION HYPOTHESIS

Explicitation was identified described by Vinay and Darbelnet in 1958 as “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 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 the situation” (1958/1995: 8 CHECK342). As such, the process could concern any kind of textual material whatsoever.

What then became known as the “explicitation hypothesis” was formulated by Blum-Kulka in 1986 (cited here from a 2001 reprint). In its historical development, the hypothesis broadly states that a translation will be more explicit than a corresponding non-translation, which may be either the source text or a

parallel text in the target language. Exactly what this term “explicit” means is then cause for some debate. Much depends, we suspect, on the kinds of things we accept as examples of explicitation. Part of Blum-Kulka’s original claim was based on cohesion markers:

The process of interpretations performed by the translator on the source text might lead to a TL [target language] text which is more redundant than the source 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 [source language] 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. (300)

This formulation is worth close attention. Note that the place of explicitation is marked out as “the process of interpretation performed by the translator”, even though actual research then has to refer to the linguistic qualities of source texts and target texts. In order to explain this process, we would have to work out the cognitive churning of interpretation, not just the statistics of textual occurrence. Further, the observation is restricted to “cohesive explicitness”, to the markers that knit texts together. The hypothesis as formulated does not strictly concern all those uses of language that refer to things beyond the text or the turns in a conversation (which we may regard as parts of a text). I (it does need not address problems of cultural reference), even though Blum-Kulka certainly looks at such cases. Third, Blum-Kulka need not presume to know what those markers mean. In a sense, they could have no meaning beyond their function as textual pointers, as part of what we might term “grammar words”. The explicitation hypothesis thus need not involve bringing out, developing, refining, specifying or normalizing semantic content involving anything beyond the text. The only result of explicitation is thus “redundancy”, the unnecessary repetition of something that is already there. As far as semantic content goes, repetition is about as empty as you can get.

This, we submit, is an intriguing formulation because it potentially avoids most presumptions of stable semantic content. In fact, it observes the repetition of pointers rather than a full process of something implicit (hidden, so how can we see it?) becoming explicit (clear for all, so we all see the same?). This is intriguing also worrying on two counts. First, could it be that explicitation is observed only in such grammar wordpointers (those whose referent is only in the text) and not in anything that refers beyond the text? Second, if repetition is the only thing we find, should we really be talking about explicitation at all?

Let us try out these questions on some further research.

TYPES OF EXPLICITATION

Blum-Kulka's explicitation hypothesis is has generally been confirmed by studies on translation between different language pairs (among others, Séguinot 1988, Weissbrod 1992,; Klaudy 1993, Englund Dimitrova 1993, Øverås 1998, Olohan and Baker 2000, Whittaker 2004). Most of these studies do actually concern grammar wordpointers of one kind or another. Yet, they include many other things as well. And their evolving categories seem not to correspond to the kinds of questions we want to ask.

Consider, for example, Vanderauwera's early finding that "translators of Dutch fiction exhibited reserve in rendering unusual and mannered imagery and word choice in the target text" (1985: 108). This clearly concerns much more than cohesion or internal repetition. Or more recently, Tirkkonen-Condit has observed 's observation that certain verb types and clitics peculiar to Finnish are used less frequently in Finnish translations than non-translations (2004), a general finding supported by Gellerstam (1996) for Swedish, and by Eskola (2004) for non-finite constructions in Finnish (all reported in Malmkjaer 2005). Such observations are certainly interesting; they certainly go well beyond grammar wordpointers; but is there any strong sense in which they can all be called explicitation? One suspects that they are happier referring to the common observation that translations are "flatter" or have less variation, less colour, than non-translations. Or, as we shall say, translators tend to take fewer risks than non-translators.

Some theorists have been especially enthusiastic about extending the field of explicitation to more than grammar wordpointers. Perhaps the clearest arguments in favour of such an extension are those formulated by Klaudy (1998, 2003), notably in her identification too of two very wide processes as "explicitation" and "implicitation" as two very wide processes. Here is a recent formulation (from Klaudy and Károly 2003):

Explicitation takes place, for example, when a SL [source-language] unit of a more general meaning is replaced by a TL [target-language] unit of a more special meaning; the complex meaning of a SL word is distributed over several words in the TL; new meaningful elements appear in the TL text; one sentence in the SL is divided into two or several sentences in the TL; or, when SL phrases are extended or "elevated" into clauses in the TL, etc.

Implicitation occurs, for instance, when a SL unit of a more specific meaning is replaced by a TL unit of a more general meaning; translators draw together the meaning of several words, and thus SL units consisting from two or more words are replaced by a TL unit consisting of one word; meaningful lexical elements of the SL text are dropped; two or

more sentences in the SL are conjoined into one sentence in the TL; or, when SL clauses are reduced to phrases in the TL, etc.

