

**Translation effects as evidence in language contact studies:
The case of variable subject pronouns in NYC Spanish**

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1 Introduction

Translation effects: Interpreters are often observed to produce target language forms that are influenced by source language structures,

Hypotheses:

1. Translation effects and contact phenomena are parallel: translation effects can be viewed as parallel to language contact phenomena produced by bilingual speakers outside of translation contexts.
2. If this is the case, evidence from translation data may be used to test hypotheses of contact-induced language change where such an identification is in doubt, as in the case of higher rates of subject pronoun use in U.S. Spanish (Bayley and Pease-Alvarez, 1997, Flores-Ferrán, 2004, Otheguy et al., 2007, Silva-Corvalán, 1994).

Data

Data for this study is taken from interpreter-mediated interactions recorded in New York Small Claims Courts (Angermeyer, 2006), a subset of six arbitration hearings with five different court interpreters who translate between English and Spanish.

Arbitration hearings in Small Claims Court are relatively informal (Conley & O'Barr 1990 (Conley and O'Barr, 1990). Most litigants represent themselves, testify in narrative form (Angermeyer and Schieffelin, 2005).

2 Parallels between translation phenomena and language contact phenomena

Translation phenomena

false friends
“translationese”
repetition of source items
language disorientation
variable translation effects

Bilingual speech phenomena

semantic extension
loan translation
insertion/borrowing
codeswitching
variable contact-induced change

2.1 False friends (cf. Nida, 2004: 157) and semantic extension (Weinreich 1968: 48)

(1) False friend: *tener relación con* ‘have an (intimate) relationship with a person’

- 1 Arbitrator: What is your **relationship** to the s- clothing store?=
2 Interpreter: =¿Qué **relación** tiene Usted (de la-) a la tienda de ropa?
(2.0)
- 3 Claimant: ¿Qué relación tengo con la tienda?
- 4 Interpreter: What relation do I have t- to the store?=
5 Arbitrator: =Yeah, do you [own the store?=
6 C’s daughter: [trabajas xxx)
7 Claimant: =Yo soy la que trabaja [(xxx).
8 Arbitrator: [You can’t [(do that)
9 Interpreter: [I’m the one that works there.

(2) Semantic extension: *yarda* ‘yard (measurement)’, not in the sense of ‘backyard’

- 1 Arbitrator: And what's the ahm (.) ahm (.) access to the garage?
2 (0.7) Is it outside with a chain-linked fence?
3 Describe the [location
4 Interpreter: [¿Cuál es el acceso a su garaje?
5 ¿Está en parte de afuera con ahm (.) con verjas cerradas?
6 Defendant: (.) Es una **yarda**.
7 Interpreter: (.) It's a **yard**.

2.2 “Translationese” (Toury, 1995) and loan translations/calques (Weinreich 1968: 51)

(3) Translationese (*pay upfront* ‘make an advance payment’)

- 1 R. Interpr.: And he always asked
2 [to get paid upfront +//.
3 S. Interpr.: [él siempre quería que [pagarían al frente
‘and he always wanted them to pay upfront’
4 Defendant: [A my nikogda ne otkazyvali
‘and we never refused’

Compare:

(4)

- 1 Claimant: Ah, una parte me daba adelante.
‘Uh, he gave me a part in advance’
2 Interpreter: He gave me some [/] ah some upfront.

Loan translations in the language use of litigants

(5)

- 1 Arbitrator: Where does the three thousand dollars that you're suing for come from?
2 Interpreter: ¿De donde sacó usted los tres mil pesos que haya -
'where do you get the 3,000 bucks from that'
3 por los cuales ha puesto la demanda?
'for which you have sued'
4 Claimant: De la carpeta que tienen que **ponerme para atrás**.
'from the carpet that they have to give back to me'
5 Interpreter: From the carpet he has to replace.

(6)

- 1 Defendant: porque él me dijo **vengo para atrás** en un mes.
'because he told me I come back in a month'
2 Interpreter: he told me, I'll be back in a month.
3 Defendant: Y yo le dije, vamos los dos y la compramos
4 Interpreter: and I told him we can go together and we can buy it.
5 Defendant: Yeah.

