

# EXPLICITATION AND THE SKOPOS THEORY IN RELATION TO TRANSLATION OF CONTEMPORARY TEXTS FROM SLOVAK INTO ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** The paper discusses two phenomena commonly occurring in the translations of literary and non-literary texts: the incidence of explicitation, or expansionism, and the skopos theory. Examination of English target texts shows that they are almost always at least ten percent longer than the Slovak source text, and sometimes even more than thirty percent longer. The paper presents some of the reasons for this and considers examples of when such explicitation is appropriate and when it is not. Whereas in some cases the translator is justified in making as faithful a translation of the original text as s/he can by preserving all its lexis and phraseology wherever possible, in other cases the translator is right in adapting the target text to comply with that of the target culture.

Keywords: explicitation, skopos, literary texts, non-literary texts, translation

## Introduction

In translating from Slovak into English, the translator will almost always produce a target text longer than that of the original. This article seeks to explain why this is so by focusing on short extracts taken from two contemporary Slovak novels and their translations into English as well as on two non-literary texts written for visitors to Slovakia. All four texts illustrate the process of explicitation, which causes the target text to be longer than the original. We will consider each of the four target texts, suggest why they are longer than their source texts and consider whether this makes them as successful as the originals. We will also consider the question of their purpose, or *skopos*, and whether the target texts could not have been rendered differently to make them more meaningful or readable to the target audience.

## Literary Texts

Both the English texts have been written in the last five years. The first was published by a London publisher (Garnett Press, 2011); the second has recently been offered for publication by the Slovak *Literárne informačné centrum*. Here the extracts are offered in full for purposes of clarification.

The first extract is from Daniela Kapitáňová's novel *Kniha o cintoríne*, a novel attributed to and narrated by its central character, Samko Tále. He is an eccentric man-child figure, a down-at-heel loner whose first-person narrative mirrors his childlike opinions and speech patterns. One challenge for the English translator is to reproduce his infantility of discourse in the target text. Another is to capture all the novel's specific sociocultural elements. The following extract gives an indication of both of these:

Kým bola Ivana ešte nevydatá, tak sa tiež volala Ivana Táleová, ale ked' sa vydala, tak si zmenila meno na Ivana Tále, lebo ona je veľká umelkyňa ohľadom klavíra a aj na platiach a na televízore je taká, že Ivana Tále. Lebo ona sa vydala, ale za takého, čo sa volá Žebrák, a nikto na svete sa nechce volať na platni a v televízore, že Žebráková. Jej manžel sa volá Filip Žebrák. Žebrák je umelec ohľadom bubnov. Jeho otec bol Čech a môj otec nemal rád Čechov, lebo hovoril, že to sú všetci naozajstní žebráci a dobrí sú len Slováci. A okrem toho on poznal Žebrákovho otca, lebo boli spolužiaci, a bol na neho urazený, lebo ešte ked' boli v škole, tak si Žebrákov otec Žebrák pomýlil písmená a namiesto Orol tatranský povedal Osol tatranský. Teda to tak hovoril Žebrák, že si pomýlil písmená, ale môj otec povedal, že to urobil Žebrák naschvál, aby sme boli ako kultúra zosmiešnení.

Môj otec nemal rád Čechov, Maďarov, Rusov, Židov, komunistov, cigáňov, spartakiády, pionierov, SZM, Zväzarm, ROH, Csemadok, SNP, Pražské povstanie, Zväz žien, Vítazný február, VOSR, ZČSSP, MDŽ, Oslobodenie a ani to nemal rád, ked' na tzv. Slovenský štát povedali, že je tzv. To znamená, že je takzvaný. Na to vždy môj otec povedal, že komunisti sú takzvaní. Okrem toho počúval aj Slobodnú Európu, a to bolo vtedy tak veľmi zakázané, že až. (2000: 30-1)

Before Ivana got married, her surname name was Táleová but when she got married she changed her name to Ivana Tále without *-ová* at the end because she is a great artist regarding the piano and when she is on records and on TV she always says that her name is Ivana Tále. Because she got married to this man whose name is Žebrák which means beggar in Czech, so it goes without saying that nobody in the world wants to be called Žebráková on records and on TV. Her husband's name is Filip Žebrák and he's an artist regarding drumming. His father was a Czech and my Dad didn't like Czechs, because he said that all Czechs are beggars and that Slovaks are better. And besides, my Dad used to know Žebrák's Dad because they went to school together and he got offended because when they did the Tatra Eagle in class, Žebrák's Dad got the spelling wrong and he called the Tatra Eagle a Tatra Beagle. But Dad said that Žebrák was only pretending it was a mistake and he'd done it on purpose just to make fun of us Slovaks and of our culture.

