Explicitation in Media Translation: English Translation of Japanese Journalistic Texts

Robert De Silva
Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan
silva@kanda.kuis.ac.jp

Abstract

When translating between cultures, explanations or added information for the target readers are often required. Such explanation, or explicitation, involves the addition of material not explicitly stated in the source text (ST). The translation of newspaper articles particularly requires the use of explicitation. Newspaper readership tends to be from a particular region and journalists can assume that they share background knowledge about people, places, cultural events and customs. In translations, these referents may require explicitation for readers from other cultures.
The study examines explicitation found in the English translations of 24 Japanese journalistic essays that appeared in a leading Japanese newspaper. The English translations of these columns were published in an affiliated English-language newspaper.
Specifically, the study focuses on the use of explicitation in the translation of proper nouns (principally personal names and geographic referents) and cultural references. The English translations tended to give more complete forms of personal names (providing first names even when the ST only mentioned the surnames). In addition, identifying information was supplied, even for historically prominent Western figures. Geographic referents were also found to be more specific in the English translations. Reference to Japanese cultural customs or events included explicitation in the form of explanatory information or definitions, while also maintaining the Japanese lexical items.
The results are discussed in terms of rhetorical differences between Japanese and English as well as differences in journalistic norms.

Key words: explicitation, media texts, rhetoric.

1. Introduction

Translation from one language to another can be a window on the culture of the source language. While the translation of literature is one such vehicle, the translation of other sorts of texts that are read by a large number of people in the source culture can provide an even better view of the source language culture. Among such texts, those published in daily newspapers are of special interest since they provide the topics of everyday conversation as well as reflect commonly held opinions.

The focus of this study is on the use of explicitation in the translation of journalistic texts from Japanese to English. Explicitation involves the addition of some elements not specifically stated in the ST but which may be needed for comprehension by the target readers of the translation of the text. Journalistic texts, by their very nature, contain a large number of proper nouns and cultural references. This study focuses on the types of explicitation used for the translation of such items. When a proper noun is translated, the translator must decide to what degree the referent is known by the target readership. Explanations or elaboration may be added for referents deemed unfamiliar. Similarly, when a cultural reference is made in a text, a decision must be made about how best to convey this information to the reader. While source cultural referents may be familiar enough to the target readers to not require translation or explanation (such as the word *sushi* in Japanese) other cultural features may require explicitation.

2. Explicitation

In the field of Translation Studies, the concept of explicitation is traced back to the early work of Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) in which they define explicitation as "a process which consists of introducing information into the target-language which is present implicitly in the source-language, but it can be derived from the context or the situation" (quoted in Klaudy 2003: 172)

The concept was developed further by Blum-Kulka (1986/2000). She takes a discourse approach to translation and considers shifts in cohesion and coherence (Halliday and Hasan 1976). She uses "explicitness" to discuss shifts in types of cohesion, including changes in anaphoric reference, lexical repetition, pronominalization, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. Such shifts often entail an increase in the amount of redundancy in the Target Text (TT) due to the use of more explicit cohesive marking. She describes the concept thus:

> The process of interpretation performed by the translator on the source text might lead to a TL [target language] text which is more redundant than the SL [source language] 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 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. (2000: 300, italics in original).

A broader approach to explicitation can be seen in the work of Kinga Klaudy. Klaudy (2003) distinguishes two types of explicitation, or addition: obligatory additions required for the formation of grammatical sentences in the target language (including such features as articles and grammatical gender) and optional additions for the creation of coherent texts.

> Optional additions … e needed to create a unified coherent target-language text. These may be textual additions, necessary because of the different discourse conventions of languages; or pragmatic additions required because of differences in the background knowledge possessed by source-and target-language readers. (003: 103-104)

Building on the broader approach to explicitation taken by Klaudy, the present study will follow the definition of explicitation proposed by Pápai (2004):

> In terms of process, explicitation is a translation technique involving a shift from the source text (ST) concerning structure or content. It is a technique of increasing cohesiveness of the ST and also of adding linguistic and extra-linguistic information.

> The ultimate motivation is the translator's conscious or subconscious effort to meet the target readers' expectations. (2004: 145)

This definition sees explicitation as encompassing both linguistic and extra-linguistic information. Such a definition is suitable for the study of media translation, which often requires the addition of contextual information.

