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## Background Knowledge Explicitation

### Blueprint for a Theoretical Model

#### *Abstract*

In order to compensate for anticipated knowledge deficits among TL readers, translators may introduce in their translations non-formal elements of information that were left implicit in the SL text, a process known as background knowledge explicitation. In contrast to the explicitation of formal aspects of language, the process has been less extensively explored. To remedy this deficit, the present study employs schema theory-oriented research into reading comprehension as a broad theoretical framework for the investigation of the process of background knowledge explicitation. Analysis identifies two translation-induced inference process failures that prevent TL readers from making sense of the text. Two explicitation procedures are presented that purport to address these failures. The discussion reviews a number of implementation issues hinging on the status of the translator as a historical entity with cultural competence limits and the elusiveness of the reading experience.

## 1 Introduction

Vinay and Darbelnet are presumably among the earliest to have addressed explicitation in translation, which they describe as

Procédé qui consiste à introduire dans LA [langue d'arrivée] des précisions qui restent implicites dans LD [langue de départ], mais qui se dégagent du contexte ou de la situation.

(Vinay/Darbelnet 1958: 8)

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*.

(Vinay/Darbelnet 1958/1995: 342)

Nida depicts the process as “amplification from implicit to explicit status”<sup>1</sup> whereby “important semantic elements carried implicitly in the source language may require explicit identification in the receptor language” (Nida 1964: 228). The label of *amplification* has had some currency within more recent research (e.g. Malone 1988: 41; Fawcett 1997: 45). However, the translation community seems to have converged on the

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the nine categories listed under “addition”, itself a subcategory of “adjustment” carried out in the translation process (Nida 1964: 227).

use of the label “explicitation” as the technical term referring to the process in question, as is attested by the entry devoted to the concept in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Klaudy 1998/2008; see also Olohan/Baker 2000: 142; Englund Dimitrova 2005).

Research into explicitation has broadly been influenced by Blum-Kulka’s (1986) distinction between the explicitation of formal and non-formal aspects of language. Within this dichotomous framework, research has focused on the formal side (Kamenická 2008: 117-118), bolstered in so doing by the ease inherent to defining and singling out formal aspects of language and by the emergence and proliferation of corpus-based research (Laviosa 2002: 18). Conversely, focus on the non-formal side of the dichotomy, crippled by a lack of theoretical grounding, has been limited to awareness-raising accounts.

The present paper will attempt to bridge this deficit in the handling of the explicitation of non-formal aspects and will rely on schema theory-oriented research into reading comprehension as a broad framework for the investigation. The argument will proceed as follows. First, a review of explicitation will highlight the different theoretical and practical hurdles that led to the predominance of studies on the formal side of the dichotomy. Second, the rationale for the adoption of schema theory-oriented research into reading comprehension to address the explicitation of non-formal semantic aspects will be discussed. Third, a proposal for a categorisation of implicit information and corresponding translation strategies will be laid out. Finally, the paper will provide a discussion of theoretical and methodological issues relative to the explicitation of these non-formal elements.

## 2 Explicitation: An Overview

The concept of *explicitation* covers a wide range of phenomena (Englund Dimitrova 2005: 34). A major categorisation that was to prove influential is the one provided by Blum-Kulka (1986) who, through her use of two translation shift categories, makes an initial *formal vs. non-formal* distinction. With few exceptions (Séguinot 1988), subsequent categorisations, though not necessarily mirroring Blum-Kulka’s framework, adopt a similar dichotomous approach (see for instance Malone 1988: 45; Klaudy 1998/2008; Laviosa 2002: 18).

The formal branch of the dichotomy consists of what Blum-Kulka calls *shifts of cohesion*. We are dealing here with a multitude of features such as anaphoric and cataphoric references or syntactic features (e.g. gender, inflectional cases, etc.) that are all “objectively detectable” and related to “overt textual relationship[s]” (Blum-Kulka 1986: 23). Because these features are not equally present in all languages, they may necessitate explicitation in case we are translating from a language where a feature is not used

to a language where it is.<sup>2</sup> The bilingual example (1), taken from a Nestlé® Fitness® cereal pack sold in the Middle East, is an instance of gender explication at the levels of the Arabic pronouns and verb inflections, making the sentence explicitly address female customers.

(1) (SL) When you “break your fast” you are simply asking your body to start working.

(TL) عندما تتناولين وجبة الفطور، فأنتِ تُحْتَنِنِ جسمكِ على البدء بالعمل.

(Back translation) When take<sup>-2fs-nom</sup> meal breakfast, so you<sup>-2fs</sup> urge<sup>-2fs-nom</sup> body<sup>-2fs-gen</sup> to start<sup>-gen</sup> work.<sup>3</sup>

Blum-Kulka's non-formal side of the dichotomy, on the other hand, corresponds to *shifts of coherence*, where coherence is understood as “a covert potential meaning relationship among parts of a text, made overt by the reader or listener through processes of interpretation” (Blum-Kulka 1986: 17). In the main,<sup>4</sup> this category addresses information gaps resulting from the *readership shift* characteristic of the translation act. Indeed, information which is left implicit in the source text (ST), which is often necessary for its comprehension, and which is expected (at least in principle) to be available to the ST reader, is not always accessible to the target language (TL) reader. Because this implicitness may induce change or loss of meaning potential (Blum-Kulka 1986: 23), the necessity arises to make this information available to the TL reader through explication. In extract (2), from Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace of Desire*, the translators added elements of information (in italics) to make the significance and role of the phrase “Night of Destiny” more explicit to the TL readers.<sup>5</sup>

(2) (Context) Where a protagonist relishes in the description of his beloved.