My Dad didn't like Czechs or Hungarians or Russians or Jews or Communists or Gypsies or Spartakiads or Young Pioneers, or the Socialist Youth Union, or the Union of Army Supporters, or the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement, or the Czechoslovak Hungarian Cultural Association, or the Slovak National Uprising, or the Prague Uprising, or the Women's Union, or Victorious February, or the Great October Socialist Revolution, or the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship, or International Women's Day, or Liberation Day, and he also didn't like people calling the wartime so-called Slovak State so-called. Meaning it wasn't really independent, only so-called. My Dad always used to say that it was the Communists who were so-called. And besides he also used to listen to Radio Free Europe, and back then that was really strictly forbidden.

(2011: 24-5 Tr. Julia Sherwood)

When comparing the source and target texts, we notice how the target text is much (forty percent) longer than the original. Such expansion on the part of the translator is necessary in this situation, however. Firstly the need for elaboration is evident: no Anglophonic reader could possibly understand all the initials and acronyms of the original and the translator's decision to spell them out in her English translation is justified as their meaning is important and contributes to the humour and satirical purpose of the novel. Secondly the very nature and effect of the original novel's narrative is incremental and based on the kind of repetition and clumsiness we can see here. Although one may question some cases of explicitation (is 'so it goes without saying' necessary? Is the 'surname name' tautology a typo or intended to reflect the narrator's simple-mindedness?), the fact that the English translation is so much longer does not undermine the effect of the target text and aptly reflects the quality and mood of the original.

Most cases of explicitation in this passage are done transparently. The expansion 'whose name is Žebrák *which means beggar in Czech*' is in no way intrusive and is consistent with Samko's overstating expository style. The modulation of 'Orol tatranský povedal Osol tatranský' to 'he called the Tatra Eagle a Tatra Beagle' is not quite as humorous as the original but is fluent and amusing and preferable to a literal translation and/or footnote, for instance. The transposition at the very end (from 'to bolo vtedy tak veľmi zakázané, že až' to 'and back then that was really strictly forbidden') does not quite capture the breathless expressiveness of the original but is again in no way intrusive. The translator's addition of 'or' between all the groups and institutions listed in the sentence beginning: 'My father didn't

like...’ is effective expansion and adds to the reader’s impression of Samko’s childishness and the parodic humour of the passage.

What this extract typifies is that rather than its plot or other characters, it is the personality and narrative cadences of its central character which most distinguish the novel; often it is not so much what Samko is telling us as how he is telling it which is important. In capturing his eccentricity of voice and manner, the translator thus succeeds in staying faithful to the spirit of the original. We may even say she conforms to Schleiermacher’s definition of “the genuine translator” as:

... a writer who wants to bring those two completely separated persons, his author and his reader, truly together, and who would like to bring the latter to an understanding and enjoyment of the former as correct and complete as possible without inviting him to leave the sphere of his mother tongue (qt. in Venuti 1995:100).

In the second extract, taken from Peter Pišťanek’s newest novel *Lokomotívy v daždi*, the reader is occasionally forced to ‘leave the sphere of his mother tongue’, as certain Slovak words in the original are retained in the translatum. The novel has not yet been published in English but his publisher is already offering sample extracts in English at book fairs abroad. It is about a young boy growing up in the 1950s and 60s in a Slovak border town (Devínska Nová Ves). This extract comes shortly after his parents have defected to Austria while he has remained in Slovakia to be looked after by his grandparents.

