

Explicitation and Implicaitaion in Translation: Towards a Heuristic for Investigating Translation Competence

Amelia Mareva

Abstract. The paper seeks to further investigate students' and experts' explicitation / implicitation behavior by providing empirical evidence on the issue. The research paradigm, while still anchored in translation studies and cognitive linguistics, is extended to include the perspective of lexical typology as well. It is argued that the typological perspective can yield considerable insight into Bulgarian-English cross-lingual transformations, the two languages traditionally being described in terms of their high degree of analyticity and dubbed as 'markante Sprachen' within the Slavic and Germanic families. Also, as typology shares with cognitive linguistics an inherent interest in universal phenomena, explicitation, being quintessentially defined as a translation universal, is an excellent candidate for such an approach. In line with the "universalist" approach, explicitation is construed as a strategy of simplification, which facilitates communication in situations of natural and artificial bilingualism where semantically opaque words and meanings in the source language are analytically decomposed into more primitive and transparent discrete units in the target language. In contrast, implicitation is understood as a synthetic fusion of source text semantic components and words into single target text lexemes. Essentially, explicitation is a one-to-many relationship manifested in periphrastic expansion / addition of lexemes and implicitation is a many-to-one relationship as a result of semantic ellipsis and / or omission. In focusing on lexical variation, the study takes the conventional analytical / synthetic division beyond its initial grammatical bias towards establishing some important parameters of Bulgarian and English lexical typological profiles.

The corpus features lexical data from 144 English-Bulgarian translations of three 1,000-word excerpts from contemporary English novels accomplished by three experts and forty-five students. The results suggest a marked disparity between experienced and inexperienced translators' strategic competence as evidenced by the lexical variation due to explicitation and implicitation effects. Overall, the present findings appear to confirm the hypotheses that explicitation shifts prevail in both students' and experts' production, and that students in general tend to avoid implicitation.

1. Introduction

The current paper will present a heuristic for studying explicitation and implicitation at the interface between translation theory, typology and translation pedagogy. Apparently, for the past couple of decades, the two constructs of explicitation

and implicitation have been among the most intensely researched phenomena in translation studies and may rightly be said to have shaped, to a large extent, the scientific and methodological discourses within the discipline.

In an attempt to bring together the diverse theoretical and empirical strands in explicitation research, the article will take a fresh look at the interdependence between explicitation/ implicitation on the one hand, and typology and translation competence on the other. First, a novel definition of the key terms will be proposed upon which explicitation/implicitation (E/I) shifts are conceived as manifestations of analyticity and syntheticity in language contact situations within an integrated model, informed primarily by lexical typology, contrastive linguistics and translation studies. The paper's main goal is to explore the relationship between the implementation of lexical E/I strategies and the development of translation skills while highlighting at the same time major typological similarities and differences between English and Bulgarian as manifested in the process of translation. To this end, the findings of a relatively small-scale empirical study will be reported, featuring students' and experts' English-Bulgarian translations of literary prose. The focus is on lexical variation in the undergraduates' output, relative both to the source texts and the professional translators' output. Furthermore, some important distinctions between expert and non-expert models of translation will be discussed. Finally, it will be argued that the investigation of explicitation not only can yield important insights into the nature of translation, but it can also have some major implications for translation training and education.

2. Explicitation and implicitation: an attempt at a typological definition

Despite being dubbed as “one of the few apparent discoveries” made by the science of translation (Pym 2005, 29), explicitation has proven to be quite an “elusive” and controversial concept (Kamenicka 2008, 117). According to a recent and generally accepted definition, explicitation is “a process (technique, strategy) by which the translator makes explicit in the target text information, which is only implicit in the source language” (Englund Dimitrova 2005, 5). In emphasizing the intrinsic, Janus-like

