Explicitation in Consecutive Interpreting, Volume 135 in Benjamins Translation Library, was written by Fang Tang “a rising Chinese young scholar of interpreting studies” (see back cover), based in Guangdong University.

Investigating the Explicitation Hypothesis in Translation Studies (TS) has yielded a wealth of both theoretical and empirical results, sometimes with conflicting conclusions. Explicitation in Interpreting Studies (IS), however, has received limited research attention. Many authors are of the opinion that the constraints of Simultaneous Interpreting (SI), namely the Time Constraint, the Memory Constraint, the Linearity Constraint and the [Un]shared Knowledge Constraint are expected to affect the type and extent of explicitating shifts in SI, but at the same time they are also the causes triggering explicitation in this mode (Gumul 2006).

Although most research in Interpreting Studies has focused on explicitation in SI, explicitation can be expected to occur more naturally in Consecutive Interpreting (CI), where interpreters produce the target language text through retrieval from memory and based on their notes. Research on explicitation in Interpreting Studies investigated either students only (Gumul 2006) or professionals only (Shlesinger 1995).

Gumul called for “further large-scale product- and process-oriented research, with professional interpreters as subjects” (2015:155) to determine the motivations behind explicitation in interpreting, and to see whether explicitation is a strategy interpreters use or a by-product of linguistic mediation.

The volume under review answers this call and investigates the effects of expertise and directionality on explicitation patterns in Chinese to English and English to Chinese CI.

Before looking at what the book contains, we must note that – although neither the author nor the editors explicitate it – this volume is actually a book version...
of the author’s 2014 doctoral dissertation, with all the advantages and drawbacks deriving from that fact. The advantages are that the research project was carefully designed, all the relevant literature was explored and a theoretical framework appropriate to the needs of the research was developed. Valid research questions were asked and answered. The disadvantage is that the reader may get lost in the details of the research if it is presented in the same form as in the dissertation, especially if there is no typographic help, e.g. page break between the different sections, as in Tang’s book.

Chapter 1 of the monograph states the justifications and motivations for the research reported in the book, the central motivation being the fact that there is little information in the literature on the characteristic features of explicitation in CI, while there are conflicting views on the role of expertise in explicitation in both TS and IS. This conflict prompted the author to ask the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of explicitation in Consecutive Interpreting?
2. How does the interpreters’ professional experience affect their explicitation patterns?
3. How does the interpreting direction affect interpreters’ explicitation patterns?

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of studies on explicitation, focusing on six problems in relation to explicitation research: the definitions of explicitation, typologies used in studies on explicitation, motivations for explicitation, the effects of professional experience and directionality on explicitation, and the connections between the explicitation hypothesis and explicitation as a translation universal. These problems have been widely discussed in the TS literature on explicitation, and providing an overview is quite an ambitious undertaking, as it is impossible to cover all of the previous results. This, however, should not be an excuse for leaving out some key works on explicitation from her review and give others only a cursory mention. A more thorough background could have been given for example when comparing and contrasting the Explicitation Hypothesis and explicitation as a translation universal. Some theoretical sections are rather short and the question whether explicitation is obligatory or optional would have deserved more than a nine-line discussion.

When writing about explicitation in interpreting, the author fails to mention some studies, or mentions them only briefly without discussing implications for the present research. Critical remarks concerning previous studies on explicitation in interpreting are not supported with details. Still, it has to be noted that Tang identifies the gaps in previous studies with a sharp eye.
In Chapter 3 the author presents her own theoretical framework based on Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics. Halliday’s three metafunctions of language have been used in TS to develop typologies of explicitation shifts (House 2004; Becher 2011) and to investigate cohesive explicitation (Károly 2017). She also provides a definition of explicitation (often missing from previous studies) as “translation shifts made by an interpreter when s/he provides additional information which can be inferred from the context (“the co-text, the situation and the culture”, p. 33).

Tang’s typology of explicitation, based on Halliday’s metafunctions of language (with some modifications), comprises the categories of experiential, interpersonal and textual explicitation. Experiential explicitation means the addition or substitution of modifiers, processes, circumstantial adjuncts, or participants. Interpersonal explicitation means the addition or substitution of engagement, attitudinal and graduation markers. In Halliday’s system, the interpersonal metafunction of language refers to mood and modality; however, according to Tang, these are not manageable bases for the analysis of explicitation, because it is not clear whether the addition of modal verbs can be viewed as explicitation or not (p. 37). Instead, she uses the Appraisal System of Martin and White (2005) as a quantifiable basis for analyzing interpersonal explicitation.

The third category of explicitation in Tang’s classification is that of textual explicitation. This category includes cases where the added or substituted information concerns the cohesion of the text; the three subtypes of (grammatical) cohesion used in her analysis are reference, ellipsis and conjunction.