These two processes are held to cover both operations that are conscious or automatic, obligatory or optional. The relative beauties of this approach are that it recognizes explicitation as being not the only game in town, it covers a wide range of observations on many different levels, and it can be tested in many ways on any language pair. Klaudy usefully applies such tests in order to distinguish between those operations that are obligatory (where explicitation in one direction always corresponds to implicitation in the other) and those that are optional (where this correspondence is not exact or constant). The operations that are specific to translation, rather than to language pairs, would then be those where the relation between explicitation and implicitation is asymmetric. This is neat. Further, the traditional explicitation hypotheses can then be reformulated as a wider “asymmetry hypothesis”, “according to which “explicitations in the L1→L2 direction are not always counterbalanced by implicitations in the L2→L1 direction because translators – if they have a choice – prefer to use operations involving explicitation, and often fail to perform optional implicitations” (Klaudy and Károly 2003).

We believe find this reformulation to be both useful and elegant. To illustrate the approach, at least in our understanding, we adapt two examples from Frankenberg-Garcia (2004):

Source:	Frances liked her doctor.
Translation:	Frances gostava dessa médica.
Back translation:	Frances liked this [female] doctor.

Here the translator into Portuguese is obliged to specify the sex of the doctor, and this would count as explicitation (in Klaudy’s sense). But the translator into English is under no such obligation and may thus choose the path of implicitation, giving no information corresponding to the sex of the doctor. The processes of explicitation and implicitation are in this case symmetrical. What we have here thus belongs to the languages in contact, and not to the specificity of translation.

Consider, however, the following:

Source:	Você também gosta dela?
Translation:	So you like her too?
Literal translation:	You like her too?

Here the translator has added the entirely optional adverbial ‘So’ (yes, an internal deicticspointer again), knitting the discourse together in a way that the source

does not (for similar findings in the field of interpreting, see Shlesinger 1991, among others). Translated back into Portuguese, the adverbial can easily be retained, and is indeed quite likely to be retained. The relations between explicitation and potential implicitation are in this case highly asymmetric. This instance of explicitation is thus to be attributed to the translation situation, and not to the languages in contact. This second kind of explicitation is a candidate for status as a translation universal.

Then again, wWhat we win on the swings, we lose on the roundabouts. This wider view of explicitation provides powerful analytical categories, but it must raises many questions about the limits of those categories. To what extent can we say that the doctor's female sex is entirely due to the Portuguese language? Perhaps Frances (or the translator) likes her, optionally, precisely for because of this generic quality. And again, who is to say that this helpful So that orients the reader is not an outright addition by the translator, rather than an the outing of something held in a Portuguese closet? There must always remain doubt about any assumption of stable semantic content, particularly when that content is paradoxically held to be at once hidden and obviously available to all. That problem was not too serious when all we were talking about was the repetition of grammar wordpointers. But any braver notion of explicitation must address more than a few problems in the philosophy of language.

At this point we shall attempt to formulate our own approach to explicitation. We shall accept, in the wider, semantic senserange of the hypothesis, dealing with more than pointers. But we shall attempt to avoid any assumption of, hopefully without assuming any stable semantic content. This is rather like doing theory with one hand tied behind your back.

A MODEL OF EXPLICITATION

Here we shall model explication within a risk-management framework. The aim is to provide a rationalist explanation of why the phenomenon might occur. Here we understand "risk" to beas the probability of an undesired outcome. There are many such risks in translation, but most of them are too contingent to be of import in a general theory. The greatest problems facing a translator might be the risk of not getting paid, or of losing the client, or even of being identified behind a convenient pseudonym. All of that, however, depends on the myriad factors in specific communication situations. For our purposes here, undesired outcomes are those that restrict cooperation between the communication partners; desirable outcomes are those that enhance the potential for cooperation, where cooperation allows for mutual benefits (see Pym 2000). In practice, most of the risks that concern us here will thus be what other approaches would loosely term "misreadings" by the end-receiver.

Some translation problems involve low risks (the possible undesired outcomes are of limited dimensions). Others are clearly high-risk. In these terms, good translating would be the art of investing low effort in solving low-risk problems, and high effort in solving high-risk problems. Bad translating would be the reverse, on both counts. But such things are peripheral to our theoretical task here.

Our examples are from a translation that we recently carried out from German into English. This allows for a certain degree of qualitative introspection. We nevertheless believe the model can be extended beyond the data.

