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Translating in-text citation language from Slovak into English: research articles on linguistics

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ABSTRACT

Academics are required to publish the results of their research internationally, which often involves using English. Many authors can create and publish their work, however, those unfamiliar with the English language and/or its writing conventions might face various challenges before achieving success. Using pre-translation and discourse analysis and synthesis, the purpose of this paper is to identify similarities and differences in the language patterns used by authors of research papers published in Slovak and English when referring to other sources of information. The research considers the Slovak cultural specifics that need to be taken into consideration when translating into English. The challenge lies in whether the source text should be translated semantically to retain the cultural and linguistic aspects of the original (which might ultimately sound somewhat unnatural, peculiar or inappropriate in English), or whether adjustments should be made (with the author's consent) to reflect the target culture's writing conventions, which to some extent may mean sacrificing the author's idiolect. The research contributes to the development of a new subfield of writing-for-translation stylistics and might be interesting and useful to those wishing to publish scientific papers in English (Slovak authors), or it could serve as a springboard for discussing writing conventions of other cultures and how these match the English ones.

Key words:

Academic vocabulary. In-text citation. Research paper. Translation from Slovak into English. Translation stylistics.

INTRODUCTION

Although there is exceeding pressure on academics to publish their work (especially research articles) internationally, Slovak authors unfamiliar with English often express reluctance. The unwillingness to publish abroad might stem from their fear of the unknown (where the unknown is the Anglo-American style of writing) or uncertainty as to why there might be a need to assess or adjust their text structurally or linguistically to meet the target culture's conventions. They might feel threatened that they will have to sacrifice their style of writing or idiolect, or even years of writing experience, just to please the publisher.

Ideally, authors should become familiar with the target culture's writing conventions. It is essential that they have access either to academic writing courses or to empirical data on the matter. Therefore, research investigating similarities and differences between English and Slovak academic writing conventions should continue. This paper is a direct continuation to my dissertation¹ that investigates the in-text citation language used by Slovak authors and authors publishing in English (not necessarily native English users), namely the use of reporting verbs, reporting nouns and reporting adjuncts as well as other expressions. Its primary focus is on identification of the Slovak specifics that could be regarded as problematic if they were translated into English. The challenge lies in whether the source text should be translated literally or semantically, although it might ultimately sound somewhat unnatural or peculiar in English, or whether some adjustments should be made (with the author's consent) to reflect the target culture's writing conventions, which may mean that the author

¹ Laputkova, A. (2024). *Vplyv lingvokultúry na tvorbu akademického textu určeného na preklad / Impact of linguaculture on creating academic texts intended for translation*. [Doctoral dissertation, Prešov University].

may need to sacrifice their idiolect. If the authors become familiar with these aspects and are willing to internalise them, they can incorporate them into their text-creating process. Moreover, this research could be beneficial to translators, as they might not be aware of what is and what is not appropriate in the target language.

Scholars focusing on Anglo-American academic vocabulary find inappropriate choice of vocabulary, complicated verbalisation or the use of inadequately complex lexical units to be the most common of non-native speakers of English (e.g., Gastel and Day 2016, Hofmann 2010, Körner 2008, McKinley and Rose 2019, Sternberg and Sternberg 2010). The goal of a scientific study is not to succeed "in verbal acrobatics, but in originality, in the method of argumentation and in the heterogeneity of methodological approaches" (Kačmárová and Bilá 2021, p. 39). The way the author verbalises their thoughts, what vocabulary they use, can also contribute to their publication success, therefore the choice of vocabulary is important.

The paper presents sample passages from the Slovak corpus with literal and suggested translations that illustrate the specifics of the Slovak academic writing style. The research can provide data for specialised translation and contribute to the development of a new subfield of writing-for-translation stylistics. It might be valuable to those wishing to publish scientific papers or translating them into English, or it could serve as a springboard for discussing writing conventions of other cultures and how these match the English ones.