dichotomy between explicit and implicit meanings across languages, this formulation closely follows Vinay and Darbelnet's original definition. However, since first introduced in 1958, the concept of explicitation has undergone a remarkable evolution from a mere technique applied ad hoc for solving specific problems to an all-encompassing translation universal held responsible for the increased informativeness and transparency of target texts. It is, indeed, quite a challenging task to establish a common ground for discussing the construct as it covers a range of different characteristics and is fraught with an array of different interpretations. Explicitation has been viewed as a "specific feature" of translated texts marking them off as a "third code" (Øveras 1998). Later, it has been elevated to the status of a universal characteristic of translation, "independent of the influence of the specific language pairs involved in the process" (Baker 1993, 243; cf. also Vanderauwera 1985, Laviosa 1998, among many others). The concept has even been extended to describe a tendency towards increasing message redundancy in all mediation / communication situations (cf. Blum-Kulka 1986, Danchev 1992, Álvares Lugrís 2001-2). And while most scholars agree about the overarching role of explicitation in translation theory and practice, some point to its adverse effects denouncing it as "overtranslation" (Newmark 1988), an "inflationist" factor (Steiner 1975) and in general, a "deforming tendency of unfolding what in the original is folded" (Berman 2000 [1984]). Understandably, the negative aspects of explicitation are particularly relevant in studies which contrast students' to professionals' translation performance.

Being a conceptually complex and structurally disparate notion, explicitation has spawned off a vast and heterogeneous body of research which can be subsumed only synoptically here under two main schools of thought. First, by right of birth and in importance, is the contrastive linguistic analysis with its focus on the implicit / explicit configurations in SL and TL products. On this approach, E/I variation is viewed as a function of the inherent asymmetry of the linguistic sign, which is resolved through the minimax principle of balancing between economy and redundancy (cf. for e.g. Alexieva 1982, Klaudy 1993). More recently, the contrastive perspective has been enriched by a cognitive dimension, which explores various aspects of translation production and

perception as a process. Explicitation is studied as part of the translator's strategic competence through psycholinguistic discourse analysis methods (Seguinot 1988, Englund Dimitrova 2005, inter alia).

What is novel in the heuristic developed here is the endeavour to make a strong case for a typological research paradigm, which seems to be particularly well-suited for the study of explicitation. In the first place, a typological description can yield considerable insight into Bulgarian-English cross-lingual transformations, as the two languages have traditionally been described in terms of their high degree of analyticity; in fact, they have been singled out as markante Sprachen within the Slavic and Germanic families. Second, in exploring lexical variation, the study takes the conventional analytical / synthetic division beyond its initial grammatical bias towards establishing some important parameters of Bulgarian and English lexical typological profiles. A further and very significant consideration derives from the fact that typology shares with cognitive linguistics an inherent interest in universal phenomena, and explicitation, being quintessentially defined as a translation universal, is an excellent candidate for such an approach (for a more detailed rationale, cf. Mareva 1992). Besides, with the second focus of the study falling on translation competence – an extremely complex construct and a vast research area in its own right – the adoption of a dynamic interdisciplinary paradigm is a necessary prerequisite for enhancing our understanding of the interrelationship between the investigated phenomena.

Having set forth these premises, I would like to argue for a broader definition of the two key concepts. In line with the “universalist” approach and following Danchev's seminal proposal (1992), explicitation is construed as a strategy of simplification, which facilitates communication in situations of natural and artificial bilingualism where semantically opaque words and meanings in the SL are analytically decomposed into more primitive and transparent discrete units in the TL. In contrast, implicitation is understood as a synthetic fusion of ST semantic components and words into single TT lexemes. Essentially, explicitation is a one-to-many relationship manifested in periphrastic

expansion / addition of lexemes and implicitation is a many-to-one relationship as a result of semantic ellipsis and / or omission.

The grounding of explicitation/implicitation in analytical / synthetic equivalence has also some methodological advantages. It obviously facilitates the operationalization of research procedures through the possibility of conducting quantitative counts on lexemes (added and omitted words). The data, being lexical in nature, are less norm-governed and hence, more indicative of translators' free choices and creativity (to follow Englund Dimitrova's distinction: 2005, 236-8), thus allowing for additional glimpses into novice-es' and experts' models of translation. And certainly, this approach provides a unified platform for discussing E/I techniques as successful achievement strategies in both translation and language learning contexts.

3. Corpus design

Initially, my research interest was sparked by some anecdotal claims about translators' use of explicitation and their amount of experience. The two most stimulating points of departure are provided by Vinay et Darbelnet's (1958, 185) insightful comment that "Le traductuer allonge par prudence et aussi par ignorance" and Eugene Nida's (1974, 163) famous observation that "There is a tendency for all good translations to be somewhat longer than the originals." Thus, the main thrust of this empirical study is to test, qualitatively and quantitatively, Blum-Kulka's (1986, 20-1) widely known "explicitation hypothesis", which holds that:

[...]Translations are usually more explicit than source texts, especially those by non-professional translators. Inexperienced translators produce more explanatory / redundant texts: the less experienced the translator, the more the process of translation is made obvious.