Let us accept that any stretch of text can be interpreted by an indefinite number of further stretches of text, all of them potentially correct. This is a basic version of Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation (1960), compatible with Blum-Kulka's evocation of the text's "meaning potential" (2001: 304). Consider, for example, the following string, taken from the title of the article in German (Kujamäki: forthcoming):

1. Selbstverständlich besteht ein gewisses Interesse für Finnland, aber...

This could be interpreted as:

2. Of course there is a certain interest for Finland, but...
3. Naturally there is a certain interest for Finland, but...
4. Obviously there still exists a certain interest in Finland, but...
5. Of course here in Finland there exists a certain interest, but...
6. It is self-explanatory that a certain interest for Finland is still standing, but...
7. Of course here there exists a certain interest for Finland, but...

and so on.

Such alternatives are easily generated by automatic translation processes. As one student put it at a recent seminar in Tarragona, "the machine produces endless correct translations, and then we have to decide which one is correct". But how do we determine this kind of human "correctness"? Here we admit that all of the above versions are correct in one way or another, but that some are more high-risk than others. The idea of a comfortable human "correctness" usually turns out to be a low-risk interpretation. And that is no doubt perhaps what we are looking for here.

The solving of translation problems may be seen as a process of generating such alternatives and then selecting one of them as the translation (Pym 2003). The use of explicitation would then be a way of handling these problems so as to manage the risks.

In our series of possible renditions, there is considerable variation in some places, and none in others. How would this variation relate to risk? *Ein gewisses Interesse* is always ‘a certain interest’, and *Finnland* is always ‘Finland’. For us, there is no real translation problem to be solved in such those cases, and thus very little risk. In other places, there is considerable variation but it is somehow non-problematic. ‘Of course’, ‘naturally’, ‘obviously’ and so on can all be used interchangeably, and no great risk is run.

In further cases, however, there is variation of a rather more high-risk kind. Consider the case of *Interesse für Finnland*. This could be rendered as ‘interest for Finland’ or, more normally, as ‘interest in Finland’. The choice of one translation or the other is important here because a series of further alternatives depend on it, some of them with highly undesired outcomes. If we choose ‘interest in Finland’, which is linguistically more acceptable, the reader may be led to believe that the interest itself is located in Finland (as in rendition 56). That assumption is quite plausible on the basis of the data at hand, but will soon be contradicted as the reader finds that the whole article discusses interests located in Germany. On the other hand, if we choose ‘interest for Finland’, we may sound strange but there is at least no risk of swapping Germany for Finland. So which are we to choose? Our final rendition in this case was:

8. Of course Germans have a certain interest in Finland, but...

Why did we insert this reference to ‘Germans’? We could argue that the information was implicit in the source, since the phrase appears again within the text (no longer just the title), in the mouth of an explicitly German publisher. The insertion of ‘Germans’ (or even of ‘we Germans’) would thus be a case of explicitation. However, there is much further information that could equally be seen as implicit. We could have put, for instance, ‘We right-wing Germans who believe in the unity of Nordic peoples still have deep ideological interests in manipulating the Germanic image of Finland’. Now that is explicit! But it would not be a happy title.

Clearly, much more is at stake here than a simple move from implicit to explicit information. By inserting this particular piece of implicit text (‘Germans’), we sought to restrict the potential ambiguity of the preposition ‘in’ (‘a certain interest in’). In effect, we chopped short one set path of potential interpretative positions connections in order to direct the reader down another path of connected interpretations. We thus reduced the risk of one reading by enhancing the probability of another. And that, we propose, is a good reason for using explicitation, and not just in this particular case.

Let us be very careful about what we are saying here, or rather, about what we are not saying. We have not claimed, for instance, that there is just one correct rendition of the source text. We have simply located a kind of translation

problem that opens up more than one string of further interpretations, and we have assumed that the translator decides, at no matter what level of awareness, that one interpretative path is more cooperative than others. We have thus allowed that the translator will invest a special effort (such as introducing the term ‘German’) in order to minimize the risk of an undesired interpretation. In this case the special effort has taken the form of explicitation.

This kind of logic can also explain other cases of explicitation. The following example is from the same translation:

9. ...sales of Silja [Sillanpää’s novel *Nuorena nukkunut*, *The Maid Silja/Fallen Asleep While Young*, 1931].

Here the German original just mentions Silja, the German name of the novel. That name has to be retained, since the sales figures given in the co-text refer to that German translation. Nevertheless, the reader with no German and less Finnish is likely to have trouble grasping what is going on here. We have thus made some information explicit, indeed redundant (close attention to the co-text alone could retrieve the name of the author Sillanpää and the fact that the book is a novel). Then we have also added the name of the original Finnish novel, which turns out to be significantly different from the German, and the two titles under which it was rendered into English, where it might ring some bells for our English-language reader. All this in order to avoid the risk of leaving the reader entirely in the dark. If we lost them the reader, we would lose the possibility of cooperation.

