

## **BILINGUALISM AS AN EFFECTIVE FACTOR IN A SUCCESSFUL TRANSLATION**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this paper is to examine the role of bilingualism as effective factor in a successful translation. The innateness of translating skills will be questioned with the help of examples from various case studies conducted on bilinguals. The main terms such as 'natural translation, social bilingual, professional bilingual, native translator,' that were used by the scholars who discussed the matter of translation and bilingualism, will be explained and compared throughout this paper. If we go deeper into the topic, the question of the need for translation and this will be discussed in relation to the role of meta-linguistic knowledge in the translation activity of a bilingual.*

**Keywords:** Translation, Bilingualism and Language.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Bilingualism is the use of two languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers in the world's population. [1] Multilingualism is becoming a social phenomenon governed by the needs of globalization and cultural openness. Owing to the ease of access to information facilitated by the Internet, individuals' exposure to multiple languages is becoming increasingly frequent, thereby promoting a need to acquire additional languages. People who speak several languages are also called polyglots. Throughout the world, translation is an everyday activity for many bilingual children. This fact inevitably raises a question in one's mind: Can every bilingual become a translator? In order to find an answer to this question, first the definitions of particular terms has to be made clear. The concept of bilingualism is a field of study in psychology and particularly in psycholinguistics, and different scholars attribute different roles to bilingualism in the general theory of translation. The definition of multilingualism is a subject of debate in the very same way as the definition of language fluency. On one end of a sort of linguistic continuum, one may define multilingualism as complete competence and mastery in another language. The speaker would presumably have complete knowledge and control over the language so as to sound native. On the opposite end of the spectrum would be people who know enough phrases to get around as a tourist using the alternate language. Since 1992, Vivian Cook has argued that most multilingual speakers fall somewhere between minimal and maximal definitions. Cook calls these people multi-competent. In addition, there is no consistent definition of what constitutes a distinct language. For instance, scholars often disagree whether Scots is a language in its own right or a dialect of English. [ 2 ] Furthermore, what is considered a language can change, often for purely political purposes, such as when Serbo-Croatian was created as a standard language on the basis of the Eastern Herzegovinian dialect to function as umbrella for numerous South Slavic dialects, and after the breakup of Yugoslavia was split into Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin, or when Ukrainian was dismissed as a Russian dialect by the Russian tsars to discourage national feelings. Many small independent nations' schoolchildren are today compelled to learn multiple

languages because of international interactions. [ 3 ] For example, in Finland, all children are required to learn at least two foreign languages: the other national language (Swedish or Finnish) and one alien language (usually English). Many Finnish schoolchildren also select further languages, such as German or Russian. In some large nations with multiple languages, such as India, school children may routinely learn multiple languages based on where they reside in the country. In major metros of Central, South and East India, many children may be fluent in four languages. Thus a child of Telugu parents living in Bangalore will end up speaking his or her mother tongue (Telugu) at home and the state language (Kannada), Hindi and English in school and his or her surroundings.

