

A Comparative Study of Translation Quality as Done by Bilinguals and Trilinguals: A Case Study of Persian Bilingual and Kurdish Trilingual Translation Students of English in Iran

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Abstract

Individual case studies by linguists have concluded that early bilingualism is advantageous to children's cognitive and linguistic development. Also, the existence of more than two languages in the brain suggests that multilinguals enhance cognitive control when compared to bilinguals. Accordingly, this study examined the differential roles of bilingualism and trilingualism (multilingualism) on the quality of translation. Participants were 48 BA students of translation. In order to homogenize them in terms of English language proficiency, Oxford Placement Test was administered. The participants were asked to translate 30 sentences from English into Persian. After collecting the participant's translations, three raters evaluated the quality of their translations. The results revealed that the performance of the trilinguals on the translation was significantly higher than that for the bilinguals. Moreover, the correlation between trilingualism and the quality of translation was higher than the correlation between bilingualism and the quality of translation.

Keywords: Bilinguals; Trilinguals; Cognitive development; Translation quality

1. Introduction

Recent studies on bilinguals have shown that bilingualism has profound effects on cognitive processes, sensitivity to linguistic cues and sociolinguistic requirements. Children in a bilingual context may be able to

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transfer their decontextualized skills and knowledge from one language to another. Furthermore, bilingual children have heightened metalinguistic awareness because they routinely pay attention to language form (i.e., which language is spoken) in order to make decisions on their own language choice. “Metalinguistic awareness refers to a speaker’s conscious awareness about language and the use of language and bilinguals have sufficient metalinguistic awareness to speak the contextually appropriate language, as we mentioned” (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2003, p.378). On the other hand, with regard to trilinguals it is inferred that the experience of three different languages also results in further enhanced awareness of the analysis and control components of processing to enable the speaker to make the right choices and respond in linguistically and communicatively adequate ways. Furthermore, language processing in the multilingual mind must differ from the bilingual mind because there are more than two languages to use at a given time. The existence of more than two languages in the brain suggests that multilinguals have enhanced cognitive control when compared to bilinguals. For this reason, it was hypothesized that multilinguals’ enhanced cognition affects the quality of their translation. The present study aims to examine the differential role of bilingualism and multilingualism on the quality of translation. In other words, the effect of multilinguals enhanced metalinguistic awareness, intelligence, sensitivity, flexibility and other superiorities on the quality of translation was investigated. House (2001) believes that “over and above its role as a concept constitutive of translation, ‘equivalence’ is the fundamental criterion of translation quality” (p.247). Moreover, House (1997) states that equivalence is relate to the preservation of meaning across two different languages, and deals with the semantic, pragmatic, and textual aspects of meaning particularly important for translation. Furthermore, Samuelsson-Brown (2004) points out, a translator’s reputation will be determined by the quality of the translations s/he produces. In the same way, Pourgharib and Dehbandi (2013) believe that translation study is a new discipline in Iran, so scholars and researchers seek to discover different factors which affect translation in order to improve the quality of translation. Certainly, individual characteristics like translator’s knowledge, experience, personality, and different skills that he/she uses in the process of translation affect translation quality. Accordingly, quality assessment is of great importance in that field of translation studies.

Bloomfield (1933) states that ‘native-like control of two languages’ can be taken as the criterion for bilingualism. Moreover, Haugen (1953) mentions that when he observes a speaker of one language producing

compete meaningful utterances in the other language, he can call him a “bilingual”. Bialystok, Craik, Green, and Gollan (2009) suggest that the use of two languages imposes on a single control system additional demands beyond those experienced by speakers of just one language. Ben-Zeev (1977) argues that in order to avoid linguistic interference bilingual children must develop a greater awareness and sensitivity to linguistic cues. In the same way, a review of literature on early code-switching (Koppe & Meisel, 1995) shows that bilingual children acquire the necessary knowledge very early. Already by age 2, they choose the language according to the addressee, and soon afterwards they begin to adapt to other sociolinguistic requirements. Leopold (1949) suggests that bilingual children have two words for each referent and, early on, are forced to realize the conventional nature of language. Leopold (1949) postulates that bilingual children are forced to higher levels of abstract thought by the early need to separate the world from its referent. The separation of the word from its referent is seen as one of the major milestones in the development of symbolic thinking. Ansaldo, Marcotte, Fonseca, and Scherer (2008) assert that “as scientists unlock more of the neurological secrets of the bilingual brain, speaking more than one language may have cognitive benefits that extend from childhood into old age” (cited in EC, 2009, p.17). It must be confessed that balanced bilingual children outperform their monolingual peers on measures of concept formation (Bain, 1974; Liedtke & Nelson, 1968), divergent thinking skills and creativity (Torrance et al., 1970) and field independence (Duncan & De Avila, 1979) as well as in their capacity to use language to monitor cognitive performance (Bain & Yu, 1980). Bialystok et al. (2004) asserts that recent research promotes bilingualism as a kind of guarantee for life time cognitive advantages over monolinguals. Moreover, Piaget (cited in Farrant et al., 2006) believes that language plays a casual role in the development of intelligence/logic thought.

