Commented Translations of Non-literary Texts in Slovakia

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*"The nature of the product cannot be understood
without a comprehension of the nature of the process."*
(J. S. Holmes, 1988, chapter 7, para. 3)

Abstract

To this date, several scholars emphasised the importance of process-based learning as well as the benefits of using commented translation as a key evaluation method in university translation programmes (e.g., Kussmaul 1995, Gile 1995, Chesterman and Williams 2002, Hurtado Albir 2015, Shih 2018). However, commented translation has not been a focal point of discussion or research among Slovak scholars. Therefore, using quantitative methods, the principal objective of this study was to investigate the practice of writing commented translations at Slovak universities, specifically the practice of writing a commented translation as an alternative to traditional research-focused thesis. Analysis of 211 theses not only revealed typical formal structure and features of commented translations of non-literary texts, but also possible shortcomings. The study implies that the practice of writing commented translation is rather heterogenous and in some respects inconsistent. As a result of these investigations, suggestions were identified for future research.

1. Introduction

Commented translation, also referred to as translation commentary (cf. Shei 2005; Garcia Alvarez 2007; Shih 2018), translation with commentary (cf. Williams & Chesterman 2002), or annotated translation (cf. Almana 2016), can be interpreted in two senses. Broadly speaking, commented translation refers to auto criticism of one's own translation, which is the sole aspect that differentiates commented translation from conventional translation criticism. In a narrow sense, however, commented translation can be defined as an *ideal* assessment tool and an alternative to a research-based thesis in academic translator training programmes due to its nature of assessing a wide spectrum of knowledge, skills, and competences related to translation, while giving students an opportunity to defend their translations and raise their awareness of the translation process. Commented translation to be discussed in this paper primarily involves commented translation in its narrow sense and emphasizes why it is still so important to get a look at the whole picture, i.e., shift our attention from the product to the process itself. In that case, an important question follows: Why do we need to understand the process?

2.   Theoretical background

The process aspect was already stressed in 1967 by J. Levý in his article *Translation as Decision Process* (In Venuti 2000)*,* in which Levý defines translation as a process of communication with regard to its objective and as a decision process with regard to the translator's working situation, which compels him to make a certain strategic decision, which consists in choosing among a certain number of equivalents. However, those decisions are oftentimes obscured by the target text, and it is almost impossible to objectively reconstruct the process. As Levý describes the translator's decisions may be necessary or unnecessary, motivated or unmotivated. But how can we know for sure that the translation is bad or inappropriate if we do not know translator's line of thought? In fact, it is quite difficult to form an opinion about the quality of a translation and reach absolute conclusions without directly observing the intricate process behind this complex and creative activity. Then, to shed light on the translation process and reach somewhat objective conclusions about a specific translation, it is necessary to go straight to the source and ask translators themselves on what grounds have they made their decisions, what translation approach have they chosen and why, and what has motivated their choice of specific strategies. So, how should we go about it then? How should we make the process more transparent? What instruments or methods do we have at our disposal?

The idea that students enrolled in translator training programmes should have an opportunity to reason their decision-making process in the form of a retrospective commentary submitted with their translation was voiced by P. Kussmaul in 1995. He stresses, among other things, that students should be able to defend their translation from possible criticism using plausible arguments, but disregards weak argumentation such as "I think it sounds better", "I found it in a dictionary", or "I think I provided an adequate solution" because similar comments and quasi-justifications serve no purpose as they have zero informational and argumentative value. Students should, naturally, aim to become professionals and "professionalism implies the ability to rationalize one's decision-making process in an objective way, and the models offered by translation studies provide the basis for acquiring this ability" (Kussmaul 1995, 33). Furthermore, it should be noted that "the ability to discuss translation in an objective way is central to a translator's competence" (ibid.).

In line with the notion of translator's transfer competence, Ch. Nord (1991) discusses several methods of testing it: general translation task aimed at testing transfer, linguistic, and cultural competence, specialized translation task devoted to translation problem; and commented translation. In exams, students usually submit their translations without accompanying notes or comments and do not immediately have a chance to defend their solutions, e.g., an examiner cannot know for sure if an omission that may appear in the student's translation should be considered a mistake or if it is motivated and functional. That is one of the reasons why, according to Nord, "the students should be encouraged to comment

on their translation and/or to justify certain solution using the concepts and terms of translation theory and methodology" (ibid., 179, also see Gromová 2003).

Similarly, D. Kelly (2005) also emphasises the importance of a process-centred approach for training translators as opposed to the traditional tendency to emphasise the product. This thinking reflects the paradigmatic shift from a product-based approach rooted mainly in the notion of linguistic equivalence to the translator's behaviour and processes taking place in their mind. She maintains that "training should insist on how to go about translating and not on the actual written product of that complex process" (ibid., 13). In other words, students must be aware of specific steps they are taking, especially if they do not want to approach translation mindlessly and repeat the same mistakes repeatedly. Thus, Kelly proposes that students should have an opportunity to submit individual translation project at the end of the academic year/programme – a translation accompanied by a commentary on several aspects of the translation process, e.g., problems encountered, decisions taken, revisions, local strategies, source text analysis, etc.).

