

# Describing Catalan–Spanish translation

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## 1. Introduction

Translation between Spanish and Catalan has historically been conditioned by the socio-political context surrounding this language pair and, in particular, by the relations that the two languages and their territories have established along history.

Throughout its long history, the Catalan language has undergone periods of glory, periods of decline and crisis, and even periods of persecution. The existence of translations between both languages varies according to the period in question. The work by the classical writer and philosopher Ramon Llull, for instance, was translated into Spanish during Catalan's Golden Age (15th century), while a significant absence of translations is noted during its periods of decline, between the 16th and 18th centuries, and during Franco's dictatorship. During the 16th and 18th centuries, translation was almost exclusively limited to religious texts. In fact, the 18th century was one of the worst periods in the history of Catalan: The Valencian Codes of Law were abolished (and the Kingdom of Valencia annexed to Castile), and the *Decret de Nova Planta* was approved, whereby Catalanian and Balearic constitutions and institutions were abolished. From this moment onwards, Catalan began to share territory with Spanish. The second period of decline was Franco's dictatorship, between 1936 and 1975. Catalan was then persecuted and Spanish imposed throughout the Catalan-speaking territories. In these two periods the Catalan language, both in original texts and in translations, was reduced to the minimum or even disappeared.

Fortunately, the situation nowadays has changed dramatically. In the last thirty years we have witnessed the re-establishment of freedoms following the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975, and secondly, the recovery of Catalan in all language registers, both oral and written. The enactment of the different statutes of autonomy and the laws on language policy has played a decisive role in this process because they have fostered and ensured the use of Catalan. Translation into Catalan has also played an important role in the process of recovering the social use of Catalan in many fields — for example, in the administrative register, in audiovisual media and in the literary world. We will examine these questions in the last section. Let us now see the contextual features that nowadays determine the current practice of translation between Catalan and Spanish.

## **2. Language coexistence**

When any two languages share the same socio-geographical space, coexistence becomes the main conditioning factor that defines a linguistic combination and is also the axis around which all other factors take place.

The status of linguistic autonomy and the recognition of two official languages in certain areas of Spain—Catalan and Spanish in this case, but also combinations of Galician or Basque and Spanish—would appear, in principle, to guarantee a high level of knowledge of both languages by speakers from these bilingual areas. And, as argued by Harris and Sherwood (1978), these speakers might develop translating skills more easily than monolingual individuals. However, in Toury's opinion (1984: 192), “[the] increase in the rate of bilingualism does not necessary run parallel to the increase in translation proficiency”. “The ability to translate presupposes the existence of two other, more basic abilities, namely (a) to acquire more than one languages, and (b) to establish similarities and differences, on more than one level, between items and structures, if not full utterances, pertinent to the languages than one has actually acquired” (Toury 1984: 189). For speakers, and in particular for translators, this factor of linguistic coexistence can give rise also to several drawbacks, such as the constant interferences that occur between the two languages due to the risk to establish only similarities between them (see Payrató 1985; Ruaix 1996; Rodríguez-Vida 1997).

## **3. The closeness of the languages**

Both Spanish and Catalan do not just coexist in the same territory, they are close languages too. Furthermore, geographical and historical reasons have even in-

creased the degree of closeness. The fact that both languages evolved from Latin, the fact that during several periods in history they were subject to attempts at unification, and the fact that now they share the same territory, contribute to a decidedly parallel evolution. Colon (1989) examines the various stages that have determined the evolution of Catalan lexis during its coexistence with Spanish. The author points out the fact that in its original form, the percentage of lexical affinities between Spanish and Catalan was very low, and that Catalan vocabulary was in fact closer to Occitan than to Spanish. However, from the 15th century onwards, this direction changed, and Catalan began to adopt lexis and grammar that more closely related to the Hispano-Lusitanian Latin branch than to the Occitan one. In the 16th and 17th centuries, linguistic features incorporated from the Spanish language became increasingly more common, a trend which has continued to the present day. This process of language approximation, together with such close coexistence, explains the constant transfers (the use of false friends, for example) in the spoken language, which also affect professional translations.