(SL) كأنَّ الشرق قد استوهبها الغرب في ليلة القدر. (Mahfouz 1957: 18)

(Translation without explication) [...] as though the East had requested you as a gift from the West on the Night of Destiny.

(Translation with explication) [...] as though the East had requested you as a gift from the West on the anniversary of the Night of Destiny, *at the end of Ramadan, when prayers are sure to be answered.*

(Mahfouz 1994a: 15. Emphasis added)

These two explication categories are found to be depicted under different labels throughout the literature. For instance, Malone refers to the category of explication of formal

<sup>2</sup> Klaudy and Károly (2005: 15) list six “standard transfer operations involving explication: lexical specification, lexical division, lexical addition, grammatical specification, grammatical elevation (raising), grammatical addition.”

<sup>3</sup> Key: 2: second person; f: feminine; s: singular; nom: nominative; gen: genitive.

<sup>4</sup> See Blum-Kulka's further division of this category into text-focused and reader-focused shifts (Blum-Kulka 1986: 23-32) where the latter category bears a stronger relationship to the TL reader.

<sup>5</sup> All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

aspects of language as structurally motivated *classificatory amplification*, which is “normally evoked by linguistic conditions of the target language” (Malone 1988: 45), while for Klaudy, the category corresponds to obligatory and optional<sup>6</sup> explicitations, both related to the linguistic system (Klaudy 1998/2008: 106). Explicitation dealing with non-formal aspects corresponds for Malone to strategically driven *compensatory amplification*, “characteristically motivated by extra-linguistic conditions of the target audience” (Malone 1988: 45). For Klaudy, this second category corresponds to what she calls *pragmatic explicitation*, that is usually dictated by differences between cultures (Klaudy 1998/2008: 106-107).<sup>7</sup> More serious than the lack of uniformity over the nomenclature is the disagreement regarding what the concepts involved should cover, as even the initial formal/non-formal dichotomy is not uniformly acknowledged. In fact, Séguinot discards explicitations triggered by formal aspects of the text and argues in favour of reserving the term “for additions in a translated text which cannot be explained by structural, stylistic, or rhetorical differences between the two languages” (Séguinot 1988: 108).

Despite this lack of convergence, a large amount of research has gone into the investigation of explicitation. Among the various research paths figure explicitation as a translation universal (Blum-Kulka 1986; Olohan/Baker 2000; Pápai 2004)<sup>8</sup> and explicitation as a key to individual translator style (Baker 2000; Saldanha 2005; Kamenická 2008). With rare exceptions, this body of research has mainly focused on the formal side of the dichotomy (Laviosa 2002: 18). Directly observable on the surface of the text, the aspects at stake here lend themselves more readily to empirical investigation (Blum-Kulka 1986: 23). It is therefore not surprising that corpus linguistics was identified as an ideal testing ground for the kind of investigation sought here (Baker 1993; Frankenberg-Garcia 2009). Conversely, the study of non-formal manifestations of explicitation has remained comparatively limited as it is affected by theoretical and methodological hurdles that are attributable to the very nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny, which, contrary to formal aspects, is not directly observable and is less amenable to quantitative analysis (Blum-Kulka 1986: 23; Pym 2005: 34).

Because of these theoretical and methodological challenges, non-formal manifestations of explicitation are frequently identified under broad labels such as *general knowledge* (Klaudy 1998/2008: 106), *culture-specific concepts* (Englund Dimitrova 2005: 37), concepts that are unfamiliar to the TL audience (Vaseva 1980, quoted in Klaudy 1998/2008: 105), *indirect references to shared knowledge* (Séguinot 1985: 297), or

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<sup>6</sup> The category of optional explicitation here may be confusing. Klaudy explains that these explicitations “are optional in the sense that grammatically correct sentences can be constructed without their application in the target language, although the text as a whole will be clumsy and unnatural” (Klaudy 1998/2008: 106). Kamenická adds that they are “due to differences between text-building strategies and stylistic preferences of the two languages in question” (Kamenická 2008: 118).

<sup>7</sup> The use of *pragmatic explicitation* as a label, however, should be distinguished from the subcategory of explicitation handling pragmatic inferencing such as *presupposition* (Fawcett 1998; Séguinot 1988: 108) and *implicature* (Malmkjær 1998: 29-31; Englund Dimitrova 2005: 34). These instances of pragmatic inferencing are calculable (see Senft 2014: 33-37), a feature that makes it possible to work them out through a chain of reasoning (Séguinot 1985: 295).

<sup>8</sup> See also Becher (2010) for criticism of one aspect of the hypothesis.