## DISCUSSION

Paul discusses the relation between bilingualism and translation in his article "Translation and Bilingualism" through some real examples and case studies and mainly considering the lexical level of translation and the role of bilingualism. He uses bilingualism to examine some general questions in the use of language and to learn more about how the human mind handles different kinds of information. He emphasizes the human factor in translation by humans comparing it with machine translation. [ 4 ]. He points out that there is no satisfactory translation machine. The reason for this is the complex structure of languages and the fact that the meanings of words have more than one interpretation depending on the context in which they are used, and a machine cannot make this distinction. A multilingual person is someone who can communicate in more than one language, either actively (through speaking, writing, or signing) or passively (through listening, reading, or perceiving). More specifically, the terms bilingual and trilingual are used to describe comparable situations in which two or three languages are involved. A multilingual person is generally referred to as a polyglot. Multilingual speakers have acquired and maintained at least one language during childhood, the so-called first language. The first language (sometimes also referred to as the mother tongue) is acquired without formal education, by mechanisms heavily disputed. Children acquiring two languages in this way are called simultaneous bilinguals. Even in the case of simultaneous bilinguals, one language usually dominates over the other. In linguistics, first language acquisition is closely related to the concept of a "native speaker". According to a view widely held by linguists, a native speaker of a given language has in some respects a level of skill which a second language learner cannot easily accomplish. Consequently, descriptive empirical studies of languages are usually carried out using only native speakers. This view is, however, slightly problematic, particularly as many non-native speakers demonstrably not only successfully engage with and in their non-native language societies, but in fact may become culturally and even linguistically important contributors in their non-native language. In recent years, linguistic research has focused attention on the use of widely known world languages, such as English, as a lingua franca or a shared common language of professional and commercial communities. In lingua franca situations, most speakers of the common language are functionally multilingual. Parallel to this argument, Catford [ 5 ] argues that translation theory must be formed through a theory of meaning. His understanding of 'meaning' in a text can be analyzed at different levels and units; smaller units constitute the meanings of larger units. He assumes that "translation implies the substitution or replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another language". The concept of equivalence is a problematic issue and, since it can be interpreted in different ways, we should clarify its usage here, in Catford's sentence. Stressing the importance of context, he argues that

the equivalent meaning of a sentence can be entirely captured in a target language only at the sentence level. Bilinguals who are highly proficient in two or more languages are reported to have enhanced executive function and are better at some aspects of language learning compared to monolinguals. [ 6 ] Research indicates that a multilingual brain is nimbler, quicker, better able to deal with ambiguities, resolve conflicts, and resist Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. There is also a phenomenon known as distractive bilingualism or semilingualism. When acquisition of the first language is interrupted and insufficient or unstructured language input follows from the second language, as sometimes happens with immigrant children, the speaker can end up with two languages both mastered below the monolingual standard. For example, the East Bengal rooted bangali Muslim community of Assam province in India. As mentioned, their mother tongue is Bangla. But they have no opportunity to study in the MT in the school. Their medium language of study is Assamese, i. e., the provincial language. So they communicate in a mean language standard mixing both the mother tongue and the medium language. Because they have no chance to study both the languages separately, they can't differentiate between the two and maintain it in expression. Literacy plays an important role in the development of language in these immigrant children. Those who were literate in their first language before arriving, and who have support to maintain that literacy, are at the very least able to maintain and master their first language. There are differences between those who learn a language in a class environment and those who learn through total immersion, usually living in a country where the target language is widely spoken. Without the possibility to actively translate, due to a complete lack of any first language communication opportunity, the comparison between languages is reduced. The new language is almost independently learned, like the mother tongue for a child, with direct concept-to-language translation that can become more natural than word structures learned as a subject. Added to this, the uninterrupted, immediate and exclusive practice of the new language reinforces and deepens the attained knowledge. One interesting point that he focuses on is the fact that the way bilingual people interpret words is different from the dictionary translations of the same words. Kolers explains this situation through a psychological approach: "Our words are commonly used in contexts, in situations that are defined both by their physical characteristics and by our habits, attitudes, dispositions, and intentions toward them. These cognitive and emotional conditions affect the way we interpret a word when we hear it or see it; they affect the meaning we give to the world" . In his article he points out that words denoting objects have rather similar meanings when translated. However, words that denote ethical or political ideas or emotions usually have different meanings in different languages. Although these types of words exist in all languages and cultures, the meanings people attribute to them differs from culture to culture. This explains the difficulty in translating culturally distant languages and why translations of bilinguals sometimes differ from dictionary translations. They adjust the meaning to the 'other' culture as they switch between languages. Even considering only the lexical level, we will see that culture plays a leading role in translation. The advantage of being a true bilingual as a translator becomes apparent here because being bilingual means being bicultural as well. That is to say, a 'true bilingual' is a member of two different linguistic communities, and that means s/he is also a member of two different cultures. In Kolers's article there is an example relevant to this topic. The word 'lamp' may have different interpretations according to the social and cultural context it is used. For a person living in an industrialized country, a lamp is a device attached to a wall by an electric wire and one turns it on and off by using a switch. On the other hand, someone living in the rural area of an underdeveloped part of the world would think of a device that can be carried and that can be lighted by applying a flame to a wick. From this example we can conclude that two words do not necessarily refer to the same thing even when they are