NON-LITERARY TRANSLATION – will be added here

ACADEMIC WRITING AND STYLISTICS

Unlike Anglo-American literature on academic vocabulary, which is specific, includes numerous examples, recommendations and instructions applicable in writing, for example, in research papers, the Slovak scientific communication is mostly theoretical and descriptive. While English academic language is concise, clear, and precise, Slovak authors often communicate implicitly or verbosely, which might make the contents difficult for the reader to understand (Pípalová 2014, Barrer 2019). However, research articles written by Slovak authors gradually adjust to trends typical for the international scientific community, especially regarding their linearity, conversational character, comprehensibility, and more explicit presence of the author (Murin et al. 2021, Kačmárová and Bilá 2021).

Regarding the Slovak linguistic tradition, stylistics is a scientific discipline that describes any writing styles, although academic writing is formally or semantically not present in it (Kačmárová et al. 2023). Style (štýl) is perceived as the selection and the use of linguistic devices typical for a certain function, speech act or individual (Petráčková and Kraus 2005). According to Miko (1970), style is a unique or standardised dynamic configuration of certain expressive characteristics in the text represented by linguistic and thematic devices, and it can be identified based on repetition of identical features, which can be investigated. Slančová (2022a) states that any text is the final product of style, although it also serves as its starting point. She perceives style as an individualised way of verbal interaction which acquires qualitative validity in a specific communicative act, while it relates to the theme and to various linguistic and non-linguistic markers.

Understanding of style is different in English and in Slovak. Table 1 below presents seven types of Slovak culture-specific items related to style where what is understood as style in Slovak is in fact a text type in English (Kačmárová et al 2023):

| Slovak term | Semantic translation | Functional translation |
|----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| náučný štýl | educational/scientific style | academic texts |
| administratívny štýl | clerical style | business writing |
| publicistický štýl | journalistic style | journalistic writing |
| rečnícky štýl | oratorical style | speech |
| esejistický štýl | essay style | belletristic rhetoric |
| hovorový štýl | colloquial style | vernacular language |
| umelecký štýl | artistic style | belle-letters text |

Table 1 Types of styles in Slovak with semantic and functional translations (Kačmárová et al 2023)

The educational or scientific style, which corresponds to academic texts in English, has been characterised by Mistrík (1965) as public, the goal of which is to educate or explain. The language used for this purpose is tentative, smooth, suppresses subjectivity, emotions and expressiveness, its function is communicative, it is characterised by logic, precision, impersonality, unambiguity, clarity, iconicity, specialisation, terminology, publicity, monologue; it is written, official; its addressee is absent (e.g., Mistrík 1965, Hrdlička and Vilímek 2008, Findra 2013, Slančová 1996, 2022). In this regard, Slančová (2022) mentions scientific macrosocial communication register with preferred linguistic and paralinguistic conventions, thus authors follow a traditional template when creating a text both in terms of its structure or when selecting linguistic devices. In Slovak, the information related to academic writing is mostly theoretical, therefore there is a need for empirical data and more practical guidelines that could help especially beginning scholars create quality publications.

METHODOLOGY

MATERIAL

A corpus of sixty research papers on linguistics (thirty in English, thirty in Slovak) was compiled. All papers were published in journals indexed in Scopus Elsevier to ensure comparable standard. They all used the name and date referencing system. The Slovak papers were published between 2018 and 2022 and retrieved from two journals (*The Journal of Linguistics/Jazykovedný časopis* and *Slovak Speech/Slovenská reč*). The English corpus contains thirty texts published between 2019 and 2023 in five different journals: *The Journal of Pragmatics*, *Lingua*, *Language & Communication*, *The Journal of English Linguistics*, *Corpus Linguistics* and *Linguistic Theory*.

METHODS

Qualitative methods, particularly pre-translation analysis, discourse analysis and synthesis, were used for this research (however, the research uses the findings from my dissertation, in which corpus analysis was conducted to quantify and categorise reporting verbs, reporting nouns and other expressions). After the compilation of the corpora, the sections containing citations were extracted (integral and non-integral) and thorough pre-translation and discourse analysis was conducted. The aim was to identify recurring patterns in the citation language in the Slovak corpus, which were different from those in the English corpus. Several examples were selected to illustrate various culture-specific aspects. These were then analysed further at a lexical, morphological and syntactic level and translated semantically into English. The semantic translation was analysed in each case to determine whether it would be considered academically appropriate or natural for the target culture. Any problematic areas were addressed and commented on, and subsequently functional translation was provided for each example.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION (other examples can be added)

In-text citations and references appeared in various parts of the examined texts. Regarding the structure, the Slovak papers (25) mostly contain the introduction, the body, and the conclusion, where the body includes chapters titled based on the author's own decision. The IMRAD structure is used in five Slovak texts. The authors refer to other sources of information practically in every section of the paper, except for the conclusion with minimum citations. The English texts use IMRAD (with slight adjustments, most texts contain introduction, some have literature review / background, data, material or corpus and methods, results, discussion and the conclusion or the summary) and all the citations appear in practically all the parts except for the conclusion. What is true for both linguacultures, however, is that most citations appear in the introduction or in the literature review.