In order to achieve the study's objectives, the following research design and methodology has been employed. Two research questions have been formulated:

(1) whether the correlation between lexical E/I shifts can be indicative of the translator's amount of expertise and

(2) whether the student's evolving model of translation is more explicitation-oriented than the expert's.

To this end, a pilot corpus of 55 English-Bulgarian translations was compiled. Three STs and their translations were processed: the length of the excerpts was limited to the manageable amount of 1,000 words running text each, or a total of 3,000 words of STs and approximately (allowing for length variation) 165,000 words of TTs executed by all 55 subjects. The chosen genre was fiction as it is generally believed to display greater linguistic variability: the sample texts were drawn from three contemporary novels written by different authors and translated into Bulgarian by different professionals. The selection criteria were established to ensure maximum diversity in terms of language input, and writers' and translators' styles. Some pedagogical criteria were considered as well: the STs were selected to represent varying levels of translation difficulty and also to engage actively students' interest; in fact, the students found the texts easy to relate to and quite fun to translate.

To guarantee that the experiment was properly controlled, the 52 undergraduate subjects were subdivided into two groups according to their English language (EL) proficiency, translation skills, native language competence and computer literacy. Of these the two dependent variables were the level of EL skills and the amount of translation instruction. The independent variable was the number of lexical E/I shifts attested in the TTs. Group 1 consisted of 25 third-year undergraduates at Sofia University – proficient C2 English users with very good translation skills (240 hours translation education). Group 2 comprised 27 fourth-year students at New Bulgarian University with good translation skills (180 hours translation training) and with a slightly lower level of EL proficiency (C1.2). In addition, the NBU undergraduates appeared to have superior computer skills, but a poorer knowledge of Bulgarian spelling and grammar norms.

An analytical method was developed for the identification of paired exponents of lexical E/I phenomena based on translation equivalence. The qualitative and quantitative

analysis dealt with semantic and structural decompression and compression of lexical items. The data were hand-picked through a controlled count procedure as proposed in Mareva 1993: manual data collection was preferred to computerized counts of graphic words since the research focus was on notional lexemes. In line with Nida and Taber's model (1974), two basic types of shifts were analyzed: periphrastic expansion and condensation of SL meanings leading to lexical addition or omission in TT surface structures.

For brevity's sake and just by way of illustration, a few examples are adduced below. A clear case of explicitation is evidenced by the translation of 'Montgomery boy' (JG) as 'син на семейство Монтгомъри' / literally *son of family Montgomery, which at the same time realizes the semantic feature of 'family' as a separate surface structure unit and specifies the meaning of 'boy' to 'son'. Another example is furnished by the noun phrase 'whisky sour' (MC), which was either transliterated ('уиски сауър'), or was given explanatory translations such as 'уиски с лимон' / whisky with lemon and 'коктейл с уиски' / cocktail with whisky.

Even greater variation occurred in the lexicalization of verb phrases in Bulgarian when many of the implied objects were stated explicitly in a variety of ways: for instance, the paradigmatic meaning of 'sliced' was rendered as 'накълцах' / cut; 'накълцах на търкалца' / cut in round pieces; 'накълцах на филии' / cut into slices; 'нарязях на шайби' / cut into discs, or the verb 'chalked' (JU) generally received the equivalent 'бе написал с тебешир' / wrote in chalk.

Typical examples of implicitation are 'motorized vehicles' (JG) translated as 'автомобилите' / automobiles or 'hill people' (JG) rendered monoverbally as 'планинците' by the professional translator and polyverbally by all student translators as 'хората от планината / men from the mountain; хората от хълмовете / men from the hills; хората от хълма / people from the hill; селяните от планината / peasants from the mountain', etc.

Regarding cultural references the undergraduates always tended to offer additional information, thus foreignizing the Bulgarian TT as is the case of preserving the proper

noun in ‘John Deere tractor’; the expert opted for omitting the name obviously presuming it to be unknown to the larger Bulgarian audience. However, all students transcribed the name and 11 of them even supplied extensive footnotes taking the Bulgarian reader through the minute steps of their own painstaking research process.