The current study examines the use of explicitation strategies in the translation of media texts from Japanese to English. A number of features of such texts can be considered for evaluation. We will not consider those examples of addition that Klaudy has called Obligatory Additions, i.e. those grammatical features that must be added in order to create grammatical target-language sentences. These are readily apparent and are not particularly important or distinctive solely in media texts. Some grammatical features that would be obligatory are the addition of articles and first person subject pronouns. Japanese does not have articles. Also, the use of first person pronouns is usually restricted and they are generally ellipted both in speech and writing. This is despite the fact that the verb in Japanese is not marked for person or number as it is in many other languages that allow the dropping of the subject.

Since newspaper texts are generally written for a readership from a particular geographic area and culture, journalists assume their readers share common background knowledge concerning the source culture, local news events, as well as general world knowledge. When these texts are translated into other languages, the translators must decide to what extent such background knowledge needs to be provided for the intended audience.

3. Data

The data for the study consist of journalistic essays from a major Japanese daily newspaper, the *Asahi Shimbun*. The Asahi is one of the top three major national newspapers in Japan, the second largest in terms of circulation (8.3 million). Its editorial policy can be considered "left-of-center". The specific genre examined here is a short opinion column carried daily on the front page of the newspaper. This particular genre does not seem to have a parallel in American journalistic writing. The column, called *Tensei Jingo* in Japanese, is believed to have originated with the *Asahi Shimbun* in 1904 (Maynard 1998). The genre had a great influence on journalism in Japan, and today a similar column appears in virtually every other national, local, trade and specialty newspaper in Japan. Compared to other types of newspaper columns found both in Western and Japanese newspapers, the *Tensei Jingo* column does not carry the name of the writer, but normally he is a member of the editorial board of the newspaper and his name is made known to the public. The column itself is a mixed genre expressing the opinions or observations of the author. The topics range over a wide number of fields, including domestic and international politics, war, medicine, history, books, sport, and the changing of the seasons. There is a tendency for the writer to include historical or literary allusions and some philosophical comments. The column is perhaps the most read part of the newspaper, given its position on the front page and its brevity. The column is frequently a topic of conversation and discussion in Japan. In addition, every year a number of Japanese universities include some columns from *Tensei Jingo* on their admissions examinations.

The *Tensei Jingo* column lends itself to translation study because the English translations of the columns are published daily in the Japan edition of the *International Herald Tribune* (IHT). The English title of the column is "Vox Populi, Vox Dei", a rather loose Latin translation of the Japanese title. Maynard (1998: 220) suggests that the Japanese title could be translated into English as "Heavenly Voice, Human Words", meaning something like "there is a voice in the heavens and the voice is heard through the people". The English translation of this column, which began in 1957 (Maynard 1998), is intended primarily for

foreign readers (mainly resident in Japan) of the IHT. (Until 2001, it was published in the *Asahi Shimbun*'s own English language edition, the *Asahi Evening News*). The English translations for the previous 10 days can be accessed through the Asahi's Internet website (http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/voxlist.html).

In addition to these two intended readerships, for the past twenty years quarterly collections of the columns have been published with the Japanese original and English translation appearing on the same page, and with English-Japanese glossaries provided. These publications are mainly targeted at Japanese learners of English, and secondarily at foreign learners of Japanese. The present study uses 24 texts from the Summer 2004 collection (Asahi Shimbun Ronsetsu Iinshitsu 2004). This volume contains all of the *Tensei Jingo* columns from the *Asahi Shimbun* from April, May, and June of 2004 and the English translations which were published in the Japan edition of the *International Herald Tribune*. The 24 texts analyzed include the first 15 columns from April 2004 and the first 9 in May, 2004.

4. Results

4.1. Personal names

The principal feature found in the TTs is the use of complete names the first time a person is referred to. Although the Japanese STs often did not include the first name of people, the first name was always provided in the English translations. For example, the name of the U. S. President was given in Japanese as *Busshu Beidaitouryou* (literally "Bush American President") while in English translation it was given in full ("U.S. President George W. Bush"). This rule also holds for Japanese politicians, such as the Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi. In Japanese he was never referred to by his full name, but by his surname followed by the title *shushou* (Prime Minister) or by the title alone. In the English translations Koizumi's full name was consistently used on first mentions with the family name alone on subsequent mentions.