Tables 1 – 6 below present examples from the Slovak corpus that illustrate similarities and differences between the two linguacultures and that could be problematic in terms of translation, or they require certain adjustments. The information about the subject-matter of the research as well as the names of the cited authors or publications are deleted to retain anonymity (these are replaced with capital letters, e.g. XX). The only exception is example in Table 1, where it is the culture-specific aspect of referring to other sources. Letter x in the brackets represents the year of the publication in the case of an integral citation, or the name of the author with the year of the publication in the case of a non-integral citation. Each table contains semantic translation of the source text and a more appropriate translation solution that reflects English academic writing recommendations for expressing ideas concisely, clearly, and precisely. Each example is analysed and commented on, and the type of a problem is identified.

The first significant difference between the Slovak and the English citation language is in the use of the cited authors' names. In English, there are only three instances in which the citing authors mention both the first name and the surname of the cited author. In two of these, the citing authors state that their communication with the cited person was personal, and in one case the cited author is acknowledged for sharing their research corpus with the citing author. Example in Table 1 below illustrates how this aspect in Slovak research articles, in which the first name and the surname of the cited author is used relatively frequently, typically at the first mention of the source, after which authors normally mention either the surname only or the surname with the first name initial(s).

In the entire Slovak corpus, there are only two citing authors whose citation style is identical to that in the English corpus, that is mentioning the cited authors' surnames only. English research articles normally contain initials only to distinguish between two cited authors with the same surname. It is not clear why Slovak authors use the first name(s) or the initial(s) of cited authors. The use of the first name or the initial(s) in Slovak seems to reflect personal engagement. To clarify, since the scientific community is relatively small, it is likely that individual scholars are familiar with each other; on the other hand, the use of the first name or the initial evokes politeness and respect towards the cited author. The suggested translation disregards this trend, as it is not common practice in the Anglo-American academic community.

Moreover, the example below shows a complicated and unclear syntactic structure, in which the subject and the verb are separated by an object (this is possible as Slovak is syntactically more flexible than English). The suggested translation follows a more rigid English sentence structure, placing a prepositional phrase in the initial position followed by the main clause. This structure also simplifies the reading process.

| Slovak original | Semantic translation | Suggested translation |
|---|---|---|
| <i>Lenka Garančovská (x) pri ... ako hlavný identifikačný atribút stanovila ..., t. j. za ... označila.... Na základe týchto zápisov potom zaraďila medzi ...</i> | <i>Lenka Garančovská (x) for ... as the main identifying attribute established ..., i.e. identified On the basis of those registrations, she then classified ...</i> | <i>Regarding ..., Garančovská (x) established ... as the main identifying attribute, i.e. identified Based on the records, she then classified ...</i> |

Table 1

Example in Table 2 below contains several aspects that need to be considered before translating the source text into English. The first is the reporting noun *lingvisti* (*linguists*), which is premodified by *zahraničný* (*international*), a frequent adjective occurring in the Slovak corpus, similarly to adjectives denoting the cited authors' nationality or origin (in the example below *slovenská lingvistika* or *Slovak linguistics*), but with no occurrences in the English corpus. Slovak authors might consider it more important to make distinctions between domestic and international research. The Anglo-American scientific community is multilingual; nevertheless, authors tend not to point to the cited authors' origin or specify the geographical location of the research.

The lexical unit *venovať pozornosť* (literally *devote/pay attention*) has not been identified in the English corpus; it is not typical for Anglo-American academic communication, since one-word verbs are preferred wherever possible. Its meaning is to carefully look at something to discover or learn something. The semantic equivalents to this research act in English could be verbs such as *focus on*, *investigate*, *examine*, or *scrutinize*.

