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The Phenomenon of Bilingualism and Interference in translations between Catalan and Spanish

Karina Donets

*Master's student,
specialty in Applied Linguistics,
V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University;
(4 Svobody Square, Kharkiv, 61022, Ukraine);
e-mail: donets2021111@student.karazin.ua; <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7982-6610>*

The study is due to the intensive functioning of the Catalan and Spanish languages in Catalonia, where bilingualism represents not only a socio-cultural reality but also a key factor in the development of linguistic and translation competence. The investigation of code-switching and interference is significant for both translation studies and cognitive linguistics, as it helps to elucidate the mechanisms through which bilingualism influences translation quality.

The aim of the article is to identify the specific features of bilingualism, code-switching, and interference in translations between Catalan and Spanish, and to determine the factors that condition translation quality.

The study applies comparative analysis of translations, a cognitive approach to bilingual processes and elements of sociolinguistic description.

The results indicate that the translations from Catalan into Spanish were higher quality than those in the opposite direction, due to a more consistent level of education in Spanish. The most common mistakes were grammatical shifts, spelling inaccuracies, and lexical calques. Older participants tended to rely on literal translation and interference-induced mistakes, while younger bilinguals demonstrated higher literacy and stylistic flexibility. It was further revealed that even minimal translation experience reduces the frequency of errors and enhances the naturalness of the text.

It is concluded that bilingualism alone does not provide high quality translation. The crucial factors included the level of formal language education, the presence of translation experience and the ability to control interference.

Keywords: bilingualism, code-switching, interference, Catalan, Spanish, translation.

Bilingualism is a central object of research in modern linguistics, psycholinguistics and sociology, as it encompasses both cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions. It is generally defined as the ability of an individual or community to use two languages depending on the communicative situation. No universal definition exists, as bilingualism is multidimensional and interpreted in diverse ways. In its broadest sense, it is the practice of alternating between two languages in everyday life [11, p. 68]. Psycholinguists emphasize the role of memory and language control [13, p. 1150], whereas sociolinguists highlight the impact of language policy and the sociopolitical status of languages [10, p.69].

Scholars distinguish several types of bilingualism in science. By origin: **natural** (mastering two languages from childhood) and **artificial** (learning a second language at school or as a result of migration). According to the organization of linguistic systems: **coordinative** (languages function independently) and **subordinative** (the second language is acquired through the prism of the first). By level of proficiency: **symmetrical** and **asymmetrical**, which directly influence communication ability and translation strategies [12].

Contemporary approaches emphasize the integration of linguistic, cognitive, and cultural factors.

Catalan-Spanish bilingualism is a vivid example of the stable coexistence of two languages within one society. The Catalan language was formed in the Middle Ages but was marginalized during the centralization policy of Castile (XVI–XVIII centuries). Only after the democratic reforms of the twentieth century that it regained official recognition and expanded its role in education, culture and the media [2, p.332]. Today, Spanish continues to serve as the language of interregional and international communication, while Catalan is a symbol of regional identity. Most residents of Catalonia speak both languages: Spanish tends to dominate and Catalan retains high prestige and is actively supported by an autonomous language policy.

The specificity of Catalan-Spanish bilingualism is its naturalness: children grow up in a bilingual environment, assimilating both systems almost symmetrically. This contributes to the widespread phenomenon of code-switching – the spontaneous transition from one language to another, depending on the topic or interlocutor. Consequently, Catalonia has become a space where bilingualism operates as both an individual and a social phenomenon [8, p.125].

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Translation in a bilingual environment takes place in a competitive environment between two languages. When a bilingual retrieves a word, equivalent from both languages are activated [1, p.724], which creates a risk of interference. However, effective control mechanisms – focusing on the target language and inhibition irrelevant elements – allow to avoid errors [4, p.1160]. Neurolinguistic studies confirm the involvement of different parts of the brain in this process [6, p.228], which is consistent with D. Green's inhibitory control model [5, p.69].

The speed of translation depends on language proficiency and directionality: translation from L2 to L1 is faster than in the opposite direction, especially for non-professionals. For experienced translators, this asymmetry diminished [9, p.135]. Translation experience is a decisive factor that forms not only linguistic but also strategic and cultural competencies [7, p.10]. Professionals better control interference, process texts faster and work more effectively with atypical vocabulary [3, p.1150].