*cultural knowledge* (Perego 2003: 74). When a further typology of the phenomenon is undertaken (Nida 1964: 91; Aziz 1982; Newmark 1987: 94-103; Séguinot 1988: 108; Franco Aixelá 1996; Tymoczko 1999: 24-25), the categories presented are not functionally distinct and their listing often makes no claims beyond awareness raising (Nida 1964: 91). As such, these investigations, though illustrative of the handling of instances of explicitation of information left implicit in the source language (SL) text, leave a large room for intuition and the dexterity of the translator. This issue is attested by Englund Dimitrova when she argues that

[p]rofessional translators can be assumed to be aware of such needs, and also to know the strategies that are available to achieve this, *whereas students with no experience in communicative translation might not be.* (Englund Dimitrova 2005: 37. Emphasis added)

### **3 The Pertinence of a Schema Theory-based Approach to Explicitation**

Moving beyond awareness raising to propose a functional categorisation of implicit knowledge and corresponding explicitation strategies would have the merit of spelling out some of the intuitive expertise of experienced professional translators. However, such an endeavour needs to be grounded in an adequate theoretical framework in order to reduce, if not remove, epistemological hurdles arising from the elusive nature of the phenomenon under scrutiny. The present section argues that insights from approaches into reading comprehension, and specifically those deriving from schema theory, can prove helpful for such an investigation.

Schema theory developed within cognitive science as a model of the structure in which knowledge is stored in human memory (Rumelhart 1980; Anderson/Pearson 1984: 10; Alderson 2000: 17, 33). The model found an immediate application in empirical investigations of reading comprehension processes (Anderson/Pearson 1984: 259). A major assumption within this model is that reading comprehension is a construct resulting from the interaction between the text and the knowledge the readers bring to the text through inferencing processes that activate the appropriate schemata (Schank/Abelson 1977: 41).<sup>9</sup> In the words of Brown and Yule,

it is typically the case that texts which a reader will normally encounter will [...] assume massive amounts of existing background knowledge, and normally require the reader to make whatever inferences he feels willing to work for in order to reach an understanding of what is being conveyed. (Brown/Yule 1983: 269-270)

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<sup>9</sup> Schema Theory has, since it emerged in the 1970s, been superseded by a multitude of other approaches that either broaden its scope by merging reading with other language skills within a global focus on literacy, or try to address shortcomings in schema theory itself (see Pearson 2009: 292-311 for a review). Though diverse, these approaches partake of the same paradigm shift that came about with schema theory and that advocates that comprehension is the junction point between elements of information in the text and elements from outside the text.

This strand of reading comprehension theory appeals to the process of making explicit in the TL elements of information that are left implicit in the SL text and that are expected to be retrieved from the SL reader's background knowledge. This construct specifically draws on schema-based research into second/foreign language (henceforth L2) reading (McVee/Dunsmore/Gavelek 2005: 534-535). This body of research proceeds from the assumption that the process whereby readers contribute to comprehension by bringing in their background knowledge is likely to be affected by knowledge gaps induced by shifts in readership. Indeed, L2 readers are typically outsiders to the audience for which a text is originally intended. They are often found to lack specific schemata and are therefore unable to make inferences that are necessary to help them make sense of the text (Alderson/Urquhart 1984; Carrell/Devine/Eskey 1988; Carrell 1991; Semino 1995). From this perspective, reading a translated text in L1 can be considered a mirror image of L2 reading as both activities represent variations on what can be depicted as reading in a foreign culture. In both activities, the background knowledge load assumed by the text can create comprehension or interpretation challenges arising from the shift in readership.<sup>10</sup>

The parallel between reading in a foreign language and the reading of translated texts naturally extends to the strategies used to address the knowledge gap obstacles that readers encounter in both cases. Both L2 teachers and translators act as mediators of the encounter with the foreign text. For teachers, the mediation consists in running activities (whether pre-reading, while reading, or post-reading) (Al-Issa 2006; Liu/Li-rong et al. 2010) that are intent on activating or creating the necessary schemata in the learner and subsequently enabling the required inferencing processes. For translators, the panoply of available strategies consists of explicitation strategies (see Kim 2006).

#### **4 A Schemata-based Investigation of Background Knowledge Explicitation**

From a schemata-based perspective, reading issues that originate from the TL text reader's ignorance of background knowledge can be considered to relate to two types of inference making processes; elaborative and evaluative inferencing. The rest of the present section elaborates on these two types of difficulties and on the explicitation strategies that can be devised to address them. It should be underscored at this stage that the contribution of the framework presented here resides not in providing new solutions. The explicitation processes that will be described below are already being exploited by translators and handled by translation theorists (though these often make use of different nomenclatures). Rather, the contribution consists in explaining and, to some extent, predicting the use of these processes for specific textual instances drawing on schema theory-based research into reading comprehension as a general theoretical framework.

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<sup>10</sup> See also Doherty (2002: 171).



## 4.1 Elaborative Inferencing

Broadly speaking, elaborative inferences are processes that relate textual elements to the reader's knowledge as part of the overall effort of making sense of the text (Collins/Tajika 1996: 27). This elaborative inferencing process is impaired in case the reader encounters a textual element with an unfamiliar reference. The sections below elaborate on the notions of unfamiliar "general references" and on "textual references" as a specific sub-type.