Lastly, in this section, in order to evaluate and make sense of the findings, an explicitation / implicitation quotient (E/IQ) is defined. Unlike Kamenicka’s “plicitation quotient” (2008), in our approach the places of the numerator and the denominator are switched: the E/IQ is obtained by dividing the number of explicitation exemplars by the number of implicitation exemplars. This representation seems more plausible as corpus analyses largely confirm that occurrences of explicitation outnumber those of implicitation; that is, $E/IQ > 1$.

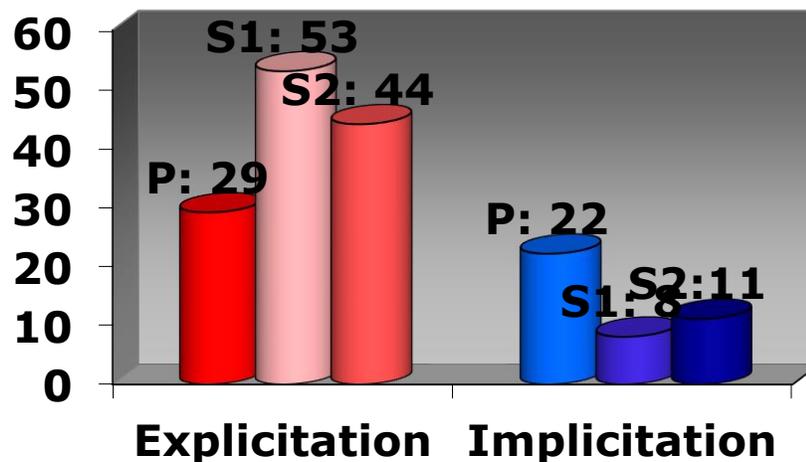
4. 1. Data and results

At this stage, the E/I shifts made by the 3 professional translators (P), the 25 group one students (S1) and the 27 group two students (S2) were calculated as arithmetic means, rounded to two decimal places, and then, as E/I quo-tients. The detailed data are reported in the table below:

STs	Graphic words; Notional lexemes	P		S1		S2	
		E shifts	I shifts	E shifts	I shifts	E shifts	I shifts
ST1/P 1 (JG)	1002 words 881 lexemes	5	9	10.63	3.18	12.44	2.88
ST2/P 2 (MC)	995 words 871 lexemes	10	4	11.20	2.91	11.53	1.67
ST3/P 3 (JU)	1022 words	8	5	12.32	3.82	14.21	3.11

	914 lexemes						
Total	3009 words 2556 lexemes	23	18	34.15	9.91	38.18	7.66
E/I quotie nt	P1-0.56; P2-2.5; P3- 1.6	P - 1.27		S1 - 3.45		S2 - 4.98	

E/I quotient P1-0.56; P2-2.5; P3-1.6 P - 1.27 S1 - 3.45 S2 - 4.98



4.2. Discussion

The results clearly reveal that E/I phenomena have a very high frequency of occurrence. In the translation of about 9 pages of STs the incidence of explicitation transformations ranges from 23 to 38.18 and that of implicitation from 18 to 7.66. In other words, there are on average 10.6 lexical explicitation shifts per printed page, or 31.8 per 1,000 words, and 3.95 implicitation shifts per page, or 11.85 per 1,000 words.

A second important finding uncovers the basic asymmetry between explicitation and implicitation effects. Although the sums total of E/I changes introduced into the TTs by the three groups of subjects fall within a narrow range – between 41 and 46 shifts – to be more accurate: 41 (23 + 18) for P; 44.06 (34.15 + 9.91) for S1 and 45.84 (38.18 + 7.66)

for S2 – the asymmetrical pattern in the E/I distribution among the groups is readily apparent. Obviously, all translators tend to favour decompression strategies, but ex-perts do so by the very small margin of 23 (E) to 18 (I): thus, their output is characterized by the lowest average $E/IQ = 1.27$. As the three professionals were originally chosen to provide maximum variation of style, based on our intuitive impressions, it is hardly surprising that a great dissimilarity in experts' choice of preferred E/I techniques has been detected (the E/IQ for P1 is 0.56, for P2 – 2.5 and for P3 –1.6). The observations are also consistent with Kamenicka's conclusion (2008, 123) that the use of E/I strategies is a "good measure for differentiating translators' styles". What is striking, however, is the inverse E/I relationship exhibited by one of the experts (P1), her E/I coefficient being lower than 1.00 ($E/IQ = 0.56$): this makes her stand out among all investigated subjects in this study as well as within a much larger, and hence more representative, sample developed for a broader re-search project. Such an atypical E/I ratio can be attributed to idiosyncratic personal features, but because predominance of explicitation over implicitation appears to be anomalous, this translator's work should be further re-searched. The other two experts' quotients are compatible with the dissertation results in that they fit in with the pattern of always being higher than 1.00.