#### **4. Characteristics of Catalan–Spanish translation**

##### **4.1. The linguistic profile of the speaker**

As a result of these contextual factors, the speaker of this linguistic combination shows a heterogeneous profile. According to the classification put forward by Baetens Beardsmore (1989: 13–73), speakers exhibit varying degrees of knowledge of the languages and different individual degrees of bilingualism. These range

- from the ambilingual, equilingual or balanced bilingual, at the top of the scale;
- the bilingual speaker with one dominant language, the non-fluent bilingual speaker and the receptive bilingual;
- the incipient bilingual, at the mid-points of the scale;
- and to the monolingual speaker, at the lowest point on the scale.

In the same way, there is also a series of heterogeneous situations that in some cases require translation, while in others translation is not needed, depending on different factors: (1) the degree of knowledge of the languages by the speakers involved in the communication setting; (2) political reasons; or (3) even, personal reasons, like personal preferences for one language or another, or for using a translation or the source language, and so on. For example, the idea that translation from Spanish into Catalan is not necessary since Catalans understand both languages is widely spread. But translations from Spanish to Catalan are made on a daily basis in different fields, like the administrative field. It seems clear that the

essential primary reason for translation — intelligibility— does not seem to be the reason why translations from Spanish to Catalan are ordered.

#### 4.2. The specificity of fields in the professional marketplace

Translation does not always take place in all areas (literary, audiovisual, legal, administrative, technical, scientific, etc.) in both directions. The need for translation in a particular area may predominate. Taking into consideration the different fields of specialisation, we see that literary translation is more largely carried out from Catalan to Spanish, whereas the volume of literary translation from Spanish to Catalan is low, and only takes place in specific circumstances—decisions taken by the editor or the author, as a creative exercise, political reasons, and recently too economical reasons (see Bacardí 2004: 256–68). The *Index Translationum* (2006) collects a sum of 1355 literature books translated from Spanish into Catalan from 1978 to 2005, and 2293 translated from Catalan into Spanish. Most translations into Catalan are books for children and teenagers, about 50 percent. This is an emerging market due to the need of children's literature in Catalan for both primary and high school education. Since Catalan is widely studied at school, children have compulsory readings among their assignments, and in many cases these books are translations.

In audiovisual media, translation from Catalan into Spanish has increased over the last few years. The professional translation market depends on how many series, documentaries, etc., are produced in Catalan, as well as their quality and popularity. At present, the most successful TV sitcoms, series, cartoons and documentaries produced in the Catalan language are translated into Spanish, *Les tres bessones* (1997), *Veterinari* (2000), etc. In the other direction, from Spanish into Catalan, translation is carried about with some reserves stemming from aesthetic reasons (it is preferable to listen to the actors in the original language) and especially from economical reasons (the Catalan speaking audience can fully understand Spanish) so translation is not needed.

The opposite occurs in the case of scientific and technical translation, with most work being translated into Catalan. The use of Catalan is currently becoming more consolidated in the academic world by the growing need for teaching materials and reference books. It has also been given a boost by the protection and support afforded by institutions such as the EU and UNESCO. Nevertheless, translations between Spanish and Catalan are still scarce in this field. Here the problem is a different one, since the language of science is neither Spanish or Catalan, but English

Finally, administrative translation is different. From the onset of the Catalan normalisation process (in 1975), all documentation used between the administra-

tion and the citizens, originally only written in Spanish, must be translated into Catalan; all citizens have the right to choose every single document in either Catalan or Spanish. This area of translation shows the highest turnover, in spite of the fact that not all documents have been translated yet. In general, translation between Spanish and Catalan has just begun to walk a path that still has far to be covered in order to recover lost ground (García de Toro 2004: 284).

#### 4.3. Bi-directionality in professional practice

Another significant fact is that in a context of bilingualism, translators are very often asked to translate in both directions, from Catalan to Spanish and from Spanish to Catalan. The official recognition of both languages leads to situations where bi-directional skills are frequently considered an essential requirement for the translator; in other words, he or she is assumed to be equally proficient in both languages.