### 4.1.1 General References

General references can be defined as textual elements that relate to real-life aspects such as institutions, celebrations, famous figures, places, past events, cultural words, etc. (Blum-Kulka 1986: 26). Extract (3) comprises references to historical figures and literary and intellectual works. Here, the TL reader can be assumed to be familiar with *The Thousand and One Nights* reference, but not with "al-Hamasa" or "al-Manfaluti". The context only helps understand that "al-Hamasa" is a work while "al-Manfaluti" is an author. Alone, the context cannot help establish the type of writing the work belongs to nor the kind of writing the mentioned author is involved in. These elements of information are nonetheless necessary for the comprehension of the passage as they are intended to demonstrate the protagonist's erudition. In extract (4), the reference is to a conservative religious school. However, the context alone only allows to surmise that "Hanbali" could be related to a conservative attitude.

- (3) (Context) Where the narrator showcases the diversity of the readings of a protagonist, showing that these cannot be classified under one category.

(SL) مقالات أدبية، و اجتماعية، و دينية، و ملحمة عنتر، و ألف ليلة، و الحماسة، و المنفلوطي، و مبادي الفلسفة. (Mahfouz 1957: 54).

(Translation without explicitation) There had been literary and social essays, religious ones, Antar's epic, *The Thousand and One Nights*, the *al-Hamasa*, the writings of al-Manfaluti, and the principles of philosophy.

- (4) (Context) Where a picnic menu becomes the subject of a discussion.

(SL) نحن نشرب البيرة لفتح النفس ليس إلا [...] أما لحم الخنزير فلهذا جذاً، جربه و لا تكن حنبلياً. (Mahfouz 1957: 198).

(Translation without explicitation) We only drink beer to wet our appetites [...] and pork's very tasty. Try it. Don't be a Hanbali.

### 4.1.2 Textual References

A specific sub-type of references is often depicted in the literature under the label of allusions. Among the theorists who tackle textual allusion within their discussion of translation difficulties, Leppihalme defines it as "small stretches of other texts embedded in the text at hand, which interact with and colour it" (Leppihalme 1997: 3). Hervey and Higgins give the following definition: "Allusive meaning is present when an expression

evokes some associated saying or quotation in such a way that the meaning of that saying or quotation becomes part of the overall meaning of the expression” (Hervey/Higgins 1992: 107). As such, a textual allusion echoes another text and represents a culture-specific semantic load.<sup>11</sup> Without knowledge of the earlier text(s), the main motive for the allusion, quite often an “added innuendo” (Hervey/Higgins 1992: 107), is missed. Hence, while general references call on knowledge of real-life aspects in a specific culture, the category of textual references calls on a more specific knowledge of texts within that culture. Extract (5) presupposes familiarity with Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, or at least with the now stereotypical line “some animals are more equal than others.” Without knowledge of the text referred to, the reader is unable to appreciate the irony that is usually implied with this particular allusion. Extract (6) refers to the line in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: “A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!” (Act V, scene IV: 7). Without awareness of the reference, the reader can only deduce that the name is the result of the compounding of a full phrase but is unable to take the explanation further.

- (5) At first, the two boys attended classes side by side. They were equal, although one of them was, of course, more so than the other. (Mahjoub 1998: 33)
- (6) The small village still holding out successfully against the Roman aggressors is inhabited by a tough tribe of Britons commanded by their chief MYKINGDOM-FORANOS. (Gosciny/Uderzo 1970: 7)

Taken together, general references and their sub-type of textual references<sup>12</sup> represent information loads that are nominally overt to the SL reader. For TL readers who are not familiar with the cultural or technical intricacies involved, the meaning of the text is drastically reduced or can even become obscure or opaque to interpretation. For all these textual and non-textual references, the purpose of explicitation is to provide a missing schematic link through an explanation of, or an elaboration on, what a word or phrase refers to (see for instance Fujii 2013 in the case of legal translation). Suggesting a label for this explicitation process that would unify the different proposals in the literature without adding to the cacophony described in Delisle, Lee-Jahnke and Cormier (eds) (1999: 108) is not an easy task. The label of *bridging* is tentatively suggested here.

Many of the instances of explicitation that are depicted in the literature under the category of *cultural words*<sup>13</sup> come under the wing of bridging for general references. The way these instances are handled sheds some light on the explanations and elaborations which bridging is expected to bring about. Hence, “Canelloni” would be further explicated as “the pasta dish Canelloni” (Newmark 1987: 97), “Maros” would become “the river Maros”, and “Fertő” would be “Lake Fertő” (Klaudy 1998/2008: 107). Extracts (7) and (8)

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<sup>11</sup> This is the same phenomenon treated in literature under intertextuality or literary allusion (see for instance Abrams/Harpham 1957/2012: 401).

<sup>12</sup> Blum-Kulka presents these two types of references under one category of “allusions to persons, places or other texts” whether in “real world or literary” (Blum-Kulka 1986: 26).