Although the novel is written in the third-person, the boy, Peter, often acts as its implied narrator. As readers we observe many things from his point of view, sometimes even through his choice of language. In the extract, the words *teta* and *blbec* are worth noticing, for example:

Dakedy vtedy sa Peter rozhodol, že sa pousiluje čo najrýchlejšie dospiet’, aby mohol čo najsôr s dedom zdieľať všetky tie mužské veci: partičku mariášu pri stole štampastov, chlapské rozhovory o živote a tak. Zo srdca si zanadávať na pomery. Pripíť si panákom rumu, zapíť pivom a spakruky si zotriete penu z fúzov. Pľasnúť po dobre vyformovanom zadku tetu Zorku alebo novú tetu Zdenku, čo v septembri nastúpila namiesto tety Jarky. Z toho je Peter zatial vylúčený. Musí sa teplo obliekať, nosiť trápnú čiapku, chodiť do školy, rozprávať slušne zdravíť a za všetko pekne podákovat’. Ako blbec.....

Dedo je chlap ako hora. Je dobré byť s ním kamarát. Ani byť jeho vnukom nie je celkom na zahodenie. Mať s ním určité chlapské tajomstvá a tak. Byť s ním kamarát však musí byť oveľa lepšie. Peter vidí a počuje, ako sa dedo baví s tými, čo sa medzi nich môžu rátať. Nie je ich veľa. Mäsiar Batay, čo má mäsiarstvo Jednoty oproti dedovej krčme, vedúci predajne Technokov pán Mašíček, miestny lekár doktor Beluch... a to je asi tak všetko. Akurát do partie mariášu. (2014)

It was around that time that Peter decided to try and grow up as quickly as he could so that he could start doing grown-up stuff with his grandad: playing cards at the regulars’ table: doing men’s talk about life and so on; swearing from the heart about the state of society; downing a shot of rum, chasing it down with a beer and then wiping the foam off your moustache with the back of your hand; slapping the well-formed rump of Auntie Zorka or that of the new one, Auntie Zdenka, who had taken over from Auntie Jarka in September. So far Peter had been excluded from all those delights. Instead he had to dress properly against the cold, wear his silly hat, go to school, speak politely, always say hello and thank you for everything. Like an idiot....

Grandad was a man-mountain and it was good to be his friend. Being his grandson wasn’t too bad either – having a few man-to-man secrets and so on. But being his friend must have been much better. Peter could see and hear how he would talk to those on the same level as he was. There weren’t many: Batay the butcher, whose *Jednota* shop was right opposite Grandad’s

pub; the manager of the *Technokov* store, one Mr Mašíček; Dr Beluch, the local GP... and that was it: just enough for a round of *mariáš*. (2014 - Tr. Jonathan Gresty)

As with the previous extract, the target text is significantly longer than the source text (this time by about twenty percent in terms of number of characters). In this case, however, the expansion is more due to linguistic differences between Slovak and English than to culturally specific elements, although these do occur in this second text as well. Generally the source extract here is more concise than the previous one, the sentences shorter and more incisive. Although the tone is also colloquial ('Dedo je chlap ako hora' etc.), there is more sense of narrative movement here.

In the target text, we see how transposition often leads to more words ('Dakedy vtedy...' – 'It was around that time that...'; 'Musí sa teplo obliekať' – '..he had to dress properly against the cold' etc.). There are also 'expanding' cases of modulation: 'Zo srdca si zanadávať' na pomery' – 'swearing from the heart about the state of society'; 'Pripiť si panákom rumu, zapíť pivom' – 'downing a shot of rum, chasing it down with a beer'). What is more noticeable in this extract than in the previous one is its examples of permutation. This passage has been reworked to conform more to conventional English grammar and sentence structure. The list of 'grown-up stuff' Peter wishes to do has been divided with semi-colons and not full stops; short sentences are joined together to create longer ones with independent clauses divided by colons or semi-colons; most importantly, the temporal setting has been firmly located in the past. While the Slovak narrative begins in the past and then moves into the present (despite the fact that it is describing the same time period), the English text is all in the past tense, the present-tense Slovak structures having been shifted into the past for greater consistency ('Peter vidí a počuje, ako sa dedo baví s tými....' – 'Peter could see and hear how he would talk to those...' etc.).