US Spanish *para atrás*, see Lipski (1986);

Compare in other languages, e.g. Russian interpreter use of *otdali nazad* instead of *vernuli* for 'they gave back', or the use of *back* in Acadian French (King, 2000)

2.3 Translation effects in language variation

Taylor (2008) investigates variation in prepositional phrases with pronominal complements in OE English (head-initial *to him*, or head-final *him to*), detects translation effects as head-initial variant is most frequent in translation from Latin (Latin predominantly head-initial) and particularly in translations of Latin source phrases containing a prepositional phrase.

| Text type | %P-PRO | Weight |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|
| Nontranslation | 78.0 | .411 |
| Nonbiblical translation | | |
| No Latin source PP | 60.3 | .342 |
| Latin source PP | 92.2 | .796 |
| Biblical translation | | |
| No Latin source PP | 80.5 | .595 |
| Latin source PP | 95.0 | .808 |

Table 1. Frequency of head-initial PPs with pronominal complements in Old English texts (adapted from Taylor 2008: 354)

3 Spanish subject pronouns in variation

3.1 Contact-influenced variation?

Spanish speakers in the US show higher rates of subject pronoun use than Spanish speakers elsewhere: result of contact with English (Otheguy et al., 2007)?

| Origin | Newcomers | NY-born |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Caribbean | 36% | 42% |
| Mainland | 24% | 33% |
| Total | 30% | 38% |

Table 2: Use of optional subject pronouns by Spanish speaking New Yorkers, in percent (Otheguy et al 2007: 786; data from 80 speakers)

3.2 Subject pronoun expression in translation from English

Corresponding subject pronoun in the English source

- (7) Arbitrator: Okay (0.5) do **you** have any questions
you [wanna ask him?
Interpreter: [¿**Usted** tiene alguna pregunta
que **Usted** quiere hacerle a él?
Claimant: (0.5) Eh (0.7) a él?
Interpreter: (.) Sí .
- (8) Arbitrator: Okay, do **you** have any questions **you** would like to ask him?
Interpreter: ¿ \emptyset Tiene alguna pregunta que \emptyset le quisiera hacer a él?
- (9) Arbitrator: (3.0) Okay, do **you** have any other questions **you'd** like to ask her?
Interpreter: ¿**Usted** tiene alguna otra pregunta que \emptyset le quiere hacer a ella?

Overt subject pronouns in the English source may or may not correspond to overt subject pronouns in the Spanish target utterance. (Examples are from the same interpreter).

No corresponding subject pronoun in the English source

- (10) Arbitrator: Okay, but how do I /know that?
Interpreter: ¿Pero cómo sé? Es [/] es lo que **Usted** me dice.
'but how do I know? That's what you're telling me.'
- (11) Claimant: and the same apartment downstairs
has rented for fifteen hundred and thirty dollars
Interpreter: el apartamento \emptyset le **doy** por mil quinientos treinta
'I give him the apartment for \$1,530'

3.3 Factor groups

Verb person and number

- 1sg is often the most favored environment for overt SPPs (Flores-Ferrán, 2007: 13)
- New York study: Person is most important factor group for both Mainland and Caribbean speakers, as well as newcomers and the New York-born (Otheguy et al. 2007: 789-790)

- (12) Caribbean newcomers: 2sgSpec > 2sgNonspec > 3sg > 1sg
 Mainland newcomers: 3sg > 1sg > 2sg Spec > 2sg Nonspec
 Caribbean NYBR: 2sgSpec > 2sg Nonspec > 1sg > 3sg
 Mainland NYBR: 3sg > 2sg spec > 1sg > 2sg nonspec

Weakest constraints for all groups: third plural and first plural
 (Otheguy et al. 2007: 790-792)

Switch reference

Overt subject pronouns are favored if the subject has a different referent than the subject of the preceding clause (Cameron, 1992).

Factor groups specific to translation

- Presence of corresponding SPP in English source
- Identity of source speaker (arbitrator, other litigant)
- Participation role of Spanish-speaking target recipient (addressee vs. overhearer)

3.4 Results

LITIGANTS

| Person | Mainland speakers (4) | | Caribbean speakers (4) | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------|------------------------|------------|
| | % | n | % | N |
| 1sg | 49.5% | 105 | 57% | 93 |
| 3sg | 42.9% | 77 | 45.3% | 64 |
| 3pl-specific | | (0/3) | 35% | 20 |
| 1pl | 0% | 8 | 33% | 9 |
| 2sg | | (2/2) | | (3/4) |
| 3pl-non-spec. | | 0 | | (0/4) |
| Switch reference | | | | |
| new speaker | 56.4% | 39 | 58.1% | 74 |
| Switch | 49.4% | 81 | 47.0% | 66 |
| no switch | 33.3% | 75 | 38.9% | 54 |
| Total | 44.6% | 195 | 49.0% | 194 |