The last clause of the compound sentence – *na poli slovenskej lingvistiky zarezonovala táto téma len okrajovo* (literally *in the field of Slovak linguistics resonated this topic only marginally*) – shows the use of metaphorical language, which is not suitable for academic purposes. The noun *pole* (*field*) is relatively frequent and used similarly in both linguacultures, although it could be omitted in the example to maintain conciseness. The discourse act *zarezonovať* was found in the Slovak corpus once, therefore it cannot be regarded as typical for Slovak. It could be replaced with *zaoberať sa* (literally *deal with*), in other words, the subject is *spoken* or *written about* or *discussed* (*nehovorí*, *nepíše*, *nepojednáva*), which is in contrast to what the *international linguists focus on*. In English, verbs such as *discuss* or *address* would thus be suitable. The adverbs *okrajovo* (*marginally*) can be understood as *v menšej mieri*, *čiastočne* or *letmo*, not in depth, or *briefly*, *partially*, *partly*, or *only to some extent / to some degree* in English.

| Slovak original | Semantic translation | Suggested translation |
|---|---|--|
| <i>Z lexikálnosémantického hľadiska x venovalo pozornosť viaceru zahraničných lingvistov (napr. XX, YY, ZZ a ī.), ale na poli slovenskej lingvistiky zarezonovala táto téma len okrajovo.</i> | <i>From the lexical-semantic point of view, several foreign linguists (e.g. XX, YY, ZZ and others) have paid attention to x, but this topic has only marginally resonated in the field of Slovak linguistics.</i> | <i>Although from the lexical-semantic point of view, x has been investigated by several international linguists (e.g., XX, YY, or ZZ), Slovak linguistics has addressed it only partially.</i> |

Table 2

Another example is interesting in terms of combining discourse and cognitive acts when referring to one author. The first is a negative verb *netajíť sa*, which the author selected instead of a positive equivalent. Its literal translation into English is an idiom *make no secret*, which is inappropriate for academic writing. The verb thus can be replaced with a synonym such as *vyjadriť sa*, *komunikovať*, *prezentovať otvorené*, or *state, communicate, present (openly)* in English, or replace the verb *be* (*byť*) and use the adjective *open* (*otvorený*).

Another lexical unit worth commenting on is *vyjadriť sa skepticky*, which can be translated in two ways into English: by changing the adverb *skepticky* (*sceptically*) into an adjective *skeptický* (*sceptical*) and combine it with the verb *byť* (*be*), or by retaining the discourse act *vyjadriť sa* (*express*), which is followed by the noun *scepticism*, functioning as the object. The following lexical unit to consider is *explicitne poukazuje*, which has more semantic equivalents in English, for example, *address explicitly, point out or point to (clearly)*.

There are fourteen occurrences in the Slovak corpus, where the preposition *podľa* (*according to*) is combined with a personal pronoun, which could be interpreted as *podľa jeho názoru* with the English equivalent *in his opinion* or *he is of the opinion*. The latter translation option occurs once in the English corpus, therefore it could be regarded as acceptable for the target culture, although rare. The

most suitable solution is to use *according to*, which is a frequently used semantic equivalent in the English corpus with forty-one occurrences, although only in combination with the cited author's surname and at the beginning of the sentence.

The following sentence contains a prepositional phrase *s rezervou* (literally *with reserve*), which is inappropriate as it sounds colloquial, therefore synonyms such as *zdržanliv*, *opatrne* or *cautiously, carefully* need to be used in English. Other solutions include the use of the verb *be* with a complement, i.e. adjectives such as *uncertain, sceptical*. We can see repetition of the same notion in this example (scepticism, uncertainty, doubt).