<sup>13</sup> Roughly, these are “words specific to a certain culture/language, and for which no equivalents are available in another language” (Jamoussi 2003: 109).



further illustrate cases of bridging for general references. In extract (8), each of the two transliterations, *Isha* and *burnoose*, represents an instance of general reference. The use of “evening” helps locate the time of action while the use of “hoods” helps identify “burnoose” as a clothing item. Extract (9), exemplifies an instance of bridging for a textual reference. Here, the Quranic textual reference is spelled out, as the sole use of the verse and Sura numbers is deemed insufficient. The inclusion of the initial part of the verse, which is omitted in the SL text,<sup>14</sup> is meant to clarify the overall meaning.

- (7) (Context) At one point in Bechir Khraief’s 1959 novel, a group of men come to a decision and need to seal their commitment with an oath. To make it solemn, the oath is to be taken on a copy of the Quran. Not finding one, a character suggests:

(SL) احفوا على صدري، راهو فيه الستين. (Khraief 1959/1990: 217)

(Translation without explicitation) Take the oath on my chest. It contains the sixty.

(Translation with bridging) Take the oath on my chest. It contains the sixty *books of the Quran*.

- (8) (Context) Where the narrator is relating events.

(SL) خرج المصلون من صلاة العشاء، واضعين برانيسهم على رؤوسهم. (Duagi 1946: 37)

(Translation without explicitation) After completing the Isha prayer, the worshipers came out with their burnooses on their heads.

(Translation with bridging) After completing the Isha *evening* prayer, the worshipers came out with their burnoose *hoods* on their heads.

- (9) (Context) Where the protagonist was following her husband and sons with her eyes as they were walking away from the house.

(SL) فلم تكن تمسك عن تلاوة "و من شر حاسد إذا حسد" حتى يغيبوا عن عينيها. (Mahfouz 1956: 26)

(Translation without explicitation) She continued reciting “and from the mischief of the envious person in his envy” (113, 5) until they were out of sight.

(Mahfouz 1994b: 23)

(Translation with bridging) She continued reciting *the Quranic verse* “*I seek refuge in the Lord of day break, from [...] and from the mischief of the envious person in his envy*” (113, 5) until they were out of sight.

## 4.2 Evaluative Inferencing

With evaluative inferencing the reader decides on the *why* of utterances and actions featured in the text (Sanford/Garrod 1981: 6; Brown/Yule 1983: 262). Here, the absence

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<sup>14</sup> This truncating is common in spoken communication.

of the related background knowledge may lead to an erroneous interpretation. Issues relative to evaluative inferencing can appear in instances of lexical connotation and social behaviour.

#### 4.2.1 Lexical Connotation

Lexical connotation is used here in the usual sense as the value (positive, negative, pejorative, etc.) a term acquires within a language community over and above its denotative meaning.<sup>15</sup> This focus on lexical items is to be made distinct from the focus on general references (cultural words) referred to in the previous section. Here, the word itself is not culturally bound, only its connotation is. In extract (10), the focus is on the lexical item “camphor”. The presence of the items “cringe” and “disdain” in the immediate context of this item already help orient the reader towards the negative connotation intended in the text. However, the reader still does not have the elements necessary to appreciate the association between the lexical item “camphor” and the negative connotation it holds in this particular context. What still remains covert to the TL reader is that camphor is used in the cultural context of the story to anoint the dead, and therefore comes with a strong lugubrious connotation. In extract (11), the term “professional” has a strong negative connotation originating from conservative spheres where artists are usually associated with debauchery. The ironic comment and scathing criticism that the sentence implies is not obvious to the TL reader.

(10) (Context) Where the wife is scrambling to mend her fledgling marriage.

(SL) استقبلته عند الظهر زوجته الجديدة متزينة، متعطرة ... فلما اقتربت منه، قال لها مُستكفاً:  
ريحتك بكلها زيت كافور!  
(Khraief 1959/1990: 334)

(Translation without explicitation) At noon, his new wife welcomed him. She was all made up and perfumed [...] But when she got close to him, he cringed in disdain: “You smell of *camphor oil*.”

(11) (Context) Where the protagonist, Khadija, mockingly reacts to her sister Aisha’s riling over the distribution of chores in the family house, Aisha arguing that she is content with the singing while her sister can do the rest of the chores.

(SL) يمكن ناوية تكون عالمة! (Mahfouz 1956: 28)

(Translation without explicitation) Perhaps she intends to become a *professional*.  
(Mahfouz 1994b: 26. Emphasis added).

#### 4.2.2 Social Behaviour

The category is meant to cover instances ranging from institutionalised customs to personal habits which, although not necessarily specific to a particular community,

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<sup>15</sup> See Leech (1974: chapter 2).

acquire a special significance within each (see Brown 1990: 15). Like the lexical connotation category, social behaviour involves a value or significance which a reader who is not familiar with the local culture would not be able to assign to what he/she is reading. Extract (12) provides an illustration of a customary routine to perform after praying, and does not denote a particular religious zeal, as the TL text may induce into thinking. Extract (13) depicts an instance of pregnancy-induced craving. In the cultural context of the novel, however, this craving can be not just for food but for a multitude of other objects or actions to fulfil, and is accompanied by the popular belief that non-satisfaction of the craving may result in a malformation of the foetus. In extract (14), the gesture of the female protagonist is a sign of piety. Shaking hands between a man and a woman represents an instance of direct physical contact which is forbidden in some conservative societies.