In terms of culturally-specific elements, the second text has been less domesticated than the first extract. The Slovak names of the shops have been kept (but italicized) because they help exoticize the text, there is no obvious way to translate them while retaining the Communist-era associations of the names and the reader does not need to know exactly what kind of shops they are to fully understand the point being made (unlike the names of the institutions in the previous extract). Because *mariáš* is not played in Britain and there is no name for the game in English (the word itself is a cognate of the French word *mariage*), this was also left unchanged because the reference to cards in the previous paragraph should make it clear what kind of game it was. As Marilyn Booth says, "It is important to find the balance between offering cultural information and allowing the reader to use her own intelligence to figure something out." (2008: 209) In this case, the intelligent Anglophonic reader will guess what *mariáš* is and sense the connotations of a Greek-based word like *technokov*.

As Kapitáňová and Pišťanek are both acclaimed writers, it is clear that their translators should feel no impulse to tamper with or modify the original texts beyond the ways outlined above. When working with such authors, the translator's task must be to best render the charm, humour and dynamism of the original into the target language without undue textual intervention. This is not the case with all source texts, however, and the next section, which deals with the translation of non-literary texts, shows how the translator should sometimes go beyond their remit of merely translating.

## Non-Literary Texts

The two Slovak source and English target texts used here are taken from two publications. The first is a colourful 'coffee-table' book about the wooden churches of Slovakia containing the same short texts in Slovak (source), English and German about each of the hundred or more churches described. The second is from a text about the Topoľčany

region published in the form of a tourist guide. These two texts are typical of the kind of informational texts translators here work with, are both aimed at visitors to Slovakia and thus intended to have a positive effect on the reader. At the same time they are sufficiently different in tone to provide us with striking points of comparison and contrast. As in the previous section, the extracts are given in full here so that the reader may gain an impression of their prevailing tone and *skopos*.

The first text describes the history, architecture and interior of the wooden church in Hronsek:

Úzke väzby s regiónymi protestantského Nemecka a vplyv blízkych bankých miest pomohli k tomu, že už koncom 16. storocia sa hronsecká šľachta a jej poddaní hlásili k Lutherovmu učeniu. Evanjelickí veriaci sa najprv spoločne stretávali v priestoroch Rothovského kaštieľa. Vlastný chrám Boží si pomocou hrázdenej konštrukcie postavili na lúke nedaleko rieky Hron v rokoch 1725-26. Svojím technickým riešením a architektonickým výrazom sa zaraďuje medzi výnimočné sakrálne objekty na Slovensku a plným právom je zapísaný do zoznamu pamiatok UNESCO. Vnútorný priestor chrámu má centrálnu pôdorysnú formu, ktorú uzatvára valená klenba. Jej plocha, podobne ako doskový obklad stien, ostala hladká, bez maliarskej výzdoby. Len na stĺpoch empor so stupňovitými sedadlami možno nájsť nenápadný dekor štylizovaných iónskych hlavíc. Organ banskobystrickej majstra Martina Podkonického je nezvyčajne osadený na empore, hned za barokovým oltárom so šiestimi vymeniteľnými obrazmi. V roku 1771 ich namaľoval maliar chorvátskeho pôvodu Samuel Mialovič. Obrazy sa v oltárnej architektúre striedavo prezentujú podľa období cirkevného roku. (*Drevené kostoly, chrámy a zvonice na Slovensku*, Miloš Dudáš, Alexander Jiroušek, 2010:40)

Close ties with Protestant regions of Germany along with the influence of nearby mining towns were both instrumental in Hronsek nobility and their subjects embracing Luther's teachings at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At first local Lutherans met together in rooms of the Rothovský manor house. Later, in 1725-26, they built their own half-timbered church close to the River Hron. Both in terms of its architecture and its technical features, this church is one of the most remarkable religious buildings in Slovakia and fully deserves its inclusion in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. The church's interior has a central groundplan and barrel vaulting which, as with the wall paneling, has remained plain and unpainted. Only on the columns of the empora (or gallery), with its tiered seating, can we find the modest ornamentation of stylized Ionic entablatures. The organ, built by the Banská Bystrica master, Martin Podkonický, is unusually located in the gallery. This is right behind the Baroque altar, which has six movable paintings composed in 1771 by Samuel Mialovič, a painter of Croatian origin. These paintings are rotated within the altar architecture in accordance with the church calendar. (*Wooden Churches and Bell-Towers in Slovakia*, tr. A. Billingham, J. Gresty and D. McLean, 2010: 40)