This view is consistent with a point made by D. Gile (1995) who advocates that training should not focus on results but on the process itself. In his monograph, Gile also points out that in order to raise the students' awareness of the translation process, they should make comments about their translation which can reveal implicit knowledge of translation theory and the ability to critically analyse the source text. Thus, if we, as evaluators, do not have more information about the process, we are moving only at the surface level, unable to draw definite conclusions about the product. Therefore, to achieve a deeper understanding of the translation process, students should be encouraged to provide detailed, but more importantly, valuable insight into their decision-making process, which would in turn help examiners see the reasoning behind particular choices and certain translation strategies. Adopting a similar position, A. Hurtado Albir (2015) notes that translator training must include assessment of the product *and* the process as well. While translating texts is the most common task in teaching translation, it does not reveal much about the student's translation process, translation strategies that he employed or his knowledge of translation theory *per se*. Quite clearly, this highlights the importance of commented translation as a method of assessing students' translation competence because it "provides information on the process followed when translating a text, the problems encountered, the documentary resources used, etc. While translations only give a lecturer information on the product of a student's translation process, translation reports offer an insight into the process itself and the student's ability to undertake it properly" (ibid., 265). Hurtado Albir additionally points out that curriculum design should revolve around activities that make learning more meaningful to students and that commented translation should thus be perceived as a suitable methodological framework and evaluation procedure that "allows for integrated development and assessment of general and specific competences" (ibid., 276).

2.1. Commented translation: status quo in academia

Almost 20 years have passed since the publication of A. Chesterman and J. Williams's (2002) practical guidebook *The Map*, which gives an overview of twelve research areas in Translation Studies. The first chapter, named Text Analysis and Translation, lists *Translation with Commentary* as a possible area of study. According to the authors, a translation with commentary is "a form of introspective and retrospective research[1] where you yourself translate a text and, at the same time, write a commentary on your own translation process" (ibid., 7, also see Shei 2005). This type of case study based on self-reporting, self-awareness, and self-assessment usually involves some sort of source text analysis, the translation itself, and a commentary that provides summary of encountered translation problems and justification of one's own decision-making process. The authors furthermore also emphasise the fact that rationale behind the translator's choices should, ideally, stem from theoretical knowledge provided by translation studies.

A more substantial approach to the longer-term significance of commented translation and the process-based training can be found in A. M. Garcia Alvarez (2007). The author emphasizes that students often fail to explain the rationale behind their choices as they are not used to describing the translation process and mostly pay attention to superficial aspects of the target text. In other words, students' rationale can be characterised as anecdotal, stemming largely from student's intuition or non-educated guesses (cf. Shei 2005, Almana 2016, Shih 2018). The problem is that "traditional teaching has limited itself to conveying this theoretical knowledge in isolation from translation praxis, and therefore students do now know how to tie it together when the time comes to propose and put forward the proper strategies" (Garcia Alvarez 2007, 141). As argued by Garcia Alvarez, the biggest weakness of commented translation can be attributed to the lack of specific methodological guidelines for writing commentaries. Therefore, she proposes a set of 19 general and specific guidelines that should help a student organise their thoughts and write a commented translation. The guidelines, however, are not prescriptive because commenting on a translation of literary text will involve different issues than commenting on translations of non-literary texts and the guidelines concern themselves only with the content of commentaries, not the formal aspects of a commented translation, which makes the applicability of said guidelines somewhat limited. Ultimately, Garcia Alvarez draws attention to the importance of including commented

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[1] This research method bears resemblance to a method of recalling information about the translation process proposed by Hatim in 2001, Immediate Retrospection, which focuses on describing the thought process in a form of a report or commentary sometime later after finishing the translation and "is ideally suited to investigating how translations of particular kind are tackled" (see Hatim 2001, 166–172).

translation as a method of evaluation in translation exams and its place in the design of syllabuses.

Another theoretical framework for annotating various aspects of translations, such as global strategies, local strategies, grammatical issues, lexical and phraseological choices, cohesion, register, pragmatic, semiotic and stylistic aspects, cultural and ideological issues, can be found in a monograph written by A. Almana (2016). Almana underlines that translators' annotations must be made in a systematic fashion and should follow concrete guidelines. The purpose of annotating is then to defend the choices made by the translator and it is entirely appropriate, if not outright mandatory, to refer to translation theories where this provides a clue to the justification of a certain approach. Almana also embraces the idea that a commentary should explain the decision taken by the translator and should not focus on listing examples of translation strategies that students employed in their translation. In his view, the commentary should persuade the reader that the translator is aware of the translation process and can explain why he opted for a particular strategy or combination of many strategies.