Table 3. Frequencies of SPP in litigants' speech

INTERPRETERS

| Speaker | % | W | n |
|--|-------|-----------------|--------|
| “Isabel” (Caribbean) | 54.2% | .669 | 250 |
| “Ines” (Mainland) | 48.4% | .562 | 62 |
| “Javier” (Caribbean) | 47.0% | .433 | 164 |
| “Jaime” (Caribbean) | 44.3% | .550 | 70 |
| “Juan” (Caribbean) | 24.1% | .233 | 133 |
| Person | | | |
| | % | | n |
| 2sg <i>Usted</i> | 62.9% | .704 | 240 |
| 3sg | 52.0% | .647 | 150 |
| 3pl-specific | 39.1% | .370 | 23 |
| 1sg | 33.0% | .370 | 182 |
| 1pl | 3.6% | .030 | 55 |
| 2pl <i>Ustedes</i> | | | (4/17) |
| 2sg <i>tú</i> | | | (1/5) |
| 3pl-non-spec. | | | (1/7) |
| Switch reference | | | |
| new speaker | 50.8% | .495 | 252 |
| Switch | 50.8% | .636 | 236 |
| no switch | 30.3% | .336 | 188 |
| <i>(Translation effect)</i> | | | |
| <i>English source SPP</i> | 47.8% | <i>not sig.</i> | 552 |
| <i>No source SPP</i> | 32.8% | -- | 128 |
| Total | 45.0% | | 680 |
| Log likelihood = -362.346 Significance = 0.000 | | | |

Table 4. Frequencies of SPP in litigants’ speech

3.5 Discussion of findings

1. Data differs from sociolinguistic interviews because of **frequent speaker changes**
2. **Person distributed unevenly** across participants:
 - Arbitrators use more 2sg (addressing litigants) than 1sg
 - All interpreters use 2sg frequently
 - Litigants use mostly 1sg and 3sg (speaking about the other party), rarely 2sg
 - Interpreters use 1sg and 3sg mainly if they translate source talk from an English-speaking litigant, but not in disputes between two Spanish speakers
3. High rates of Spanish SPP in both litigants and interpreters may be due to nature of the interaction: Solomon (1998) and Flores-Ferrán (2002) note that SPPs are more frequent in **conflict narratives**

4. Low rate of 1sg SPP use by interpreters may be due to their tendency to downplay identification with the voice of the source speaker, manifested also in use of passive or reported speech (Angermeyer, 2005, Angermeyer, 2009, Berk-Seligson, 1990, Wadensjö, 1998)
5. **Translation effects** are not significant overall, but neither are they distributed evenly:
 - interpreters are trained, professional court interpreters, whose work ethic includes the avoidance of translation effects; law requires “literal translation” (Berk-Seligson, 1990)
 - however, **interpreters vary** in their translation styles and in their attitudes towards codeswitching and other aspects of litigants’ language use (Angermeyer, 2008, Angermeyer, 2009)
 - Interpreters also vary with regard to translation effects
 - Translation effects are significant for some interpreters:

“Isabel”

| Person | % | w | N |
|---------------------------|-------|------|-------|
| 3sg | 90% | .872 | 40 |
| 2sg <i>Usted</i> | 81% | .780 | 74 |
| 3pl-specific | 42% | .408 | 12 |
| 1sg | 33% | .259 | 90 |
| 1pl | 8% | .049 | 24 |
| 2pl <i>Ustedes</i> | | | (1/2) |
| 2sg <i>tú</i> | | | (1/3) |
| 3pl-non-spec. | | | (1/5) |
| | | | |
| Switch reference | | | |
| Switch | 63% | .658 | 76 |
| new speaker | 59% | .465 | 105 |
| no switch | 38% | .378 | 68 |
| | | | |
| Translation effect | | | |
| English source SPP | 58% | .552 | 215 |
| No source SPP | 31% | .170 | 35 |
| | | | |
| Total | 54.2% | | 250 |

Log likelihood = -112.846 Significance = 0.037

Table 5. Frequencies of SPP in speech of ‘Isabel’

4 Conclusion

- Rate of Spanish SPP use is susceptible to influence from English, but the effect is not strong
- Translation effects are perhaps better investigated in data from non-professional interpreting contexts

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