Note that in this example we could make a distinction between explicitation (the novel and the novelist) and something further, perhaps amplification (the different names for the novel, garnished from the translator’s research on texts beyond the source). Blum-Kulka (2001) in fact uses something similar when she attempts to distinguish between “text-based” and “reader-based” explicitation. Yet such distinctions are hard to maintain consistently. When we insert the term ‘novel’ and we repeat the name of the novelist, are we not doing essentially the same work as the apparently redundant cohesion markers with which asymmetric explicitation has long been associated? That is, cooperation with the receiver may be the general aim of explicitation, even in cases where the linguistic material is clearly referential in nature.

One final example from the same translation, just to raise a few questions about implication as well:

10. Dagegen muss ich Ihnen offen sagen, dass ich gegen das dritte Kapitel „Herbstliche Ereignisse“ die allergrössten Bedenken habe.
 11. On the other hand I must tell you openly that I have the greatest doubts about the third chapter.

This is a German publisher talking about the same novel. In the source text, the third chapter has a name, ‘Herbstliche Ereignisse’, which could be rendered as ‘Autumn Events’, or ‘Experiences’, or ‘Occurrences’. Why have we chosen to omit the name of the chapter? Well, if we had transcribed the German name (which would be correct, since the publisher is commenting on the German translation), it would probably not mean anything to the English reader. In fact, it would probably set off could compound further unwanted reactions (e.g., “I have no idea what’s going on here because I don’t read German”). Alternatively, we could have spent a few hours looking for the standard English translation of that chapter, so as not to leave the reader stranded. Yet, if we did that, not only would we have wasted our efforts on a low-risk problem, but the reader could believe that the German publisher is commenting on an English translation of the text. That would open up interpretative paths full of further unnecessary risks. Far better, in this case, to omit the name, avoid the complications, and steer the reader along a surer and simpler path. Such might be the logic of *implicitation*. It too avoids risks.

EXPLAINING EXPLICITATION

Let us accept, for the sake of an argument, that all the researchers agree that there is such a thing as optional (“asymmetric”) *explicitation*, that it is consistently more frequent in translations than is *implicitation*, and that it is a feature of the translation situation rather than of the languages in contact. Now, why should this be so? What possible explanations can we attribute to this phenomenon? Although explanation is one of the many areas of Translation Studies that we have yet to work on seriously, in this case there is no real shortage of potential answers/approaches. Let us list just a few.

Vinay and Darbelnet actually offered a rich explanation when they claimed that translators “lengthen their texts out of prudence but also out of ignorance” (1995: 193) – a positive reason (prudence is a classical virtue) and a negative one (ignorance is not). The ignorance part ensues logically from the traditional prescriptive idea that translations should not read like translations, so anything specific to translation must be negative. *Explicitation* would be part of the general “over-translating” that Mounin identified way back in 1963 – something that happens when translators know no better. That idea has long been surpassed by the age of Descriptive Translation Studies. If translators do it, it is probably because they are translators, not necessarily because they are stupid (unless, of course, all translators are stupid). What we are then left with is this one term “prudence”, about which we would like to know more.

Other explanations are more psychological or cognitive in nature. One might suppose that translators are exceptional because they are both readers and

writers at the same time (or hearers and speakers, in the case of interpreting). This situation would (1) make them especially aware of the problems of coherence difficulties of constructing meaning (because they are trying to construe meaning from the source text), (and 2) put them in a position where they can solve those problems in an explicit way, by writing down markers for everything they have just construed, and (3) do this at a time when the construction process is very fresh in their mind. More bluntly, translators would want to help readers because they, the translators, are also readers (cf. Chesterman 2004). This general idea finds some support in research by Whittaker (2004), where instances of explicitation are found to increase in passages marked by greater discursive difficulty/complexity. The harder the source text, the harder the translator works, and the more likely they are likely to make their renditions explicit. One could further hypothesize that translators do this because they are focusing on smaller textual units than are non-translators, so they tend to worry about problems that others would solve by applying principles of charity. Who but a translator would worry about the ambiguities of ‘a certain interest in...’?

Such a cognitive explanation gains greater credence from an application of relevance theory. Here we would argue that translators provide more “communicative clues” than non-translators because their receivers have fewer shared cultural references than do the receivers of the source text. This entirely logical explanation was intimated by Eugene Nida long ago as a way of understanding why translations are often longer than their sources. Strangely, it is recognized but more or less devalued by Gutt (1991), who tends to see excessive communicative clues in terms of over-translation. Gutt would rather make the receivers work. T, but the research suggests that not all translators disagree with him.