From the texts analyzed we can see that in Japanese the first name is not generally used for well-known people, such as politicians. Also, people from the world of art, literature, and music are often referred to just by their family names. This applies to people from Japan as well as from Western countries. In the Japanese ST for Text 24, a number of artists were mentioned only by family name (Vermeer, Picasso) while the English translation had full-names ("Johannes Vermeer" "Pablo Picasso"). Similarly, the ST for Text 18 contains the surnames of Mozart and Kafka, while the English translation had the full forms of their names ("Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart" "Franz Kafka"). While various explanations could be proposed for why this kind of explicitation was used, I would suggest that the translator is conforming to American English journalistic norms in which full-name reference is required on first mentions. Surnames alone are used only for subsequent mentions. Thus in English "President George W. Bush" is referred to by his full name first, becoming simply "Bush" on subsequent mentions. Concerning the names of famous artists and writers, while it is not uncommon for them to be called simply by their family names in English, the journalistic norm for full-name on first mention seems to be so strong that it was followed consistently in the translations analyzed here.

4.2. Geographic designations

Another difference concerns the mention of various geographic entities. Particularly noticeable about the TTs is the tendency to be more specific about geographic designations. For example, in text 1 the references to the city of Washington, D.C. are made more specific with the addition of specific geographic features not mentioned in the Japanese ST: "along the Potomac" and "the Tidal Basin". Similarly, in Text 10 the location of President Bush's

ranch is made more specific by the use of the town name, "Crawford", rather than just the state name ("Texas") as in the ST. Likewise in Text 8, an essay about a newspaper in Ohio, the city name "Toledo" was supplied in the TT while only the state name "Ohio" was in the ST.

An example of a Japanese geographic designation that was made more specific in the English translation involved reference to a railway station. In the Japanese source text (text 15) a train station in Tokyo is referred to just by the name of the station, "Yurakucho". In English, however, the specific train company that uses that station, JR (Japan Rail) was added.

In the examples above, the reason for this greater degree of geographic specificity is not clear. In contrast to the use of full-name reference discussed above, there does not seem to be an English journalistic norm requiring this degree of geographic detail. (See section 5 for further discussion).

4.3. Japanese cultural referents

Since a number of the texts in the corpus of the present study dealt with topics related to Japan, it is not surprising to find explicitation used for Japanese cultural references. Translators must decide which cultural referents need explicitation for the readership of the translations. They must also decide how to present the explicitation. A common strategy adopted in these texts was the maintenance of the Japanese word with the addition of a translation or explanation (what I will call "borrowing"). Three of the texts in particular contained a number of borrowings.

Text 19, which had the English title "Teaching children one of life's hardest lessons", deals with how to raise children. It quotes from books by Tolstoy on the topic of child rearing. The last paragraph of the essay contains reference to some Japanese cultural features. The English translation is as follows (with the explicitation underlined):

> Passing by a kindergarten on Tuesday, I saw *koinobori*, a set of traditional carp-shaped streamers that are hoisted around this season to pray for children's healthy growth. The "papa carp" and "mama carp" were "swimming" in the breeze, but the little blue "boy carp" had wound itself tight around a rope and only the tip of its tail could be seen. It made me think of someone trapped by society's constraints. I felt sorry for the little carp and wanted to free it, but it was too high to reach. On Children's Day, which falls on May 5, it is an old custom in Japan to put the leaves of *shobu* Japanese iris in the hot tub to enjoy the ritual *shobu-yu*. I vowed to pretend the bunch of leaves in my tub would be my carp family, so the little carp could at least swim freely there.
> (Asahi Shimbun Ronsetsu Iinshitsu 2004: 93. Originally published in the IHT/Asahi, May 7, 2004).

The translator here kept the original Japanese words for various cultural objects, providing an explanation or definition for each. The article was originally published in Japanese on May 5, which is "Children's Day", a national holiday in Japan. (In the Japanese original, only the date, May 5, was mentioned.) The main cultural object referred to was *koinobori*, translated as:

> *koinobori*, a set of traditional carp-shaped streamers that are hoisted around this season to pray for children's healthy growth"

This object is further described as being a set of three streamers including a "papa carp", a "mama carp", and a "boy carp". In addition to the carp streamers, the leaves of the Japanese iris are also part of the Children's Day festival. The two Japanese words the

translator kept were *shobu* ("Japanese iris") and *shobu-yu*: "it is an old custom in Japan to put the leaves of *shobu* Japanese iris in the hot tub to enjoy the ritual *shobu-yu*. "On Children's Day, people take a bath with the leaves of the Japanese iris floating in the bathtub". (The translation "hot tub" here is not quite accurate since it refers to the normal indoor Japanese bath). In the ST the author compares a bunch of *shobu* leaves with carp swimming freely. The bathtub is not directly mentioned at all. Also, the Japanese expression *shobu-yu* ("bath with *shobu* leaves in it") was not mentioned in the ST. The translator added that as part of the explanation about the custom of putting leaves in the bath. The addition of this Japanese word resulted in an even more foreign-sounding text.