A broader perspective has been adopted by Ch. Shih (2018) who undertook a series of interviews with lecturers at ten British universities to determine trainers' understanding of commented translation and provide empirical evidence to illustrate how it is perceived in academia. All interviewees agreed that the main attribute of commented translation is reflection and justification of the translation process and that students are expected to cite academic references to support their claims. As for the undesirable features of commented translation, the most severe are superficial treatment of a particular problem and general lack of awareness of what the translation process is about. Thus, some students think of a commentary as a report in which they list copious examples of translation strategies or shifts and no rationale. When it comes to marking criteria, the UK universities do not have a common approach for marking commented translations. Most respondents agreed that the translation should account for at least 50% of the grade, with the commentary accounting for 20–40% of the total grade. Reaching consensus over grading criteria, however, is very important as students should be aware of specific assessment and grading criteria beforehand (Kelly 2005). In the same vein, Hurtado Albir (2015) suggests the following grading criteria: the translation brief – 10%, the translation – 70%, and the commentary – 20%. These studies then support the notion that the commentary is seen as supplementary information for marking the translation, not the other way around.

Another qualitative study carried out by German scholar H. Bittner (2020) investigated commented translations from a different perspective and provides detailed analysis on evaluators' reports on commented translations theses. As he reports, students at the University of Hildesheim in Germany can write and choose to write a translation-with-commentary thesis towards their translation studies degree. The thesis' evaluator then evaluates not only the translation but also the analysis of the source text and the commentary. In line with the findings of Shih, Bittner (2020, 83)

maintains that assessing the quality of the translated text should be "at the centre of the evaluation". The author, however, does not lay down a specific set of criteria for writing a commented translation *per se*.

Perhaps the most comprehensive account of the use of commented translation in the institutional context is provided by the University of Warwick, UK. In order to fulfil requirements for receiving a university degree, MA students enrolled in the Literary Translation Studies programme have two options to choose from: a) conventional dissertation, in which students undertake an investigation into a research area related to Translation Studies; or b) a translation of literary text "accompanied by an extended piece of critical writing (a translation commentary)". If the students opt for option B, the following applies: the translation should be between 5000 and 6000 words in length (approx. 16–18 standardised pages) and must be included in the body of the dissertation, while the commentary accounts for the bulk of the thesis length at a minimum of 10,000 and a maximum of 11,000 words (approximately 31–33 standardise pages), with the source text included in the appendix. The recommended final word count is 16,000 words (approx. 60 standardised pages), so that leaves 1000 words for introduction and conclusion. Furthermore, all students are required to attend a compulsory workshop on writing a translation with commentary. As per Warwick's guidelines (last updated in 2018), a commented translation should not be confused with annotations to a text or footnotes, rather it should present series of compelling arguments and "demonstrate the theoretically-informed reflection that lies behind the creation of a translation product; address relevant issues of translation theory and practice" (Warwick, n.d.). Additionally, a translation commentary is also an essential part of Warwick's PhD programme in Translation and Transcultural Studies, consisting of an academic and practical route. In the form of a translation commentary, a PhD student is expected to "demonstrate doctoral levels of contextual knowledge and powers of analysis and argument, displaying the same intellectual discipline as a traditional PhD" (Warwick, n.d.).

One more academic source of guidelines for writing a commented translation as BA or MA thesis can be found on the website of the Institute of Translation Studies (ITS) of Charles University in Prague. At BA level[2], a commented translation thesis is the only option the Czech students have. They are required to translate non-literary text (min. length being 20 standard pages) and then write a retrospective commentary (min. length being 20 standard pages), covering 1) source text analysis, 2) challenges encountered in the translation, 3) the description of a general method of translation, and 4) typology of translation shifts. Here we can see that the commentary is At the follow-up MA level[3], similarly to Warwick, writing a commented translation is one of several options for the students to choose from. In the case of MA thesis, the translation should account for at least

[2] https://utrl.ff.cuni.cz/cs/studium/bakalarske-studium/bakalarska-prace/.
[3] https://utrl.ff.cuni.cz/cs/studium/navazujici-magisterske-studium/diplomova-prace/.

40 standardised pages and the commentary for minimum 20 standardised pages. Trainee translators at MA level should be then able to reason their decision for translating particular text, provide stylistic and lexical analysis of the source text, detect possible challenges, work out and justify their solutions, and also explain choice of a particular method of translation with regard to the translation's skopos.

All in all, this section has attempted to provide a brief summary of the literature relating to commented translation. Below are some of the key points of the review:

→ A commented translation is an authentic project set in a realistic context, adopting a holistic approach that shifts attention from the product to the process, makes it transparent, and provides valuable insight into translators' behaviour that would be otherwise obscured by a product-oriented training

→ Three major parts of a commented translation are as follows: the source text analysis (interpretation), the text in target language (translation), and the retrospective commentary itself (argumentation)

→ The primary goal of a commented translation is to rationalise one's decision-making process while demonstrating in-depth knowledge of translation theory; therefore, the students enrolled in translator training university programmes should be able to not only develop and describe their own translation practice but also discuss their translation and defend particular choices made in their own translations

→ A commented translation is associated with acquisition and assessment of translation competence, interpretative competence, argumentative competence, and other subcompetences[4]