The purpose of the Slovak text is to inform and has no overt persuasive function. It is concise and contains about the right amount of information for the layman; it is neither too detailed nor too florid or rhetorical in style. Some of the architectural terminology may be difficult (the word *empora* is only occasionally used in English so explication was felt to be necessary here) but the accompanying photographs in the book help to clarify any difficult description. The English translation is only about eight percent longer than the original. The translated text contains examples of transposition ('pomohli k tomu' – 'were instrumental in'; 'plným právom je zapísaný' – 'fully deserves its inclusion') as well as of permutation through the reordering of sentences to create a balance between long and short sentences in the target text.

In contrast to this, the second non-literary text exemplifies the kind of Slovak writing which we feel would benefit from extensive reformulation in translation:

Rotunda sv. Juraja je jedným z miest, kam naši predkovia prinášali svoje bolesti a kde čerpali nádej a silu k ďalšiemu životu. Ešte i dnes vás pri jeho návštive určite zasiahne

neopakovateľná atmosféra, ktorá tu panuje. Nadpozemský pokoj tohto miesta priam láka posiedieť si v tichu a príjemnom tieni stromov na lavičkách nedalekého amfiteátra. Viac ako tisícročnú duchovnú silu a dôstojnosť tohto starobylého miesta umocňuje i baroková Kalvária z 18. storočia, ktorá je pokojným a tajomným miestom len pár krokov nad rotundou.

Chceli by ste sa dozvedieť viac o tomto magickom mieste? V tom prípade určite nezabudnite navštíviť muzeálnu expozíciu Ľud pod Marhátom v dávnej minulosti, ktorá je jedinečnou možnosťou prehliadnut' si archeologické nálezy nielen z lokality Rotundy sv. Juraja, ale i okolitých obcí regiónu. Prídete si pozrieť vzácné artefakty, medzi ktoré patrí okrem iných i vzácná košíčková náušnica, či kľúč od Rotundy svätého Juraja. Pri návštive vás určite nadchnú miniatúrne modely palisádového dvorca z Ducového, či staroslovenskeho obydlia s vnútorným zariadením, ktoré sú pôsobivou súčasťou tejto expozície. (2013)

The Rotunda of St. George is one of the places where our ancestors brought their pain and where they drew hope and strength for the next life. Still today, upon a visit, you will certainly be touched by the unrepeatable atmosphere that prevails here. The unearthly peace of the site practically draws one to sit in the quiet and pleasant shadow of trees on the benches of the nearby amphitheatre. The more than one thousand years of spiritual force and dignity of this place is empowered by the Baroque Calvary from the 18th century, which is a peaceful and mysterious place just a few steps above the rotunda.

Would you like to know more about this magical place? If yes, then don't forget to visit the museum exposition The People Beneath Marhát in the Distant Past, which is a unique opportunity to examine the archaeological discoveries not only from the site of the Rotunda of St. George, but also the surrounding villages of the region. Come and see rare artefacts, among which is a rare basket earring or the key from the Rotunda of St. George. You will certainly be taken by the miniature models of the palisade court from Ducové, or the old Slavonic dwelling with furnishings inside, which are an impressive part of this exposition. (2013)

Unlike the previous text, this one is not only informative but also persuasive in manner. It is taken from a long (twenty-five-page) tourist guide to the Topoľčany region all of which is written in a similar way. The guide is rich in affective, even hyperbolical language and gives the Topoľčany region an almost unworldly status. Although, in isolation, the passage above may not jar too much with English readers, a few pages of such elevated prose almost certainly will. Given that it was probably written to promote the region and attract foreign tourists to it, such a text as this is therefore not fulfilling its purpose. Instead it borders on parody.

In his article, 'Ready-made language and translation', Pál Hentai (2001: 57) writes about the dangers of translating such expressive texts without due care. Often they result in so-called translationese (or translatese), a version of English rich in:

... hackneyed" or "trite" expressions [which] may be irritating because they are too frequent and there is a contradiction between frequency and claim to novelty. Too frequent use seems to wear down the expressive power of metaphorical, idiomatic and emotionally loaded words: familiarity breeds contempt.