Accordingly, translation experience determines both the quality of translation and cognitive strategies, while bilingualism alone does not guarantee an adequate result. The integration of bilingual competence with translation practice is essential for neutralizing interference and achieving accuracy.

Within the present study, the aim was to determine the specific influence of bilingualism and translation experience on the quality of interlingual translation of texts. The research sample consisted of three groups of participants: professional bilingual translators, bilingual respondents without specialized training, and novice students. The methodological basis included comparative-contrastive analysis of the source texts and their translations, along with qualitative linguistic observation and the subsequent interpretation of typical errors in the prism of the cognitive activity of bilinguals. The analysis revealed that the most common phenomena in translations were lexical calque and grammatical interference. Students and non-professional translators relied heavily on literal rendering and stylistic shifts, which lowered the adequacy of translation. At the same time, professional translators demonstrated a broader range of translation strategies and a much higher level of language flexibility, which effectively minimized the impact of interference factors.

The study used authentic Catalan and Spanish texts and their translations. Respondents were divided into three groups: professional bilingual translators, students with bilingualism, and non-philology people. The age range was also considered, from 22 to 70. This made it possible to identify the impact of generational and cognitive differences on the quality of translation.

The analysis revealed several main types of challenges:

– **Lexical errors.** Calques and literal translations were the most common, especially in the student group. For example, *lleya* (“firewood”) corresponds to the Spanish *leña*, and *sopa acabada de fer* (“freshly made soup” / “soup that has just been cooked”) corresponds to the Spanish *sopa recién hecha*. In more experienced bilinguals, there was a better consideration of the context and an adequate selection of synonyms.

– **Grammatical and syntactic deviations.** Catalan structures were often transposed into the Spanish text, producing artificial or overly complex sentences. Among the grammatical problems, the most common were the incorrect use of past tense forms (*mirà* “looked”, *mirar* instead of the normative *va mirar*), the mixing of the perfect and the simple past tenses (*es va aturar* “stopped” used instead of *va aturar-se*), mistakes in participle formation (*recent cuít* “freshly baked” instead of *recent fet*, *acabada de coure* instead of *acabat de fer*), as well as errors in subject-verb agreement (*tots l'observava* “everyone watched” instead of *tots l'observaven*).

– **Stylistic problems.** Younger respondents tended to simplify the style and neutralize emotionally expressive means, while older participants tried to preserve the imagery of the original. One of the main problems was calquing from Spanish, in particular the use of *for de pa* (“bakery,” literally “bread oven”) instead of the more natural Catalan *fleca* (“bakery”), as well as the use of colloquial verbs such as *xerraven* (“chatted,” “gossiped”) instead of the neutral *parlaven* (“talked”).

– **Cultural and semantic features.** Translating culture-specific items and idioms posed challenges. More experienced translators used adaptation more often, while students left calques. For instance, the Catalan idiom *fer el cor fort* (“to gather one’s courage”) was sometimes translated literally as *hacer el corazón fuerte*, which sounds unnatural in Spanish. The adapted version *armarse de valor* (“to brace oneself,” “to take courage”) conveys the intended meaning much more accurately and naturally.

Cognitive analysis has shown that there is constant competition between the two language systems in the translation process. Younger bilinguals tend to rely more often on automated associations, which increases the number of interference errors, whereas older participants exhibited stronger control skills, reducing deviations. Translation experience proved decisive: even without special education, practice enhanced lexical accuracy and stylistic flexibility. This is consistent with previous psycholinguistic studies that demonstrates that translation experience modifies interlanguage connections in memory and increase productivity.

The results indicate a direct relationship between the level of translation experience and the quality of translation: the higher the professional competence, the lower the degree of interlingual interference and the greater the textual equivalence. Thus, while bilingualism has undeniable cognitive and communicative value, it does not automatically ensure

high-quality translation. The decisive factor in forming professional translation competence is the practical experience that fosters the development of language control mechanisms and strategies for overcoming interference influences.

General Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that the quality of translation between Catalan and Spanish significantly depends on the age, level of language education and translation experience of the respondents. In general, translations from Catalan into Spanish were more accurate and grammatically stable, largely due to the systematic mastery of Spanish in schools. By contrast, the Catalan translations contained more interference constructions and spelling errors, especially among older participants who mastered the language in adulthood. Younger bilinguals, who learn two languages at the same time since childhood, showed significantly higher literacy, naturalness and stylistic flexibility, while older participants tended towards literal calques. Even limited translation experience had a positive effect on the result: respondents with translation practice, regardless of age, made fewer interference errors and more often selected appropriate stylistic solutions.

From a cognitive perspective, bilingual translation engages code-switching, working memory control, and inhibition mechanisms. These processes provide quick access to equivalents but at the same time increase the risk of calque, especially in Catalan translations. Thus, while bilingualism facilitates the translation process, translation quality is primarily determined by formal language training and practical translation experience.

The study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of Catalan-Spanish bilingualism and its impact on translation. It demonstrated that

bilingualism integrates sociolinguistic, cognitive and cultural dimensions, with its development in Catalonia being both natural and socially conditioned. The coexistence of Spanish and Catalan contributes to the formation of a sustainable social bilingualism, which is directly affects the translation practices. Code-switching emerged as a typical bilingual strategy that performs communicative and cognitive functions. For experienced speakers, it is automatic and makes it easier to find equivalents, while inexperienced translators need conscious control, which slows down the process. Interference was found to be the primary source of errors: from grammatical and spelling to lexical and stylistic. At the same time, in some cases, it contributed to the accuracy of the content or generated original expressive solutions. The data revealed clear differences in translation performance by age, educational level, and professional practice. Older respondents who mastered Catalan later are prone to calques and spelling mistakes, while younger participants who mastered both languages from childhood demonstrated higher literacy and more natural output. In general, translations from Catalan into Spanish were better than in the opposite direction, due to the stronger foundation of Spanish in education.

Cognitive analysis confirmed that the translation activates working memory, attention, and control mechanisms. Experienced translators maintain structural integrity, while inexperienced ones rely on literal “word-to-word” of the translation, lowering translation quality.

In sum, the mere fact of bilingualism does not guarantee the high quality of translation. Decisive factors included language education, translation experience, and the ability to control interference. Only the combination of bilingual competence with professional skills ensures the naturalness and accuracy in translation.

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Карина Донець, студентка магістерського рівня зі спеціальності «Прикладна лінгвістика», Харківський національний університет імені В. Н. Каразіна (пл. Свободи, 4, м. Харків, 61022, Україна); e-mail: donets2021111@student.karazin.ua; <http://orcid.org/0009-0004-7982-6610>

Феномен білінгвізму та інтерференції у перекладах між каталанською та іспанською мовами

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена інтенсивним функціонуванням каталанської та іспанської мов у Каталонії, де білінгвізм є не лише соціокультурною реальністю, а й важливим чинником формування мовної та перекладацької компетентності. Вивчення мовного перемикання та інтерференції має значення як для перекладознавства, так і для когнітивної лінгвістики, оскільки дозволяє пояснити механізми впливу двомовності на якість перекладу.

Мета статті полягає у виявленні особливостей прояву білінгвізму, мовного перемикання та інтерференції у перекладах між каталанською та іспанською мовами, а також у визначенні чинників, що зумовлюють якість перекладу.

У дослідженні використано метод порівняльного аналізу перекладів, когнітивний підхід до вивчення білінгвальних процесів та елементи соціолінгвістичного опису.

Результати засвідчили, що переклади з каталанської на іспанську виявилися якіснішими, ніж у зворотному напрямку, що зумовлено стабільнішим рівнем освіти з іспанської. Найтиповішими помилками стали граматичні зсуви, орфографічні огріхи та лексичні кальки. Старші учасники дослідження тяжіли до буквального перекладу та помилок, спричинених інтерференцією, тоді як молодші білінгви демонстрували вищу грамотність і стилістичну гнучкість. Виявлено, що досвід перекладу, навіть мінімальний, сприяє зменшенню кількості помилок та підвищує природність тексту.

Узагальнено зроблено висновок, що сам факт білінгвізму не забезпечує високої якості перекладу. Вирішальними є рівень формальної мовної освіти, наявність перекладацького досвіду та здатність контролювати інтерференцію.

Ключові слова: білінгвізм, мовне перемикання, інтерференція, каталанська мова, іспанська мова, переклад.

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