→ The students often fail to explain their rationale behind the translation process, paying attention to the superficial treatment of the text while listing tautological examples of shifts and translation strategies

→ A commented translation can be used as a benchmark for monitoring students' progress in translation performance

→ As for the adequacy of using commented translation as an MA thesis alternative or making it an integral part of a PhD programme, it is safe to say that this didactic and assessment tool is at least equal to that of a traditional research-based one since commented translation is used not only in practical translation modules but also

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[4] According to PETRA-E Framework of Reference for the Education and Training of Literary Translators, which distinguishes eight subcompetences that make up the overall competence of a professional literary translator, the ability to exploit theoretical knowledge, use appropriate metalanguage of the field, and justify one's translation solutions is regarded as an advanced skill and an integral part of translator's evaluative competence.

as an alternative to research-focused theses at several universities around the globe, e. g., in the UK, the Czech Republic, United States, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, Iraq, Oman, Finland or Germany (cf. Almana 2016; Shei 2018; Dewi 2019; Bittner 2020, Warwick 2020, Balkul 2021)

Taken together, commented translation can be perceived as an *ideal* assessment tool and an alternative to a research-based thesis in academic translator training programmes due to its nature of assessing a wide spectrum of knowledge, skills, and competences related to translation while making the translation process transparent and providing valuable insight into translators' practice. It should be argued that students enrolled in translator training programmes are studying to become skilled practitioners, not researchers, and thus a translation project thesis could serve as the best possible alternative to research-focused theses in translation studies programmes. However, except for Warwick's and ITS's guidelines, none of the studies and monographs reviewed has addressed formal features of a commented translation such as the recommended length of a translation and a commentary. Moreover, commented translation has not been a focal point of discussion or research among Slovak scholars. Therefore, this study builds on the existing body of research conducted abroad and seeks to fill the gap by investigating commented translations in Slovakia, specifically the practice of writing a commented translation as an alternative to traditional research-focused thesis.

3.   **Research approach and methodology**

The current study employs a quantitative approach, as it aims to collect data and examine the formal[5] features of students' commented translations of non-literary texts in Slovakia, which, to date, were not explored. In its simplest form, the primary aim of this research is to give a general overview of the structure and features of commented translations of non-literary texts and also investigate (1) whether students drew from *explicit* models or guidelines and (2) whether they discuss commented translation in its narrow sense or not.

Commented translations were collected from The Central Register of Theses and Dissertations (the Register), an open access database collecting graduation publications of all Slovak universities from 2010. In compliance with Slovak legislation, which entered into force in 2010, Slovak universities are obliged to send all BA, MA and PhD theses to the Register for originality

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[5] This paper investigates formal features of Slovak translation-with-commentary theses. A qualitative analysis of the students' commentaries focused on the students' ability to reflect on translation process and justify choices made in translation will be a topic of the forthcoming study; however, some preliminary results of the qualitative analysis will be mentioned in this paper as well.

verification. There are a huge number of data collected from five Slovak universities from 2010 to 2020, namely Comenius University in Bratislava (CU), Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (CPU), Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (MBU), Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice (UPJŠ), and Prešov University (PU). Altogether, the Register holds 498 BA and MA theses on the subject in question[6].

Since this study is focused solely on non-literary translation, the criteria for thesis selection include the following:

1) Included theses must focus on a commented translation in the narrow sense;
2) Included theses must have been published between 2010 and 2020;
3) Included theses must have been published in one of the following languages – Slovak, Russian, or English[7];
4) Included theses must have one of the following phrases either as a part of its name or as a defining keyword: *komentovaný preklad, commented translation, translation commentary, annotated translation, translation with commentary;*
5) Included theses must be publicly available;
6) Included theses must deal with a commented translation of non-literary text[8].

The data were collected manually, inserted into an Excel spreadsheet, and categorised accordingly. To present the data more clearly, several figures and tables will be included.

4.   Findings and Discussion

4.1.   General Overview of Analysed Theses

The first section summarises general information on the analysed data. Altogether, 211 theses met the selection criteria. Out of 211 theses from five Slovak universities, 205 (97%) are undergraduate BA theses and only 6 (3%) are MA theses. Similar practice can be observed at Charles

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[6] For more detailed overview, see Bendík 2021.

[7] The language criterion is based on languages that the author of the paper is highly proficient in.

[8] According to Newmark (2004), non-literary texts aim to portray the world of reality, with their primary focus being the factual and logical truths. These texts often combine non-literary subject with a literary form, e.g., essays, autobiographies, and encyclopaedias. This view is also shared by Biloveský (2012), who uses the term non-literary texts as an umbrella term, grouping not only specialised texts, but also popular science literature or texts intended at general public.