(12) (Context) Where the protagonist goes through his daily morning ritual.

حتى إذا انفتل من صلاته ترَبَع وبسط راحته وراح يدعو الله أن يكلاه برعايته ويغفر له ويبارك في ذريته وتجارته. (SL)  
(Mahfouz 1956: 20)

(Translation without explicitation) after he had finished praying he would sit cross-legged with palms outstretched and *implore God to watch over him carefully, forgive him, and bless his offspring and business.*

(Mahfouz 1994b: 17-18. Emphasis added)

(13) (Context) A narrative provided by a pregnant female protagonist.

كانت رائحة الورد تزكم الأنوف، فاشتبهت وردة ... تمنيتها و أنا حبلى. (SL) (al-Matwi 1964: 22-23)

(Translation without explicitation) The scent of roses was intoxicating. I fancied one [...] I fancied it all the more as I was pregnant.

(14) (Context) Where the protagonist goes about responding to her host's welcoming greetings.

فمدت له أم مريم يدها ملفوفة في طرف ملاءتها قائلة: (SL)  
أهلا بك يا سيد أحمد.

(Mahfouz 1957: 140)

(Translation without explicitation) Maryam's mother held out a hand *covered with a corner of her wrap* as she said, 'thank you, al-Sayyid Ahmad'.

(Mahfouz 1994a: 135. Emphasis added)

With instances of the social behaviour type, the TL reader is at a loss how to interpret the text. Indeed, the three examples above depict behaviour or gestures which, for want of further information, may seem bizarre or superfluous. Left to their own devices, and driven by the assumption that the sentence is meaningful (Grice's Cooperative Principle, Grice 1975), TL readers may reach erroneous interpretations. For instance, in extract (14), the reader may infer that the character covered her hand to hide something, or because it was dirty, or because she had a skin disease, etc.

To minimise the risk of misinterpretation in instances of social behaviour and lexical connotation, use is made of explicitations that aim to orient the reader to the way the instance is interpreted in its cultural context, and therefore to help in the working out of evaluative inferences, by supplying the missing point of view. This type of explicitation can tentatively be labelled *commenting*. The effect of the comment is to minimise the likelihood of the readers reaching the wrong interpretation or conjecturing a tentative inference but remaining unable to ascertain it. Extract (15) illustrates an attempt to provide guiding comments in the case of lexical connotation. Extract (16) provides an illustration of a possible comment in the case of social behaviour.

(15) (Context) Where the protagonist is about to leave the room to allow her husband to get some rest.

(SL) و قيل أن تجوز العتبة سمعت السيد أحمد و هو يتجشأ فتمتمت:  
صحة و عافية.

(Mahfouz 1956: 16)

(Translation without explicitation) Before she left the room, she heard her husband belch. She stammered “health and strength”.

(Mahfouz 1994b: 13)

(Translation with comment) Before she left the room, she heard her husband belch. "Health and strength" she stammered – *as is customary with this welcome display of satiation*.

(16) (Context) Where the protagonist discovers that her son, Kamal, is still sound asleep.

(SL) أقبلت عليه باسمه و حطت راحتها على جبينه و تلت الفاتحة.

(Mahfouz 1956: 21)

(Translation without explicitation) Smiling, she approached him, placed the palm of her hand on his forehead and recited the Fatiha.

(Translation with comment) Smiling, she approached him, placed the palm of her hand on his forehead and recited the opening prayer of the Qur'an, *hence shielding him from evil*.

As is often the case with categorisations, overlap is possible. A textual instance can display features of more than one type of background knowledge. This polyvalence, however, does not affect the distinctiveness of the categories being suggested, it only points at their possible build-up. In extract (8) (provided above), the implicitness can be seen as both a reference difficulty (the *burnoose* being a gown-like garment with a hood, so that the sentence should be interpreted as “covering their heads with their burnoose hoods”), as well as a social behaviour difficulty relating to the use of the garment (the hood being mainly used in cold weather). In extract (15), apart from the fact that what the character says is the truncated form of “*May God give you health and strength*”, a

formulation which signals a blessing (social behaviour), the fact of belching in this context is not associated with bad manners (lexical connotation).