This raises another academic and epistemological problem. Both languages could be considered to be the translator's mother tongue. In this case, the traditional binary division between *direct* and *inverse* translation is no longer useful. Even the labels *mother tongue* or *main language* should be revisited and revised (see Beeby 1997: 63–7; and Kelly, Martin, Nobs, Sánchez and Way 2003, for a detailed study of directionality in translation).

Kelly *et al.* (2003: 21–41) explain that the concepts *mother tongue* and *foreign language* are more than controversial in a global world in which many people live in different countries and languages during their lives. In the past 50 years an increasing number of people have been travelling around the world, thus creating multicultural and multilingual new societies, especially in the first world. Prunč (2000, 2003) also shows his doubts on the applicability of concepts such as *mother tongue* or *first language* to translation. These concepts, in fact, show different steps along the life of many individuals, and even refer more to life situations than to the individual itself. Neither bilingualism nor bicultural abilities can be considered permanent or lifelong characteristics, since both linguistic and cultural competencies in bi- or multilingual individuals are achieved and developed according to the principle of selective functionality in each area (Prunč 2000: 10).

In Spanish–Catalan translation, and generally speaking, in translation between two languages that share the same territory, the general trend to separate the practices of *direct* and *inverse* translation is valid only for certain translators, those who do not fall into the highest classification of bilingualism outlined on the scale above. In our language pair some speakers and translators have a similar degree of competence in the two languages. Indeed, as we have seen, in a context of language coexistence, bi-directionality is required of the professional translator

more often than in other language pairs, and for them this binary and excluding division seem to be totally inadequate. In addition, when we take into consideration that these translators belong to both linguistic-cultural communities—those of the source text and the target text—the difference between *direct* and *inverse translation* becomes blurred.

The same idea, although applied to other linguistic combinations, is put forward by Mayoral (2001), and by Kelly *et al.* (2003), for whom *direct* and *inverse translation* are relative concepts:

la actividad que para alguien resulta de traducción directa para otro puede resultar de traducción inversa; incluso, en el caso de un traductor bilingüe, el concepto pierde mucha de su precisión; de hecho, ya está muy extendida la denominación *traducción a la lengua no principal del traductor* para la traducción inversa, al ser considerada más ajustada a la realidad (Mayoral 2001: 319).<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, according to Mayoral and Kelly (1997), the moment and the country or countries of the language pair in each case create habits and norms which go beyond these binary concepts and which are also in progress constantly.

Las actitudes hacia este tipo diferente de traducción [la traducción hacia la lengua no principal del traductor] varían para los diferentes países, dependiendo de varios factores como la cultura de traducción existente en el país, el dominio de lenguas extranjeras, la presencia en el país de hablantes de la lengua extranjera en cuestión, etc. Así, encontramos países en los que se prepara a los traductores para trabajar en ambos sentidos (a y desde su lengua nativa o principal); son ejemplos Dinamarca, Argentina o Rusia. En el otro extremo, encontramos países donde no traducir nunca a una lengua no principal ha dejado de ser una cuestión práctica para convertirse en una cuestión de ética profesional, por ejemplo el Reino Unido (Mayoral and Kelly 1997: 22–3).<sup>2</sup>

In the case of Catalan–Spanish translation, the translator is trained to work in both directions, as we will see in the next section, and he or she is asked to translate in both directions constantly. That is why we use the binary opposition

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1. The activity that for one [translator] represents direct translation may represent inverse translation for another; even more so, in the case of a bilingual translator, the concept loses a great deal of accuracy; indeed, the term *translation into the translator's non-main language* to refer to inverse translation has become widespread, as it is considered to be a more fitting definition of the real situation. [My translation]

2. Attitudes towards this different kind of translation [*translation into the translator's non-main language*] will vary from country to country, depending on various factors such as the role of translation in that country, the dominance of foreign languages, the presence in the country of speakers of the foreign language in question, etc. Thus, we find countries that train translators to work in both directions (both into and from their native or main language), such as Denmark, Argentina or Russia. At the other extreme, the idea of never translating into the non-native language is no longer a practical question, but rather one of professional ethics in certain countries such as the United Kingdom. [My translation]

between *direct* and *inverse* translation to refer to our language pair with some reserves.