With respect to the students' E/I profile, two important characteristics should be noted. First, the more experienced students (S1) demonstrate a less pro-nounced tendency to spell out lexical meanings in TT structures, as shown by their lower quotient: $E/IQ = 3.45$, whereas the less skilled translators (S2) have a higher E/I quotient of 4.98. Second, and more important, the two groups of students are closer to each other in their use of E/I procedures than to the group of the professionals, their two batches exhibiting a much greater homogeneity than the experts' batch. Generally, our data demonstrate that students' marked preference for decompression consistently results in E/I quotients about three to four times higher than the average experts' quotient: so it can be argued that there is a direct correlation between translators' E/I profiles and their levels of translation skills.

Finally, perhaps the most significant and interesting finding is that the major differentiating factor is not so much the number of explicitation shifts, rather it is the use

of implicitation techniques. Indeed, students resort to explicitation 1.5 times more frequently than experts (S1 by almost 150% and S2 by 166%). However, the crucial difference lies in the employment of implicitation: the inexperienced students (S2) produced on average just 2 to 3 (2.55 to be precise) implicitation shifts per 1,000 words, while their more knowledgeable colleagues (S1) opted for a little over 3 (3.3) implicitation shifts. Conversely, the three professionals employed twice as many implicitation techniques: an average of 6 per 1,000 words. In this way, the experts displayed a more balanced pattern of compression and decompression, whereas both groups of students showed a strong bias towards lexical expansion and analytical simplification.

5. Conclusions

The current study offers encouraging, albeit so far inconclusive, evidence about a positive and significant relation between the use of explicitation / implicitation strategies and the level of translation skills. Certainly, our pre-liminary findings need further corroboration with larger sample sizes and through a corpus with reversed translation direction from Bulgarian into English. Nevertheless, even at this early stage of the research process, a number of important conclusions can be drawn.

First, we can surmise that the proposed heuristic is a viable and efficient tool for uncovering new knowledge about translational behaviour. It has yielded convincing results, which have proven to be consistent with our expectations and which confirm the plausibility of hypothesizing a regular and systematic relationship between explicitation and translation competence.

Second, although the occurrence of explicitation and implicitation may depend on a set of diverse factors, such as language types, structural and pragmatic characteristics of source and target texts, authors' and translators' styles, our findings indicate that the amount of translation experience is among the most important variables producing E/I effects. Significant differences in experts' and novices' strategic competence (including differences between the two groups of novices) have been observed. Students at lower levels of translation skills have been found to resort more often to explicitation than

experts and, more importantly, they have demonstrated a strong reluctance and/or unskilfulness to employ implicitation. As a consequence, novices' translations testify to a greater incidence of analytical decompositions of lexical meanings and tend to be semantically simpler and structurally longer.

Third, the analysis has also unveiled some distinctions between student and professional models of translation. Apparently, the student model is ST-oriented and sets itself explanatory goals presuming a passive readership. The undergraduate subjects have shown a strong disinclination to move away from the ST structures and have acted, consciously or unconsciously, upon the understanding that "good" translation should explicate all relevant dictionary and contextual meanings. This mindset also reflects non-experts' apprehension that using implicitation would actually amount to withholding information or saying "less". The expert model, on the contrary, prioritizes a more complex and balanced approach to explicitation and implicitation: it combines in a flexible and creative way micro- and macro-textual analyses and caters simultaneously for both source text fidelity and target text effectiveness.

And last but hardly least, the results of this study have some strong pedagogical implications. The high incidence of lexical explicitation in all translated texts, on the one hand, and students' negative bias towards implicitation, on the other, obviously call for a sustained effort on the part of both teachers and learners aiming at, first, increasing students' awareness of the diverse manifestations and applications of explicitation and implicitation, with a particular emphasis on the latter, and second, developing students' conceptual understanding and strategic competence in this area.