University in Czech Republic[9]. This striking difference implies that commented translation is preferred at the undergraduate level of education. In contrast though, according to the Information system of Masaryk University in Czech Republic[10], commented translation is the most frequently researched topic in MA theses.[11] However, trying to explain this discrepancy would be mere speculation. Thus, further study, either interview or survey among trainers, is to be conducted in order to find out trainers' perception of commented translation as a didactic and assessment tool and an alternative to the traditional research-focused theses as well. For now, it can be stated that commented translation in Slovakia is mainly done in undergraduate programmes, particularly at Constantine the Philosopher University (164 theses), Comenius University (37 theses), Pavol Jozef Šafárik University (6 theses), Matej Bel University (3 theses), and Prešov University (one thesis).

The fact that translator training programmes are available at several universities and several language departments is also reflected in the number of different foreign languages the students translate from. As for the language of the source text, students mainly translate from English (47,4%), Russian (26,5%), German (21,3%), and French (4,7%). The languages with less than 1% representation are Polish, Italian, and Swedish. This distribution not only sheds light on the long-lasting dominance of English, Russian, or German, but it can also show us exactly which language departments favour commented translation as an alternative to traditional research-focused thesis and which do not. Additionally, the vast majority of analysed theses were written in Slovak (95,2%), which only makes sense as students aim to rationalise translations produced in their native language.

The non-literary trainee translators usually deal with texts that belong to a variety of topics or domains, mostly medicine (13%), history (12%), psychology (10%), biology (9%), tourism (8%), technology (7%), legislation (7%), religion (5%) and many others, such as healthy lifestyle, translation studies, literary criticism, economy, politics, or sports (each accounting for less than 4% of the total number of theses).

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[9] Based on the data from Information system of Charles University and its digital thesis repository, since 2009 the students of Charles University completed 450 translation-with-commentary theses at BA level and 16 theses at MA level. However, after briefly introducing ITS's guidelines, this does not come as a surprise.

[10] https://is.muni.cz/vyhledavani/.

[11] For example, out of 16 translation-with-commentary theses completed at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University (MUNI) in 2019, only one (1) of them was done at the undergraduate level.

4.2. Formal Features of Analysed Commented Translations

Based on the analysis, the typical structure of Slovak commented translation looks as follows:

Introduction	**211 (100%)**
Source text analysis	**172 (81%)**
Anticipation of challenges in translation	151 (71%)
Translated text	**161 (76%)**
Source text	86 (41%)
Commentary	**211 (100%)**
Translation approach	124 (58%)
Translation shifts	211 (100%)
Conclusion	**211 (100%)**

Table 1. The most common formal features of commented translations

It can be seen from the above table that, in line with Williams and Chesterman (2002), Shei (2005) and Bittner (2020), the commented translation usually consists of three parts: a source text analysis, a target text, and a commentary. Each part will be addressed individually.

4.2.1. The source text analysis

The source text analysis is an integral part of the translation process since it lays the foundation for a successful translation. It allows a translator to get a general idea about the source text (ST) and systematically identify its semantic invariant as well as its differentiating properties, relevant features, and intratextual structures (cf. Vilikovský 1984, Levý 1991 among others). In all identified cases, students drew from Nord's (1991) model of translation-oriented text analysis, which incorporates two levels: analysis of extratextual and intratextual factors. The major part of the analysis was assigned to the latter, specifically to the ST's lexis, syntax, semantic, and stylistic properties. Nevertheless, the ST analysis was not included almost in 20% of analysed theses. This can be seen as a major problem because how does one translates a text without analysing it first? It is, after all, the ST analysis in which the students demonstrate their reading comprehension, textual competence and whether they can identify relevant or problematic places in the text.

4.2.2. The Target Text (TT)

The second most frequent constituent of a commented translations is the translation itself. It can be seen from the above table that, in some cases, the TT was seen as supplementary material and was included in an appendix, not in the main body of thesis (24%). This approach could indicate two things: 1) the commentary is, per Warwick's recommendations, seen as the most important part of the commented

translation (see the following sections); or 2) the TT is seen as a piece of supplementary information and isn't marked.

4.2.3.   The Source Text

As for including the copy of *the source text* in the main body of a thesis, it definitely is not a requirement, since only 86 students (41%) did so. It could be argued that this practice can be deemed unnecessary and could potentially lead to an artificial increase in the thesis's word count[12]. However, this was not the case in the vast majority of the analysed theses. If the ST is included, the students typically opt for bilingual or dual-language layout as such layout provides an optimal reading experience and an opportunity of comparing and contrasting the ST and the TT in a fluid and organic way.

4.2.4.   The Commentary

The third and reputedly the most important part of a commented translation is the retrospective commentary itself, a place for the students to not only demonstrate their translation competence but also their problem-solving ability, analytical skills, in-depth knowledge of various approaches in translation theory and most importantly the ability to reflect on one's own translation approach, being able to justify every single decision made in translation and make the translation process completely transparent. The following paragraphs will discuss individual parts of a typical commentary.