One further kind of explanation invokes the notion of language universals. If explicitation is held to be a universal of translation, then it may not require (or even be available to) any other kind of explanation. It simply is, in the same way that the “language faculty” simply exists as the object of study for Chomsky and followers. Further, explicitation may then exist in the same way as proposed translation universals such as “normalization” and “simplification” would exist alongside it, no matter how much these various processes might contradict or push against each other. Such claims to universal status, without attention to further explanation, raise the spectre of a generation of translation scholars busy observing corpora without thinking about people. Malmkjaer (2005) intimates that this kind of universalism is unacceptably vague, and mostly better handled by the concept of norms anyway.

On her positive side, Malmkjaer (2005), echoing something of Blum-Kulka (2000: 312), actually seeks a kind of cognitive explanation based on Grice’s Cooperation Principle, although the connection remains difficult to fol-

low. One might generally admit that translators provide more “communicative clues” than non-translators; they are somehow more cooperative. But why should that be so? Perhaps we could back this up with presuppositions like those of Simeoni (1998), who broadly sees translators as being in subservient positions, with less power than their communication partners, and therefore somehow more given to working so that others do not have to work. As if we knew. But do we really know about the powers of all translators, and about all translation situations?

This strangely connects with a partial explanation offered by Blum-Kulka (2001), where she tries to explain the difference between reader-based explicitation and text-based explicitation:

For reader-based shifts, the translator is in the position of the practitioners of preventive medicine: his role is to foresee the possibilities of “damage” to interpretation in the TL and to apply means to minimize them. With regard to text-based shifts, the translator is in the position of the physician administering treatment: in this area, accurate diagnosis is the necessary first condition to successful treatment.” (309).

Let us not insist too much on worry too much about the distinction between the categories (in our view they overlap considerably). The analogy is of interest in itself. To say that the translator is “in the position” of a doctor is to map out a space of ethical action, in much the same way, and using the same basic analogy, as Chesterman’s call for a “hieronymic oath” for translators (2001). These are apparently not just things that translators do; they are things that translators should do as part of their profession. Further, beyond the ethics, the positions of doctors are mapped out socially, in terms of regulated professional behaviour. Translators’ positions might be structured in similar ways. To be “in the position of” is to operate with a range of variable constraints, many of which are non-cognitive.

Any and all of these explanations are possible; none of them is wrong; and the same could be said for any cocktail mixing these and similar ingredients. Our purpose here is not to decide between them these explanations in any radical way. We will be happy enough to pick up a few threads and weave them into our general theory of communication cooperation and risk.

SO WHY EXPLICITATION?

The elements are there: prudence, Gricean cooperation, relevance to a new reception situation, the ethics of service (subservience), damage control or remedy. For all of these things, we could say that translators tend have reasons to be

risk-averse; or they are given to minimizing risks; or they do not want to take risks in their own name. This general hypothetical risk aversion would then be our general explanation for explicitation (and for quite a few other behavioural patterns as well). To that we can add a second and entirely compatible reason: since translation involves communication into a context with fewer shared references, it involves greater risks than non-translation, which does not consistently have this feature. And where there are greater risks, there are greater opportunities for risk minimization, although clearly not obligations xxxx. Further, to wrap it all up, we would argue that “risk”, in all these cases, may be understood as the risk of not achieving cooperation (on which, see Pym 2000). Our model can thus shift explicitation into the terminology of risk management, where much more remains to be said.

So, is explicitation a universal of translation? Is it something that all translators do because they are all risk averse? Not necessarily. We would prefer to see risk aversion as a rational consequence of the kinds of situations in which translators work, in certain cultures and in terms of certain norms. If translators are made to work in such a way that they are penalized for instances of non-cooperation and are not rewarded for taking risks in order to achieve values beyond cooperation, then they will logically tend to be risk-averse. Such a situation might be of the kind observed by Leonardo Bruni in 1405, when he complained that authors always get the praise for what is good and translators merely receive the blame for what is wrong (Bruni 1928: 102–104). With this kind of reward structure, part of Western discursive formations since the Renaissance, translators will tend to cover all bets and avoid the fireworks. With another kind of reward structure (such as that operative in the localization of advertising, for instance), we would not expect to find such risk aversion, nor pronounced explicitation.

That, at least, is a hypothesis to be tested. And that is as far as we risk delving into the depths of the translating mind, or aspiring to the heights of the empty universal.

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