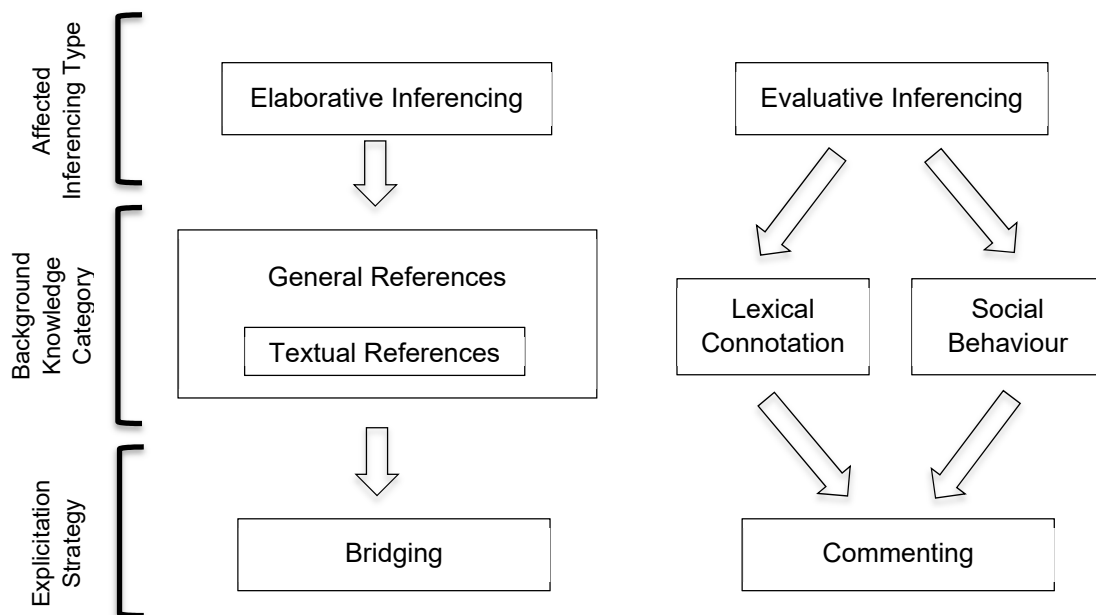


Fig. 1: Background knowledge categories with associated inference types and explication strategies

## 5 Questions of Implementation: Achilles' Heel?

The focus on the explicitation of background knowledge raises a specific set of implementation questions, both theoretical and methodological in nature. Their discussion, especially within a translator-training context, is believed to represent a necessary exercise to gain a better grasp of the leading principles and the limitations inherent to the explicitation process.

Many assumptions are held about the role of the translator in a translation approach advocating such intervention as to facilitate communication through the explicitation of elements that were left implicit by the SL text writer. The translator here becomes a mediator anticipating what may or may not represent background knowledge comprehension difficulties (Blum-Kulka 1986: 26; Baker 1992: 250; Englund Dimitrova 2005: 37) and adding elements that are deemed necessary in the fabric of the TL text. This role highlights the translator's identity as both a reader (of the SL text) and a writer (of the TL text) (Pym 2005: 38) and, by the same token, brings up the fact that the discussion of the explicitation of non-formal aspects cannot escape issues of subjectivity and indeterminacy.

## 5.1 The Translator as a Reader

Prior to tackling anticipated difficulties in the communicative situation, translators obviously have to spot them. To this end, “[t]ranslators would have to resort to their ‹world knowledge› in interpreting” the passages they translate (Delisle/Lee-Jahnke/Cormier eds 1999: 139). In more technical terms, the translators must possess the schemata (background knowledge) that the SL text authors presuppose in their readers. This urge (see for instance Durieux 1990: 671 and Séguinot 1985: 295, 297) for what can be termed SL cultural competence is most felt in texts with a primarily expressive or poetic function and can challenge the principle whereby translators are expected to work into their native language (see Jamoussi 2002). In fact, some instances of implicit knowledge could be defeating to the most competent of readers in what underscores the identity of the translator/reader as a historical consciousness (Bush 2003: 122) and his/her interpretive limits. For example, at one point in Umberto Eco’s *The Island of the Day Before* (extract 17), the narrator, Roberto, indulges in an extended reflection containing an allusion (italics) to Herman Melville and his novel *Moby Dick*.

- (17) I believe it is necessary to engage in an “Explication of the Dove,” to draft some notes for a future little monograph that could be entitled *Columba Patefacta*, and the project does not seem to me completely otiose, *considering that others have devoted whole chapters to the Meaning of the Whale, that ugly black or gray animal (though if white, it is unique)*.  
(Eco 1994/2006: 345. Emphasis added)

The fact that this literary reference is not spelled out shows that the author presupposes in his reader knowledge of classical literature in order to follow his argument. An earlier work by Umberto Eco, *Il nome della rosa* (1980), published in English under the title *The Name of the Rose* (1983), represents an extreme case, as the novel is replete with allusions and cultural and textual references that represent as many stumbling blocks to comprehension. In fact, it took a team of three scholars years to compile these references and ultimately publish them in a separate volume aptly titled *The Key to the Name of the Rose* (Eco/Haft et al. 1987).

## 5.2 The Translator as a Writer

Beyond the question of identification of implicit information lies the question of the amount of information the translator is to supply in the explicitation process. Though usually only a marginal issue, this question may require more attention in some instances that bring to bear intricate ramifications of implicit knowledge items (Blum-Kulka 1986: 26) that the reader can bring to the text. This is the case, for instance, in extract (18) where some of the underlying knowledge is that a كُتَّاب [kuttāb] is a kind of kindergarten, that the purpose of this school is to teach children the Quran, albeit mechanically, that memorising the Quran is considered, at least at the time the short story was written, as one of the cornerstones of literacy, that wooden slates are used by pupils in this kind of school, that these slates are covered with a layer of clay that has to be imprinted with



writing before it hardens, that cleaning these slates once the class is over is a chore the dunce is assigned, etc. The amount of background knowledge a reader is able to bring to the text could thus be quite voluminous.