4.2.4.1.   The Translator's Approach

The first part of the commentary is the description of *the translator's approach,* also known as *the translation conception* (cf. Hochel 1991; Vilikovksý 1984), or *the method of translation* (cf. Popovič, 1987). According to Ferenčík (1982), the translation approach is the superior translation principle, governing all of the translator's choices. It can be described as a global translation strategy applied to the text as a whole, corresponding to the specific purpose of a translation that the translator has in mind. Similarly, Hochel (1991: 41) maintains that the translation conception "shapes the process of translation as a whole, determines the choice of particular translation strategies, and plays a decisive role in the overall quality of translation. Hence, the absence of conception is a sign of an amateur and incompetent translator" (also cf. Vilikovský 1984; Levý 1963). Since translations are not created in a vacuum and since no two source texts are completely identical, the translator must be conscious of the translation's purpose and choose the best global strategy accordingly.

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[12] As the ST is only a supplementary material, it should not count towards the word limit and should be perhaps included in the appendix section.

Lack of such global strategy, however, may result in inconsistencies and self-contradictions in the translation. If translators do not adopt a specific approach, they act without thinking and translate on autopilot. Thus, the clarification of the translation approach should be a desirable feature of a commented translation since it indicates what factors exert influence on translators' behaviour and which specific translation and linguistic norms the translator conforms to.

Be that as it may, the analysis showed that only 124 students (58%) shed light on their approach to translation. Such practice can be seen as a fundamental flaw because by excluding the clarification of one's approach the students conceal the starting point of their decision-making process from evaluator, make it even less transparent. As a result, this omission can significantly affect evaluators' opinion on the students' ability to rationalise their thinking on translation.

4.2.4.2.　The Length of Target Texts in Contrast to the Length of Commentaries

The most interesting and perhaps controversial at the same time are the following formal aspects of commented translation theses: the length of translated texts (LoTTs) and the length of commentaries (LoCs) themselves.

As was pointed out in the literature review, there are no guidelines regarding the formal aspects of a commented translation. However, according to Warwick, the commentary is a place in which students ought to address relevant challenges encountered during the translation process and offer solutions that are informed by translation theory. The commentary should, therefore, account for the bulk of the thesis and be twice as long as the translation. In order to understand the practice of writing commented translations and determine whether the commentaries in Slovak theses are shorter or longer than translations, we decided to compare lengths of translations with lengths of commentaries. However, since translated texts often adopt the layout of the ST, which varies in the font size, spacing, and other formatting (e.g., text in two or three columns), we decided to measure the length not by counting physical pages of individual chapters, instead we decided to count the thesis length in *standard pages* to get more precise results.

Since only 66 % of the analysed theses were available for download in PDF format and other 36% of theses were protected from editing and copying the text into editable text document, the decision was made to use optical character recognition (OCR) software for macOS called Text Sniper[13]. On one hand, the software is very time-efficient, on the other

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[13] To test the accuracy of the software, we compared the output of Text Sniper to professional OCR software ABBYY Finereader. The difference between the two softwares on one sample of 36 converted physical pages (7381 words/51 368 characters/28 standard pages) was approximately 56 words/372 characters/0.2 standard page.

hand, it allows the user to instantly extract text directly from their screen, store it in an additive clipboard, and subsequently paste it into a Word document. All the analysed theses were converted into editable text document and saved individually. Then, to calculate the number of standard pages, we divided the number of characters (including spaces) to translation and commentary respectively by 1800 and finally we rounded the numbers.