#### 4.3.1. *Didactic implications*

This discussion has didactic implications. The teaching of translation between Catalan and Spanish, and in general between the different co-official languages in Spain, has taken place very recently. Six universities now offer courses in Catalan–Spanish translation: Universitat d’Alacant, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Universitat Jaume I de Castelló, Universitat Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona, Universitat de València, and Universitat de Vic. These courses have been available for a relatively short time (since the nineties) in all the above-mentioned universities, except for the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona which enjoys a longer tradition in the field.

All six universities share a common characteristic: no differentiation is made amongst groups in terms of *direct translation* and *inverse translation*. The following options and courses are currently available:

- Catalan–Spanish translation
- Spanish–Catalan translation
- Spanish–Catalan and Catalan–Spanish translation in the same course

In other words, either translation into just one of the two languages is taught, or the two directions are taught within the same course. Taking into consideration the speakers’ mother tongue, in a hypothetical situation, we would have the following possibilities:

- Direct Catalan–Spanish translation (for Spanish mother tongue speakers)
- Inverse Catalan–Spanish translation (for Catalan mother tongue speakers)
- Direct Spanish–Catalan translation (for Catalan mother tongue speakers)
- Inverse Spanish–Catalan translation (for Spanish mother tongue speakers)

Interestingly enough, none of the six universities offering courses in Catalan–Spanish translation follows this pattern. The speaker’s or student’s level of bilingualism, as well as the market demands, are the determining factors in the hybridisation of the groups. This undoubtedly confirms again the terms *inverse* and *direct translation* are, in fact, inappropriate labels. And a methodology based on this conceptualisation is not always applicable to our language specific setting (see García de Toro and Hurtado 1999).

#### 4.4. Self-translation

Finally, linked to this feature of bi-directionality is the phenomenon of *self-translation*. Writers often translate their own work into the neighbouring language, par-

ticularly in translation from Catalan to Spanish. The most paradigmatic case is perhaps that of writer Carme Riera, who has translated several of her own works, including *El último azul*, *Tiempo de espera* or *Una primavera para Doménico Guarini*, and has subsequently reflected on the subject. Llorenç Villalonga, Maria Aurèlia Capmany, Sebastià Juan Arbó, Xavier Berenguel or Agustí Bartra.

The writer Antoni Marí considers that this type of translation blurs the boundaries between the translation and the original text. The number of changes that this author allowed himself (proof-reading the original again, introducing subtle changes and nuances, etc.) justifies the following claim:

Paraules molt pròximes diuen coses molt diferents. D'aquí crec que parteixen les diferències que hi ha entre la versió catalana i la castellana [de *El camí de Vincennes*]. Unes són per raons de matís, altres d'errors en la primera versió, altres per emfasitzar el ritme de la llengua d'arribada, i d'altres per raó de gust, per aconseguir o mantenir un ritme i per adequar-lo a l'exigència pròpia de cada llengua (Marí 1997: 63).<sup>3</sup>

Writer Carme Riera has reflected on the translation of *Dins el darrer blau/En el último azul*. She considers literature to be “untranslatable”, and from this conception, her translation becomes a rewriting, a new creation. This explains the transformations that her novels undergo in the Spanish edition:

En *El último azul* se'ns conta la mateixa història però es fa, tot sovint, de manera diferent; hi ha paràgrafs que han desaparegut, capítols que s'han escurçat i situacions que han canviat un poc. Però també els he de confessar que a partir de la traducció castellana, la versió catalana també ha variat una mica; a partir de la sisena edició de *Dins el darrer blau* es varen corregir un seguit d'imperficcions, veure la novel·la des d'una altra llengua dóna una perspectiva distinta i alhora ajuda a recompondre el món novel·lístic (Riera 1997: 50).<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the author found it an arduous task that required a great effort on her part: “Ara estic escrivint una altra novel·la també històrica que succeeix a Cuba a finals del segle passat i he intentat reescriure-la en castellà [...] però l'exercici