(18) (Context) Where the narrator is lamenting the fact that he did not have the chance to receive a decent education.

(SL) لم أستطع حفظ شيء. لقد دخلت الكتاب و خرجت و لم أتعلم إلا محي الألواح. (Duagi 1946: 87)

(Translation without explication) I couldn't learn a single thing. I went to the kuttāb and came out and learned nothing, save for cleaning the writing slates.

In terms of schemata, this aspect relates to the idea that knowledge is stored not as clearly itemised components with clear conceptual boundaries but rather in the form of networks of interconnected semantic items (de Beaugrande/Dressler 1981: 90; Alderson 2000: 17). This semantic interlocking makes it arduous to isolate one item from the others. In fact, the activation of an item, i.e. the use of an item during comprehension, calls up connected items along with it, a process referred to as spreading activation (de Beaugrande/Dressler 1981: 88). Within this construct, comprehension is described as the sum of all these activated knowledge items.

In cases of this nature, determining exactly how much should be explicated is a factor of many aspects such as the function of the translation in the target culture (Fawcett 1997: 125), the amount of leeway the translator is allowed by patronage (Lefevere 1992: 11-25), or even product specifications (Gouadec 2007: 6-7). However, it is the aspect of reader's needs that is most salient (Nida 1964: 226; Duff 1981: 29; Malone 1988: 42; Baker 1992: 244-245; Englund Dimitrova 2005: 37).

The aspect of reader's needs relates to the broader question of the relativity of the reading experience, which defeats any attempt at identifying in a prescriptive fashion the extent of explication to be undertaken. In this respect, it is worth noting that even within the same language, discrepancy can be identified relative to what Saldanha calls the "cognitive store of the reader" (Saldanha 2008: 26), where background information uniformity is not guaranteed as we move from one generation of readers to another, from one social milieu to another, etc. (Séguinot 1985: 297). As Bush puts it, "[i]t is not possible to analyse the experience of the source text readers, and it is not possible to recreate those imponderables in a reader in another language" (Bush 2003: 132). Therefore, attempting to predict *precisely* how much extra information the TL reader needs in a particular instance is as futile as attempting to know what background information the SL reader adds to the text to make sense of it.

A more constructive approach would be to accept indeterminacy, subjectivity, and relativity as components in the explication endeavour of the kind developed here (Pym 2005: 34) and to employ coherence and the avoidance of misinterpretation as a yardstick (Blum-Kulka 1986: 26; Baker 1992: 250). In other words, it can be posited that the amount of explication the translator performs should be confined to a threshold, subjective as it

may be, whereby a clearly delineated readership is deemed able to reach coherence, i.e. to “reach an understanding of what is being conveyed” (Brown/Yule 1983: 259).<sup>16</sup>

Applying this to extract (8) above, we can initially decide to integrate two bridging-type explicitations to identify the *Isha* prayer as an evening prayer and to avoid mistaking “Burnoose” for a kind of headgear, *Burnoose* being a North African thick one-piece woollen hooded cloak worn by men in cold weather. Equally to note is that, in this particular instance, the word is a synecdoche where the whole cloak stands for the hood. In the light of this analysis, the translation could look like:

- (19) After completing the *Isha evening* prayer, the worshipers came out with their burnoose *hoods* on their heads.

However, a further comment-type explicitation could be deemed necessary to explain the use of the hood and avoid misinterpreting the action as an attempt to go incognito. Thus:

- (20) After completing the *Isha evening* prayer, the worshipers came out, their heads *wrapped in the warmth* of their burnoose *hoods*.

## 6 Conclusion

Despite the fact that the field of translation studies is regularly presented as interdisciplinary, a great deal of compartmentalisation is still in place. Background knowledge explicitation is one of those topics in the field that could benefit from an enhanced cross-fertilisation from a schema theory-based approach to reading comprehension. Such an approach focuses on the interplay between the reader’s background knowledge and the text. Applied to translation, this framework helps establish the needs of the TL reader in terms of inferences that are necessary to make sense of the text. The framework equally establishes the required explicitation strategies that can cater to the knowledge deficiencies of the reader. Two explicitation strategies, bridging and commenting, each applicable to different textual manifestations, were suggested in the present study. The tenor of the information made explicit through these two strategies corresponds in L1 reading to distinct inferences the SL reader makes to reach an understanding of the text. This construct departs from holistic accounts of background knowledge explicitation that usually remain confined to the level of awareness raising. Focusing on salient implementation considerations and challenges, the discussion finally touched on questions raised by the type of manipulation which background knowledge explicitation requires. These include expectations on the role of the translator and the profile of the TL reader in their relation to different degrees of intervention and the extent of explicitation to bring

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<sup>16</sup> In this respect, Blum-Kulka argues that “the translator becomes the judge as to the extent to which he or she finds it necessary to explain the source text’s reference network to the target-language audience” (Blum-Kulka 1986: 26). See also Engberg (2015) in the case of legal translation.

into the text. The discussion of these considerations acquires its full validity within a translator-training framework.

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