The last sentence of this example contains a clause *ho viedlo presvedčenie* (*conviction led him*), which may or may not be directly evident in Bosák's statements. For this reason, the statement could be hedged in English using, for instance, the adverb *probably* or the modal verb *might*.

| Slovak original | Semantic translation | Suggested translation |
|---|--|--|
| <p><i>Vo viacerých prácach publikovaných v 90. rokoch minulého storočia (x) sa J. Bosák netajil Skepticky sa vyjadruje k ..., čo sa týka tak ..., ako aj ..., na ktoré explicitne poukazuje. Rovnako ... je podľa neho Celkovo sa s rezervou vyjadruje o K takýmto a podobným vyjadreniam ho viedlo presvedčenie o potrebe....</i></p> | <p><i>In several works published in the 1990s, J. Bosák made no secret He is sceptical about ..., referring to both ... and ..., to which he explicitly refers. Likewise ... is, according to him On the whole, he speaks with reserve about He was led to make such and similar statements by his conviction of the need ...</i></p> | <p><i>In several works from the 1990s (x), Bosák stated that ... He is sceptical about ..., regarding both ... and ..., which he addresses. Similarly, he believes that Overall, he is uncertain about His conviction of the need ... might have been the reason he made such statements ...</i></p> |

Table 3

The following example (4) contains the noun *problematika*, which occurs sixty-four times in the entire Slovak corpus and is a very frequent linguistic choice. It denotes a set of problems, areas, therefore it could be replaced in English with, for instance, *problems, issues, or more general matters*.

There are also less typical and academically inappropriate lexical units in this example. The first is *položil autorskú otázku* (*raised an authorial question*) instead of using simple *(o)pýtal sa* (*asked*). The same sentence also contains the discourse act *upozornil*, which can be translated as *pointed out* or *pointed to*, or also *drew attention to*, all of which can also be found in the English corpus.

The second sentence contains the clause *venoval pomerne veľký priestor*, which is problematic in terms of meaning, since someone usually *devotes* or *invests time*, not *space*. It could thus be replaced with *venovať extra pozornosť* (*pay particular attention or dedicate considerable time*), or with *skúmať do hĺbky* (e.g. *explore in depth*). Literal translation *devote* is not present in the English corpus, perhaps because it is inappropriate for academic texts, therefore it needs to be replaced with another verb. The clause *ponúkol riešenie* can be translated using a verb *offered, proposed, or provided* in combination with the noun *solution*.

The following sentence contains *prikláňa sa* (*leans*), the literal translation of which would be inappropriate in the target language. The verb evokes agreement and thus can be translated into English using verbs *support* or *accept*, adjectives *supportive* or *acceptive*, or nouns *supporter* or *proponent*. It is also possible, but not necessary, to change the past tense into present, which is common when using discourse and cognitive acts, regardless of which period the citing author refers to.

| Slovak original | Semantic translation | Suggested translation |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Na ..., upozornil aj XX (x) a položil autorskú otázku, či... Tejto problematike venoval pomerne veľký priestor a ponúkol riešenie.... Aj on (x) sa prikláňa k..., no za ... považuje termín...</i> | <i>XX (x) also pointed to ..., and asked the authorial question whether... He devoted quite a lot of space to this issue and offered a solution.... He (x) also leans towards..., but considers ... to be the term ...</i> | <i>XX (x) also draws attention to ... and asks whether... He invests considerable time in the matter and proposes a solution.... He (x) is also a proponent of... although considers ... as...</i> |

Table 4

Table 5 illustrates another feature typical for Slovak scientific communication, the use of the title of the cited publication, in this case even extended with *všeobecný úvod* (*general introduction*), while the authors' names are also mentioned. In English, only the cited author is mentioned since the title of the publication can be traces in references. The solution could be to agree with the citing author and delete this information, as suggested below. Another issue in this example concerns the research act *zaoberať sa*, whose literal equivalent in English is *deal with*. Although the verb is used in the English corpus on three occasions, it is more appropriate to use a one-word verb, that is another research act with a similar meaning such as *study*, *explore*, *analyse/analyze* or *investigate*, *examine*, or a discourse act *discuss* or *consider*.

| Slovak original | Semantic translation | Suggested translation |
|---|---|---|
| <i>... sú skúmané nielen z hľadiska ..., ale aj z hľadiska ... Týmto aspektom ... sa zaoberajú najmä autori všeobecného úvodu v rámci Oxfordského slovníka súčasnej angličtiny idíomov XX a kol. (x), ktorí definujú kolokácie ako</i> | <i>... are examined not only in terms of ..., but also in terms of This aspect ... is dealt with in particular by the authors of the general introduction within the Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary English Idioms XX et al. (x), who define collocations as</i> | <i>... are examined not only in terms of ..., but also in terms of This aspect ... is discussed particularly by XX et al. (x) who define collocations as ...</i> |

Table 5

Example in Table 6 contains another relatively frequent phenomenon in the Slovak corpus, in which the cited author's profession is specified. The example below also contains an additional modifier, adjective denoting the cited author's nationality. There is no evidence of this type of a modifier in the English corpus. The recommendation here would be to delete the redundant information, which ultimately shortens the passage. Since authors publishing in certain scientific disciplines know one another or are aware of the scholars specialising in their research domain, there is no reason their profession or origin should be emphasised.