Another example of borrowing was in Text 1, which had the English title "Cherry tree's homeland is now at war". The column is about the gift of cherry trees to the United States after the Russo-Japanese War.

> After World War II, seedlings from some of the trees were given back to Japan on two occasions. I saw one "offspring" tree at a Tokyo park. Its budding flowers were redder than those of nearby *someiyoshino* cherries, forming a beautiful contrast with the white petals of *oshimazakura* trees next to it.
> (Asahi Shimbun Ronsetsu Iinshitsu 2004: 3. Originally published in the IHT/Asahi April 2, 2004).

The Japanese names for two varieties of cherry trees were maintained. As these names would not be familiar to most Western readers, it is not clear why the translator chose to include them, especially with only minimal explicitation. The blossoms of *oshimazakura* cherry trees are whiter than the more common *someiyoshino* cherry trees.

The third text with extensive use of borrowing was text 21. In this text a book by a former prime minister of Japan was quoted. The quotation involved an extended play on words concerning the role of the Chief Cabinet Secretary. The translation kept all four of the puns in Japanese, providing a translation into English for each.

4.4. Identification of historical and current events

Another type of Japanese cultural knowledge that can be provided by the translator is information about historical events and current news events in Japan. In the *Tensei Jingo* columns examined here, the writer of the STs assumes the Japanese readers are familiar with such topics. The translator often adds clarifying statements to aid comprehension for the Western readers. One example of this is Text 3 which deals with fatalities caused by automation, such as power windows in cars. A few weeks before the column was written, a boy was killed in Tokyo in an automatic revolving door at a shopping complex. In the ST this event was referred to simply as:

> *Toukyou no Roppongi Hiruzu de no kaitendoa jiko*
> "revolving door accident at Roppongi Hills in Tokyo"

Due to the widespread news coverage of the incident, the readers of the Japanese version of *Tensei Jingo* would certainly be familiar with it. For the English translation, however, the translator added some details to the text, perhaps for readers who may not have heard about the accident. The following sentence was added:

> "A few days earlier, a 6-year-old boy was crushed to death between an automated revolving door and its frame at Tokyo's Roppongi Hills complex".

Similarly, historical information is sometimes provided in the translations. Two examples of this kind of addition were the historical dates ("1868-1912") for the Meiji Period

of Japanese history (Text 2), and the dates when a Japanese author was born and died (Text 14).

4.5. Western cultural referents

We would expect that less explicitation would be necessary for reference to Western culture since the target readership could be assumed to have the necessary background knowledge. In the texts studied here, however, a number of examples of explicitation for Western cultural referents were also found. Most of these consisted of additional identifying information about writers and artists and works of classical literature. The underlined phrases in the following examples are additions that were not in the Japanese STs.

> "Gilgamesh, the ancient Mesopotamian hero" (Text 4)
> "Antoine de Saint-Exupery ... the Frenchman" ... "the French writer-aviator" (Text 11)
> "Russian novelist" Leo Tolstoy" (Text 19)
> "the surrealist painter Salvador Dali" (Text 24)

Historical background was also added. In Text 16, about the former U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammerskjold, the underlined phrases providing background information about the situation in the Congo at the time were added:

> on his way to the Congo, where he was to play a mediatory role in the turmoil following the territory's independence from Belgian colonial rule

One explanation for the use of more detailed identifications for Western referents in the English translations is that English media discourse seems to have a preference not only for the use of full names on the first mention of a person, but also for the inclusion of identifying information about such persons.

5. Discussion

The present study focused on one genre of Japanese media discourse, a short newspaper essay appearing daily in a major Japanese newspaper. From an analysis of the data included in the corpus for the study, it is apparent that a variety of explicitation strategies are being utilized in the translation of these texts. This raises the question of what could be motivating such explicitation.