given as dictionary equivalents of each other. Kolers applied some tests to bilinguals in order to measure their brain function during the translation process. In one of the experiments, bilinguals were asked to recite the alphabet backwards. Half of the group tried it in English and the other half in their native language. When they learned to do it in one language they tried to do the same thing in another language; however the results showed that learning to do one thing in one language does not necessarily mean that you will be able to also do it in the other language. French and German speakers were more successful in reciting the alphabet backwards in English than Arabic and Korean speakers because the names of letters of the first two languages are similar to English letters. This result shows us that, unlike music or natural sciences, languages have different characteristics that affect the translation activity and make it more difficult. If one were to do a word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase translation that would yield the same result as a machine translation because there are no two languages that are so close that a word-for-word translation would create an equivalent product. Even closely related languages have some differences in idiomatic expressions or syntax. Think of a bilingual who has left his country and does not practice his native language anymore. After some time he will have difficulty in thinking in his own language and will find it easier to express his ideas in his second language. This has to do with getting used to one language, while the other language becomes "foreignized." The same explanation is valid in a situation where people who are fluent in language A but had their mathematical education in another language B prefer to calculate in language B despite being less fluent in that language. Bilinguals might have important labor market advantages over monolingual individuals as bilingual people are able to carry out duties that monolinguals cannot, such as interacting with customers who only speak a minority language. A study in Switzerland has found that multilingualism is positively correlated with an individual's salary, the productivity of firms, and the gross domestic production; the authors state that Switzerland's is augmented by 10% by multilingualism. [ 7 ] A study in the United States by Agirdag found that bilingualism has substantial economic benefits as bilingual persons were found to have around \$3,000 per year more salary than monolinguals. [ 8 ] Because it is difficult or impossible to master many of the high-level semantic aspects of a language (including but not limited to its idioms and eponyms) without first understanding the culture and history of the region in which that language evolved, as a practical matter an in-depth familiarity with multiple cultures is a prerequisite for high-level multilingualism. This knowledge of cultures individually and comparatively, or indeed the mere fact of one's having that knowledge, often forms an important part of both what one considers one's own personal identity to be and what others consider that identity to be.[ 9 ] Some studies have found that groups of multilingual individuals get higher average scores on tests for certain personality traits such as cultural empathy, open mindedness and social initiative. Translation is a subjective concept and as a result of the different approaches to this latter term it is possible to answer the question that was asked at the beginning of this paper in various ways.

## CONCLUSION

It is a fact that bilingualism is a necessary condition for translation activity, but is it enough for translation proficiency? This question, discussed throughout this paper, leads us to other questions about the innateness of translation activity, the natural ability to translate and the place of training in this picture. Some bilinguals feel that their personality changes depending on which language they are speaking; thus multilingualism is said to create multiple

personalities. Xiao-lei Wang states in her book *Growing up with Three Languages: Birth to Eleven*: "Languages used by speakers with one or more than one language are used not just to represent a unitary self, but to enact different kinds of selves, and different linguistic contexts create different kinds of self-expression and experiences for the same person." However, there has been little rigorous research done on this topic and it is difficult to define "personality" in this context. What is seen as a change in personality is most probably simply a shift in attitudes and behaviors that correspond to a shift in situation or context, independent of language." However, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that a language shapes our vision of the world, may suggest that a language learned by a grown-up may have much less emotional connotations and therefore allow a more serene discussion than a language learned by a child and to that respect more or less bound to a child's perception of the world.

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