Excerpted Literature

1. Crick, M. Lamb with Dill Sauce à la Raymond Chandler. *In Kafka's Soup: A Complete History of World Literature in 14 Recipes*. Harcourt, 2006, 7-10; 7–10

- Крик, М. „Агнешко в сос от копър ала Реймънд Чандлър”. В „Супата на Кафка: История на литературата в 14 рецепти”. Преводач: Павлина Чохаджиева, Издателска къща „Колибри”, 2006, 4–8
2. Grisham, J. *A Painted House*, Dell Publishing. 2001
- Гришам, Дж. „Бялата къща”, Преводач: Зорница Димитрова, Издателство „Обсидиан”, С., 2001; <http://chitanka.info/text/3062>
3. Updike, J. *The Centaur*. Fawcett Crest, 1963
- Ъпдайк, Дж. „Кентавърът”, Преводач: Кръстан Дянков. Издателство „Народна култура”, С., 1981

References

- Alexieva, B. (1982): *Implication and Explicitation in English and Bulgarian. A Case Study of the Ways of Rendering Auditory Perception*. Sofia
- Álvares Lugiés, A. (2001-2002): *Notas para o estudio da hipótese da explication*. In: *Viceversa: Revista Galega de Traducción*, 7-8/131–148; <http://webs.uvigo.es/webatg/viceversa/files/78/hipotese.pdf>
- Baker, M. (1993): *Corpus Linguistics and Translation Studies: Implications and Applications*. In: Baker, M. et al. (eds.): *Text and Technology: In Honour of John Sinclair*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 223–250
- Berman, A. (2000): *Translation and the Trials of the Foreign*. In: Venuti, L. (ed): *The Translation Studies Reader*, Routledge, 284–297
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1986): *Shifts of Cohesion and Coherence in Translation*. In: House, J. / Blum-Kulka, S. (eds): *Interlingual and Intercultural Communication: Discourse and Cognition in Translation and Second Language Acquisition Studies*, Tübingen, 17–35
- Danchev, A. (1992): *The Evidence for Analytic and Synthetic Development in English*. In: Rissanen, M. et al. (eds): *History of Englishes. New Methods and Interpretations in Historical Linguistics*. Mouton de Gruyter, 25–41
- Englund Dimitrova, B. (2005): *Expertise and Explicitation in the Translation Process*. Amsterdam
- Newmark, P. (1988): *A Textbook of Translation*. London
- Nida, E. / Taber, C. (1974): *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Brill

- Kamenicka, R. (2008): Explicitation Profile and Translation Style. In: Pym, A. / Perekrestenko, A. (eds): Translation research projects, ISG, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 117–130
- Klaudy, K. (1993): On Explicitation Hypothesis. In: Kohn, J. / Klaudy, K. / Szombat-hely (eds): *Transfere necesse est...* Current Issues of Translation Theory, Dániel Berzsenyi College, 69–79
- Laviosa, S. (1998): Universals of Translation. In: Baker, M. (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*. London and New York, 288–291
- Mareva, A. (1992): Nyakoi teoretichni aspekti na leksikalniya analitizam i sintetizam [Some Theoretical Aspects of Lexical Analyticity and Syntheticity]. In: Chuzhdoezikovo obuchenie [Foreign Language Teaching], Sofia, 2/ 2–7
- ___ (1993): Kam tipologia na leksikalniya analitizam i sintetizam pri prevod [Towards a Typology of Lexical Analyticity and Syntheticity in Translation]. In: Sapostavitelno Ezikoznanie [Contrastive linguistics], Sofia, 5/31–41
- Øveras, L. (1998): In search of the third code: An investigation of norms in literary translation. In: *Meta* 43 (4), 571–588
- Pym, A. (2005): Explaining Explicitation. In: Karoly, K. / Fóris, A. (eds.): *New Trends in Translation Studies*. In Honour of Kinga Klaudy, Budapest, 29–34
- Séguinot, C. (1988): Pragmatics and the Explicitation Hypothesis. In: *Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, 1/2, 106–114
- Steiner, G. (1975): *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, OUP
- Vanderauwera, R. (1985): *Dutch Novels Translated into English*. The Transformations of a Minority Literature. Amsterdam
- Vinay, J. / Darbelnet, J. (1958): *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais: Méthode de traduction*. Paris