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3. Very similar words can mean very different things. I think the differences between the Catalan and the Spanish versions [of *El camí de Vincennes*] stem from this. Some differences derive from reasons of shade or nuance, some from errors in the first version, others to emphasise the pace of the target language, and others for reasons of taste, to achieve or keep up a rhythm and to match it to the demands of each language. [My translation]

4. In *El último azul* the same story is told, but frequently in a different way; certain paragraphs have disappeared, some chapters have been shortened and situations changed slightly. But I should also confess that once the Spanish translation was done, the Catalan version also changed a little. From the sixth edition of *Dins el darrer blau* onwards, a series of imperfections have been corrected. Looking at the novel through another language puts a new different perspective on it and at the same time helps to rearrange the world within the novel. [My translation]



m'ha resultat tan difícilós que l'he abandonat.” (Riera 1997: 52).<sup>5</sup> In his case, the closeness of the languages justifies the act of rewriting.

After all these considerations on translation between Catalan and Spanish in the previous pages, we can conclude that the proximity and closeness of these two languages does not guarantee success in translation, that there are far more reasons to commission a translation than the fact that the target readers cannot understand the source language, and finally, that the concepts of direct and reverse translation are a bit imprecise and not very useful in this language pair. We do think that certain translation pairs, like Spanish and Catalan, not very common in translation theories, reopen interesting theoretical debates like directionality, self-translation, market relations and forces between a major and a minor language, etc. This article wants to step in these issues and to encourage other scholars to do research into these topics.

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5. I am now writing another historical novel set in Cuba at the end of the last century, and I have attempted to re-write it in Spanish [...] but it has proved so difficult that I have abandoned the task.” [My translation]

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## Abstract

When tackling the issue of translation between Spanish and Catalan, Branchadell and West state that translation into a minority language like Catalan is truly an ill-studied and poorly understood phenomenon (2004: 16). This paper aims to start a debate on a language pair that has scarcely been studied and is still poorly known even in the Spanish context: two languages that live together, two close languages, two languages always determined by the socio-political and historical circumstances around them, and, as a result, two languages well understood by all speakers in the crowded Catalan region.

We will focus on the contextual factors that take part and determine this translation practice: the linguistic profile of their speakers, the bi-directionality of professional translation, self-translation and the specificity of fields in the professional marketplace. We will also examine the implications that derive from them, especially the implications for teaching.

This paper will reopen some interesting theoretical debates, like directionality, self-translation, market relations and power balances between a major and a minor language. For example, the closeness of these two languages does not guarantee success in translation, the concepts of

direct and reverse translation are not very useful and precise in this language combination, and the reasons for commissioning a translation are not just to facilitate understanding among the readers of the target language.

## Résumé

À propos de la traduction entre l'espagnol et le catalan, Branchadell et West affirment que la traduction vers une langue minoritaire comme le catalan est très peu étudiée et, de surcroît, il s'agit d'un phénomène très peu compris (2004: 16). Cet article essaie de lancer un débat sur la traduction d'un couple de langues rarement étudié et peu connu, voire dans le contexte espagnol: deux langues qui cohabitent, deux langues proches, deux langues toujours influencées par les circonstances sociopolitiques et historiques et, de ce fait, deux langues parlées et comprises par tous les usagers ressortissant des territoires catalanophones.

Nous nous pencherons sur les facteurs contextuels qui interviennent et déterminent la pratique de la traduction dans ce cas concret. Ces facteurs demeurent le profil linguistique des usagers, la bidirectionnalité de la traduction professionnelle, l'autotraduction et la spécificité du marché professionnel. Nous aborderons également les conséquences qui en découlent, notamment les implications concernant la didactique de la traduction.

L'article relancera des débats théoriques intéressants tels que la directionnalité, l'autotraduction, les exigences du marché et le bilan de pouvoirs entre une langue majoritaire et une langue minoritaire. Par exemple, la proximité entre les deux langues ne garantit pas le succès d'une traduction, les concepts de traduction directe et traduction inverse ne sont pas trop utiles et précis dans cette combinaison linguistique, et les raisons pour solliciter une traduction ne relèvent pas forcément de la nécessité de rendre plus aisée la compréhension du texte aux lecteurs de la langue d'arrivée.