As such, Figure 1 shows the correlation between the LoTTs and the LoCs. First of all, it reveals a general preference for shorter commentaries between four and twelve pages. While 2 commentaries are up to three pages long, 39 are between four and six pages, 65 between seven and nine, 45 between ten and twelve, 33 between thirteen and fifteen, 17 between sixteen to eighteen, 3 between nineteen and twenty-one, 4 between twenty-two and twenty-four, and 3 commentaries between twenty-five and twenty-eight pages long.
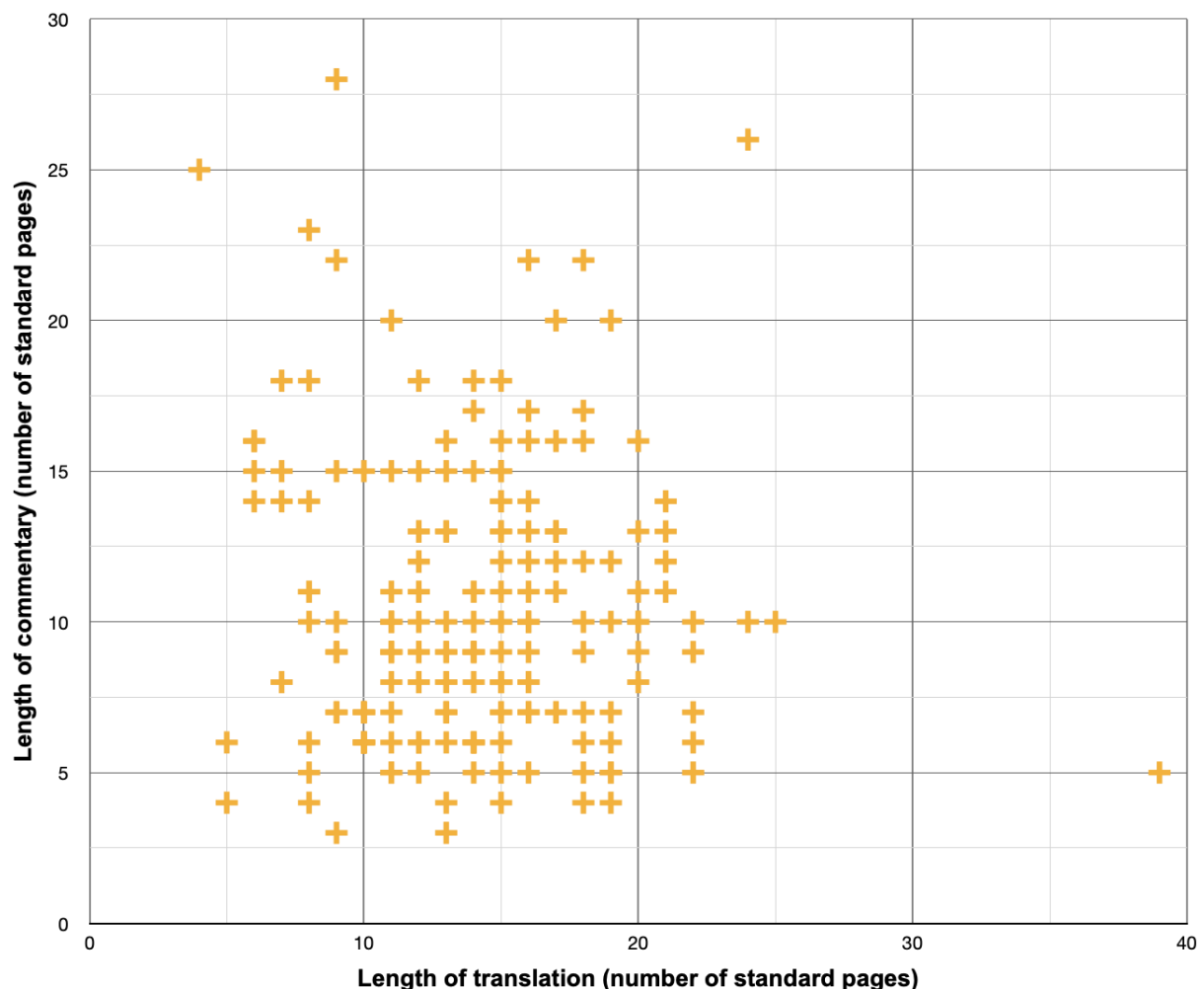

Figure 1. Correlation between lengths of translated texts
and lengths of commentaries

As for the LOTTs, 7 translations are between four and six pages long, 22 between seven and nine, 53 between ten and twelve, 55 between

thirteen and fifteen, 40 between sixteen to eighteen, 25 between nineteen and twenty-one, 8 translations between twenty-two and twenty-five, and one translation that is 39 pages long. Based on these findings, it can be sand that there is a general tendency for translations between ten and fifteen pages.

However, there are noticeable formal differences between the theses themselves. Looking at the commented translations written by undergraduate students, we find substantial differences in the ratio of the LoTTS to the LoCs. As indicated in Figure 1, 18% of students used only between four to six pages to comment on their translation, while another 30% of them used only seven to nine pages. But the key is to look at these numbers in a context and compare them with the lengths of translations as this is where the disproportionality comes to light. The average length of analysed translations is 14,1 standard pages, while the average length of commentaries is 10,3 pages. In this case, the typical commented translation would consist of 14 pages long translation and 10 pages long commentary and we may conclude that commentaries in Slovak commented translations are shorter than translated texts. There are, however, several extreme cases that we would like to mention. Those extreme cases relate to those theses, in which the length of a translation is not proportional to the length of a commentary. The ratio between the two is demonstrated in the table below using random examples:

	Length of Translation	Length of Commentary
	9	28
I	10	6
II	19	12
	11	20
	39	5
	13	15
	19	5
	8	14
	11	10
	14	11
III	13	3
IV	21	13

Table 2. The lengths of translations to the lengths of commentaries ratio

If we look at the bottom two rows, the examples labelled III and IV, we can see that translation III is 40% shorter than translation IV, however, the commentary III is almost **78%** shorter than the commentary IV. A similar scenario can be observed in the upper part of the table – the lengths of the translation and commentary in example II are twice as long as the lengths in example I.