The translation has been done reasonably well from a linguistic point of view; certainly there are far worse English-language tourist guides in some of Slovakia's towns<sup>1</sup>. The translated text is only about eleven percent longer than the original. Unlike in the

<sup>1</sup> The first paragraph of the English text welcoming visitors to Dobšiná, for instance reads as follows: "**Welcome in Dobšiná** - Dobšiná, the old mining town with residues of hamors, old mining works and tunnels and beautiful naturalistic notabilities and next attractions, which with it's surrounding offers to callers, lie in north-western part of region Rožňava". The text continues in the same vein for another eleven paragraphs; the reader can only speculate about whether it was a machine or human being (or both) who actually translated it from the Slovak. (my emphasis)

example given in the footnote, the grammar and diction are acceptable, although there are certain exceptions to this: ‘next life’ is a poor translation; ‘exposition’ carries with it a certain hint of L2 interference (‘exhibition’ would be a more natural choice); ‘empowered’ strikes a false note (‘reinforced’, for example, would be much better). These are minor semantic details, however, and although the translation adheres very much to the Slovak text sentence structure, the meaning of the original has been retained here for the most part without ambiguity. On this level, therefore, the translation is adequate and the literal-minded customer should have no grounds for complaint.

On a cultural level, however, it can be argued that the target text fails in its purpose because although it achieves merely verbal but not functional equivalence. The translator should have adapted the tone of the original to make it more acceptable to Anglophonic tastes. The author of the original text is not an established author so the translator should feel no obligation to render its descriptive and rhetorical flourishes into English. But the translator has remained faithful to these, which has resulted in an unsatisfactory target text which reads awkwardly. Rather than literal (or literary) equivalence, functional equivalence should have been the *skopos* here.

The source text is full of ungradable adjectives such as ‘unique’ and ‘unrepeatable’, which soon, in translation, makes it feel clichéd and overstated. The rhetorical question starting paragraph two and the imperative soon after (‘Príďte si pozriet’ vzácné artefakty’) are inappropriate in an English text such as this. The text, in fact, has an emotional charge which in English would be considered disproportionate to its subject and at times make it read like parody. A good translator should be sensitive to stylistic conventions of different languages and try to tone down the language of source texts such as this one in order to produce an English text which will have a positive effect on the reader. ‘Accurate’ translation in such cases can be counterproductive. With texts as gushingly affective as these, the translator has to do more than merely translate.

One of the best known members of the *skopos* school of translation, Katharina Reiss (1971, qt. In Venuti 2000), divides texts into three types and presents arguments showing how translators should adopt different approaches depending on the type of text and whether it is primarily artistic, informative or persuasive in character. About a persuasive text, which we believe the Topoľčany text above to be, she (*ibid*: 100) says the following: “If the SL text is written to convey persuasively structured contents in order to trigger off impulses of behavior, then the contents conveyed in the TL must be capable of triggering off analogous impulses of behavior in the TL reader”. This means that the translator has to think about the effects of the translation on the target audience and reflect on whether a faithful translation will produce the same effect as the source text has on its target reader. In this case, it almost certainly would not. In my opinion the target text must be quite different in tone from that of the source text if the same ‘impulses of behaviour’ (i.e. an active wish to visit this region) are going to be triggered off in the reader. The good translator thus has to intervene here and naturalise the tone of the *translatum* so that it adheres to the norms of the target culture.

## Conclusion

As shown above, reasons for explication in translation are both cultural and lexical. In many cases such explication is justified. However, the translator should always reflect on the exact purpose or *skopos* of the text and the nature of the target audience; based on these, the translator should then make decisions on how best to translate the given text and whether it is necessary to be fully explicit. In the case of the literary texts given above, the translator is right to stay as faithful as possible to the intentionality of the original, elucidating cultural details which may be confusing for the reader, changing tenses to prevent ambiguity but not interfering with the essence of the prose and its narrative voice. This is both the duty of the

translator and a sign of respect to the author of the work being translated. With non-literary texts, however, the translator may, and in some cases, should go beyond this remit. The persuasive Topoľčany text above presents one such case in which the translator should have been more sensitive to the *skopos* of the target text by deciding to adopt a different translational strategy from the one chosen.

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