The following sentence contains a similar problem, the use of the reporting noun *kolektív autorov* (*a team of authors*) instead of the cited authors' names. Moreover, the source is specified, in this case a monograph with details about its content. It is more appropriate not to mention this information in English, but instead to use the cited author's or authors' name(s) only, with the year of the publication indicated in the brackets. Should the reader be interested, they can find more detailed information about the publication in references.

| Slovak original | Semantic translation | Suggested translation |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Český lingvista XX konštatuje, že... (x). Podobný názor v otázke ... zastáva aj autorský kolektív nami citovanej ... monografie o ... (x).</i> | <i>Czech linguist XX notes that... (x). A similar opinion on the issue of ... is also held by the author's collective of the ... monograph on ... (x).</i> | <i>XX notes that... (x). A similar opinion on the issue of ... is also held by YY (x).</i> |

Table 6

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the language used when referring to other sources of information in thirty Slovak and thirty English research articles, focusing on the culture-specific aspects in the Slovak corpora. It analyses these aspects in terms of appropriateness if these were translated literally into English and provides translation solutions where necessary. This research uses data from a prior in-depth corpus analysis of both corpora, which quantifies and classifies reporting verbs, reporting nouns, reporting adjuncts and other lexical devices.

The findings indicate that the way authors refer to other sources of information in Slovak and English is slowly merging. However, some aspects typical for Slovak authors need to be considered when translating the text into English. The first feature is the use of initials, first names of the cited authors and sometimes the use of titles of cited publication, which is not common in English research articles. Another common phenomenon in Slovak is the use of the modifying adjectives with reporting nouns that denote the cited authors' nationality or origin (and other attributes). Another aspect of the Slovak language which might seem unnatural when translated literally into English is the use of idiomatic, metaphorical, or literary language.

Regarding translation, some lexical units cannot be translated literally, therefore the translator's creativity or resourcefulness is important. Whenever any adjustments need to be made, the translator should consult these with the author. In some cases, English provides more translation solutions to Slovak expressions, therefore the choice can be made to reflect the author's or the translator's personal choice. Regarding reporting verbs, the translator should retain their meaning (discourse, cognitive or research acts), although some changes are possible (see example 5 above). Furthermore, it is important to remember that Anglo-American academic writing requires concise, clear, and unambiguous communication, therefore any redundant, metaphorical, or literary language should be avoided.

REFERENCES – will be added here

Institutional Description

The research takes place at the Institute of Translation and Interpreting Studies at the Faculty of Arts, University of Prešov in Slovakia, an established research and educational institution. The Faculty of Arts offers undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs in teacher training, translation and interpreting, psychology, history, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, political science, and social work. The faculty members' workload comprises teaching (60%) and basic or applied research (40%), which is conducted mainly through grant projects and published both in Slovakia and abroad. Currently, there is no writing centre or support department to assist academics with their research publications, although our Institute provides a course of academic writing in English to PhD students. The academics who are unfamiliar with English often rely on translation services.

Key Theorists

Understanding Anglo-American academic writing conventions (many sources)

KAČMÁROVÁ, A. & M. BILÁ, eds. *Anglo-americký štýl písania v praxi / Anglo-American style of writing in real life*. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita v Prešove.

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English stylistics (especially for terminology)

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Glossary:

- Academic texts = *scientific or educational style* in Slovak
- *Formal, informal, neutral register* (tenor) in English (Slovak uses terms *lower, higher*)
- *Integral and non-integral citations*: in integral citations, the source is integrated into the structure of the sentence and is one of its elements; in non-integral, the source is not the element of the sentence structure.
- *Semantic translation*: focus on meaning and the sense rather than on form.
- *Discourse, research, cognitive acts* (categorisation of reporting verbs based on their meaning)