Of course, one could argue that length is not everything; concise writing will always top verbiage that makes it difficult to navigate through the text and reach the key points. At first glance, we could say that possibly even six- or eight-pages long commentaries provide enough space to demonstrate and display appropriate levels of knowledge, reasoning, and analytical skills. This would, of course, hold true only if commentators truly justified their individual decisions, using translation theory as a springboard to find a chain of evidence that would help them explain their decision-making process, potentially making the translation unassailable. However, based on a preliminary qualitative analysis of the commentaries, which will be further elaborated on in the author's forthcoming paper, up to 22% of commentaries do not revolve around the justification of the decision-making process. In line with what is mentioned in Shei (2005), Garcia Alverez (2007), Almana (2016) and Shih (2018), said commentaries merely list tautological examples of translation shifts and strategies, providing only little or no rationale behind the translation. Of course, we do learn what kind of solutions the commentators propose for the problem encountered, but we do not know how they approached it; we can only see examples of translation strategies, sometimes up to eight examples per strategy, with the fifth being no different from the third one. So, how can commented translation fulfil its goal as a didactic and an assessment tool in said cases, when the notion of process, mentioned at the very beginning of this paper, is almost entirely abandoned and made less transparent?

In the right hands, commented translation has a great potential to become a very powerful tool – a method to organize thoughts on a translation and widen one's experience and knowledge. The findings reported here thus suggest that it is necessary to pull the curtains back and rethink 1) how commented translation should be approached by trainers (at all three levels of tertiary education); and 2) what are the markers of a quality commented translation, i.e. what desirable formal and content features the translation-with-commentary thesis should have in order to distinguish it from a linguistic exercise or translation criticism theses that often focus on detecting shifts in a particular translation.

4.3. Explicit methodology?

Apart from investigating the formal features of commented translations theses, the study sought to answer the following specific questions: *1) Do students follow explicit guidelines on how to write a commented translation?* and *2) Do students discuss commented translation in its narrow sense or not?* The answers are offered below in reversed order and provide the first results of a qualitative research, which is centred upon analysing the whole text of theses included in the corpus.

Regarding the second question, the answer is rather straightforward: No, students did not mention commented translation in its narrow sense in their theses and did not refer to the authors and studies reviewed or any other methodological material on the topic discussed. The students used the introduction chapter to declare that they are writing a commented

translation, but then they immediately proceeded to the source text analysis without considering the wider issues of writing a commented translation and the applicability of this tool in translators' training and translation competence assessment. This can, however, be attributed to the scarcity of literature on commented translation both in Slovakia and abroad.

The above answer should be the cue to the first question regarding guidelines and methodology: No, students did not draw upon *explicit* guidelines or methodology on writing a commented translation, that is students did not refer to specific guidelines or model in the introductory part of the thesis or any other section. Having said that, it is safe to say that most of the theses written at Constantine the Philosopher University followed an implicit methodology, or rather an implicit tradition. Let us explain. We believe it is probable that students discuss commented translation as a didactic tool and thesis topic at seminars or during meetings with their supervisors. This is evident mainly in the structure of the theses completed at CPU being very similar and also in the inclusion of the "anticipation of challenges in translation" category. It is assumed that the CPU students followed the model of a source text analysis proposed by S. Kondelová (In Müglová 2009, 2018), which builds on Nord's model of translation-oriented text analysis. This assumption is further supported by the fact that 137 students (65%) referred to D. Müglová's university textbook *Komunikácia, tlmočenie, preklad alebo Prečo spadla Babylonská veža?* (Communication, Interpreting, Translation, or Why did the Tower of Babel Collapse?, 2009, 2018), in which Kondelová's elaborated model can be found. Additionally, when talking about translation shifts or general theory of translation in their commentaries, the students predominantly cited textbooks by E. Gromová and E. Dekanová, teachers at CPU (134 and 65 references respectively). As such, this can be another hint of a more coordinated action that we want to explore in the future via semi-structured interviews.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the practice of using commented translation as an alternative to conventional research-focused BA and MA theses in Slovakia. Even though commented translation is not frequently discussed among Slovak scholars, it is a very much preferred alternative to conventional research-focused thesis. In fact, the Register holds 498 commented translations as opposed to only 296 translation criticism theses. The numbers are clearly in favour of commented translation and suggest that commented translation is used much more often than we may have originally thought and as such deserves more recognition and attention from academia.

Furthermore, this study, focused primarily on the formal features of commented translations of non-literary text, contributes to our understanding of commented translation as a didactic tool and a method of assessment, but also raises important questions about the practice of

writing commented translations at Slovak universities as the combination of findings in the present study provides some support for the premise that the practice seems rather heterogenous and inconsistent since the amount of effort needed to complete the thesis can differ substantially from case to case. Commented translation is without a doubt an excellent alternative to a conventional research-focused thesis, but it should be used thoughtfully to make the students more conscious about the translation process and give them a space to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Therefore, as regards the translation institutes covered, it could be argued that there is a need for a model of commented translation and a specific set of all-embracing guidelines on how to write a commented translation. Such guidelines should then not only address the content of commentaries, but also the formal features of a commented translation such as the scope of the source text analysis and the minimum and maximum length of translation and commentary. We believe that developing individual guidelines for *all three* levels of tertiary education and suggesting them as one of the resources to be considered when introducing translation-with-commentary thesis topic to students could help systematize the practice of writing commented translation and increase its overall methodological rigour since all possible shortcomings might stem from not following thorough guidelines on how to write a commented translation.

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