As mentioned in the discussion of personal names, one reason for using explicitation is the need to follow target language norms for the genre type. In this case, the norm for journalistic writing in the American context requires full-name reference to people when they are first mentioned. This rule appears to apply even to famous people currently alive or from the past.

In the discussion of the degree of detail given for geographic reference as well as for the identification of people and events, another motivating factor must be sought. There does not seem to be an English journalistic norm for the amount of detail to include. However, it could be attributed to a stylistic preference that may be specific to the genre, or preferred by the target readers.

Hall (1983) characterizes cultures according to "how much information (text) needs to be made explicit for communication to take place" (Katan 2004: 245). Cultures differ in the amount of text and context required for communication. Low context cultures rely more directly on the information provided in texts. High context cultures rely more on the context, or shared background knowledge, rather than what is directly in texts. According to this categorization, Japan would be considered a High context culture while the U.S. would be a Low context culture (Victor 1992).

This categorization of Japanese culture can be shown by considering Japanese text structure in general, and the structure of the *Tensei Jingo* columns in particular. In many ways Japanese is a concise language which allows for extensive use of ellipsis. The ellipsis that characterizes many Japanese texts is not merely that of grammatical constituents such as subject pronouns. Markers of cohesion and coherence are often not present. In addition, shared background information is also abbreviated.

While not referring directly to Hall's work on culture, Hinds (1987) proposes a similar way of categorizing rhetorical patterning of different languages. This "new typology" of language takes into consideration differing degrees of reader and writer responsibility for effective communication. In some languages, such as American English, the writer has primary responsibility for making his/her writing clear and well-organized in order to facilitate understanding. English writers do this by the way they organize their thoughts on paper and by the way they indicate connections among these thoughts. In contrast, there are languages in which it is mainly the reader's responsibility to facilitate understanding. The writer may be vague and imprecise, leaving room for the reader to build connections among the thoughts expressed. It is up to the reader to see how parts of an essay are related to each other. Hinds suggests that Japanese is a language which has reader responsibility.

Hinds illustrates this point by considering the use of transition markers. The typical rhetorical organization of Japanese has four-parts: Presentation, Development, Surprise Turn, and Conclusion (Maynard 1998). The third part of the pattern requires a digression from the main topic. This digression can be slight or major, but the fact that it is a digression is often not overtly signaled in Japanese. Hinds (1987) explains how this pattern differs from English. He notes in particular that the third part of the pattern, the surprise element in Japanese, tends to appear "with few overt transition markers" (1987:150). He contrasts this with English writing where transition markers are important and expected. He maintains that "it is the writer's task to provide appropriate transition statements so that the reader can piece together the thread of the writer's logic which binds the composition together" (Hinds 1987: 146). In his analysis of Japanese texts, he finds that transition markers are not used or are more subtle because "it is the reader's responsibility to determine the relationship between any one part of an essay and the essay as a whole." (Hinds 1987: 146)

If we extend this concept to the types of explicitation found in the translation of Japanese media texts, we perhaps can suggest a reason for the need for additional information in the translation. Since Japanese uses a concise rhetorical style requiring the reader to supply necessary links and background information, it is not surprising that geographic details, identifying information and historical facts are often not made explicit. In the case of Japanese cultural referents, the translation into English would of necessity need explicitation. However, when the reference is to Western figures (writers, painters, etc.) who are certainly known to Western readers, a different motivation seems to come into play. It is not to provide knowledge the readers do not have, but rather to fulfill the target readers' expectations about well-formed writing. In this case, journalistic writing should be clear and provide background information with a high level of detail.

While Hinds developed these concepts primarily in the context of contrastive rhetoric and ESL writing instruction, these ideas clearly are applicable to the field of translation as well. If Japanese is characteristically imprecise (at least in some genres of writing), then the translator must be prepared to use a high degree of explicitation in order to produce texts that will meet the expectations of most English readers. Likewise, these concepts can contribute to helping students of translation become sensitive to the need for and use of explicitation strategies in translating from Japanese to English.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Robert De Silva is a professor in the Department of International Communication at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba City, Japan, where he teaches English and discourse analysis. He has studied at Georgetown University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Currently he is enrolled in the doctoral program in translation studies at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, Spain. His research interests include media translation, explicitation in translation, Japanese-English translation, and translator training.