This typology, even though rooted in a solid theoretical framework, still seems subjective, especially when it comes to identifying specific cases of explicitation. For example, there is a considerable overlap between experiential and textual explicitation that the author herself acknowledges. The examples provided to clarify her typology sometimes illustrate the poor language and interpreting skills of the participants instead of being clear examples of explicitation.

In addition to a product-oriented investigation, Fang Tang complements her research with a process-oriented element aimed to describe motivations for explicitation. Process information was gained from two sources: retrospective interviews with the interpreters and the analysis of the notes interpreters have taken during the consecutive interpreting tasks.

Based on data analysis Tang has established the following reasons for explicitation. The first motivation is time management; interpreters use this type of explicitation when they wish to compensate for something that they have not interpreted form the SL text. The second motivation is gap-filling; this would motivate explicitation in cases where the interpreters fail to understand, remember, or express the SL message. The third motivation for explicitation in consecutive

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interpreting is clarifying, which means that the interpreter makes an effort to reduce the listeners’ processing effort. The fourth motivation is reinforcing, in other words, the wish to reinforce the speaker’s attitude. Finally, note-related explicitation is related to the layout of the notes the interpreter has taken. Risk avoidance, proposed by Pym (2004, 2005a, 2005b) as the chief motivator for explicitation, is never mentioned.

Based on the examples, gap filling (a failure in understanding, remembering or expressing the original message) can be seen as a coping mechanism related to poor language skills rather than motivation for explicitation.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of research methodology and participants. There were 24 participants in this investigation, a group of 12 professional interpreters and a group of 12 students of interpreting. 24 subjects provide Tang with a big enough sample, especially when we take into consideration the problem of recruiting participants in IS research. The participants were invited to interpret comparable texts, one from Chinese into English and one from English to Chinese. The dependent variable in the study was explicitation pattern, and independent variables were professional experience and language direction. The examples given by Tang, however, suggest that the language competence of the interpreter trainees participating in her research was in some cases rather weak, which undermines the strength of the results.

Chapters 5 through 8 provide a detailed description of the four types of explicitation, experiential explicitation, interpersonal explicitation, textual explicitation, and note-related explicitation. Each chapter is divided into subsections for discussing differences related to expertise in both interpreting directions, Chinese to English and English to Chinese, with a detailed report of the results and complete with examples and statistical analyses. Unfortunately, as noted above, typographically this part is not very reader-friendly.

Chapter 9 discusses the findings from the perspective of motivations and directionality and places the results in the context of previous findings in TS and IS.

In Chapter 10, the major findings are summarized. Tang finds evidence for the existence of interpreting-inherent explicitation in both English to Chinese and Chinese to English CI. About half of the explicitating shifts are related to the message, 20% to appraisal information and 30% to cohesion (p. 213). As for motivation, the most frequent motivation is the endeavour to clarify (50+%), followed by the endeavour to reinforce (20%). The third most frequent motivation is time-management (15%), followed by compensating for information loss (5%).

Based on her results, Tang identifies several tendencies that can be seen as stemming from interpreters’ professional experience. Apparently, the tendency of clarifying increases with experience, indicating that interpreters tend to be more listener-oriented. The tendency of adding frame-based knowledge means that as
interpreters gain experience, they establish broader semantic frames, which enables them to retrieve background information more efficiently.

The tendency of cohesion enhancement shows that professionals added more cohesive links than trainee interpreters. The tendency of intensifying observed in the output of professionals shows that with experience, interpreters might intensify the speaker’s appraisal information.

The tendency of deverbalizing can be observed in note-related explicitations; professionals had more explicitations related to symbols noted down, while students explicitated because of the misinterpretation of their notes. These are in line with findings that with increasing expertise interpreters’ deverbalization ability will improve.

In the performance of students of interpreting, a tendency to use explicitation as a strategy to compensate for inadequate interpreting competence is observed. The main motivations for explicitation in this group were time-management and gap-filling.

Interpreting direction was also found to affect explicitation patterns. The results suggest that in interpreting form Language A to B there is a tendency to restructure and paraphrase information, in other words, a tendency to explicitate through substitution, whereas in interpreting from B to A there is more addition. If reliable, this finding will cast doubt on the claim that translation universals are independent of language pair and direction of translation.

The summary of the results is followed by the limitations and implications of the study, together with suggestions for further studies.

A merit of the volume is that Fang Tang examines every aspect of explicitation and, in contrast to previous studies, takes directionality into consideration. In addition, the volume sheds new light on explicitation through the investigation of motivations to explicitate. Hopefully, this work will trigger new studies on the somewhat neglected topic of explicitation in interpreting.

It should also be noted, however, that there are a number of errors in grammar and style in the volume that could have been noticed and corrected before publication.

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References