Genesee (1998) suggests that a student should be defined as trilingual if s/he can use her/his three languages to communicate in both oral and written speech. EC (2009) claims that knowledge of more than one language points to the expansion of certain types of human potential, including the potential for thinking, learning, problem-solving and communicating which show signs of being enhanced through multilingualism. Furthermore, Cook (1995), Jessner (2006) and Svalberg (2007) believe that those who speak more than one language are also generally more aware of sociolinguistic variables and functions, and they are adapt at switching between different regional varieties, registers, and formal and informal language styles. They suggest that this knowledge, especially when it is brought to a conscious

level, is known as language awareness and metalinguistic awareness, and is a special advantage of multilingualism. In other words, EC (2009) asserts that the impact of multilingualism on interpersonal communication is reported in terms of understanding and responding to the communicative needs of others, contextual sensitivity, interactional competence in communication, and enhanced skills in differentiating languages in contextually sensitive ways. This suggests that multilingualism tends towards multiskills in interpersonal interaction. If so, then this can have a bearing on the potential for creativity. Hoffmann (2001) argues that trilingual language competence contain the linguistic aspects, that is, vocabulary and grammar, from the three language systems, and also the pragmatic component, consisting of sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences pertaining to the three languages involved. In addition, it includes the ability to function in bilingual or trilingual contexts, which require decisions on code choice and code-switching. Accordingly, he asserts that trilingual competence enables speakers to create their own linguistic means in order to master particular communicative situations. Likewise, Tokuhama Espinosa (2008, p. 93) believes that “those who speak several languages have a broader perspective which can lead to fresh and it can be argued that speaking more languages brings cognitive benefits, which may be associated with increased use of the brain. One of possible spin-off benefits is creativity”. Moreover, Espinosa (2008) believes that “the idea that the brain is like a muscle that grows with exercise is not just a metaphor” (p. 43). In the same way, Bialystok (2002) claims that language and cognition proceed through similar mechanisms with mutual influence on each other. Furthermore, Hoffmann (2001) argues that trilinguals’ experience of three different languages also results in further enhanced awareness of the analysis and control components of processing to enable the speaker to make the right choices and respond in linguistically and communicatively adequate ways. According to Belz (2002) “the learner’s playful use of multiple linguistic codes may index resourceful, creative and pleasurable displays of multicompetence” (p. 59). Andreou (2007) points out that trilinguals have better phonological awareness than bilinguals since they have heightened sensitivity to the phonological units of words probably because they must attend carefully to the speech stream in order to make distinction among their three languages and to organize their developing lexicon. According to recent data on bilingualism and trilingualism (Brohy, 2001; Hufeisen, 1998; and Jessner, 1999), children who learn a second or a third language appear to be more intellectually acute.

Hatim and Munday (2004) argue that the systematic evaluation of the target text (TT) by comparison with the source text (ST) is called translation quality assessment. It must be confessed that the problem of producing a high-quality translation has preoccupied the minds of translators and academics for ages. Different assessment methods (e.g., Leuven-Zwart, 1989, 1990; Toury, 1995; House, 1997; Maier, 1998; Schaffner, 1998; and Fawcett, 2000) have been developed by scholars and the translation industry (Williams & Chesterman, 2002). However, none of these methods is without problems because the process of assessing translation is by itself highly subjective (Ahmadi, 2011). Moreover, the field of Translation Quality Assessment, as Hajmohammadi (2005) states, is problematic.

As early as 1790, Tytler (1992; in Bassnet & Lefevere) wrote in his essay on the principles of translation that:

I would therefore describe a good translation to be, that in which the merit of the original work is completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work. “He proceeds with his laws of translation:

- 1- That the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work.
- 2- That the style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
- 3- That the translation should have all the ease of the original composition.

His emphasis on comprehensibility and normality (in the sense of a translation effect on the native speaker) clearly evidences two yardsticks that are and will be present in any TQA model, namely, informativity and naturalness. Moreover, Nida (1964, cited in Ülsever, 1999, p. 52) suggests three criteria for assessing a translation: (i) general efficiency of the communication process, (ii) comprehension of intent, and (iii) equivalence of response. The last criterion, Ülsever explains, is closely linked to Nida’s principle of dynamic equivalence where the effect on the target reader is the focus of attention (see also Nida, 1996). Schaffner (1998) also points to a change of focus, “from translation as text reproduction to text production. The basic tenet is that we do not translate words or grammatical structures, but texts as communicative occurrences, i.e. we are always dealing with texts in situation and in culture, and these texts fulfill a specific function” (p.1).

The simple question of how we know when a translation is good is, according to House (2001), the main concern with translation criticism. House (1977) defines translation as the replacement of a text in the source language by a semantically and pragmatically equivalent text in the target language. Thus, an adequate translation text is a pragmatically and semantically equivalent one. Accordingly, Baker (2006) claims that the operation of the model involves initially an analysis of the original according to a set of situational dimensions, for which linguistic correlates are established. The resulting textual profile of the original characterizes its function, which is then taken as the norm against which the translation is measured, the degree to which the textual profile and function of the translation match the profile and function of the original is the degree to which the translation is adequate in quality. House's functional-pragmatic model (2001,2006) has foregrounded its foundation theory on translation as re-contextualisation, which is defined as "taking a text out of its original frame and context and placing it within a new set of relationships and culturally-conditioned expectations" (House, 2006, p. 356). In this way, preserving in the translation the effect the ST had on its readers and trying to elicit a similar response from the target reader is referred to as functional equivalence (Hatim & Munday, 2004). Baker (2006) adds that functional equivalence is only possible in covert translation in which differences in the cultural presuppositions of the source and target language communities may require the translator to apply a cultural filter.

2. Method

2.1. Materials

The nature of this research was a correlational study. That is to say, the effects of trilingualism on the quality of translation was investigated. The two variables in this study were translation quality and translator's bilingualism or trilingualism; in other words, translation quality was the independent variable and bilingualism or trilingualism was the dependent variable.

To achieve the research goal, two groups of undergraduate translation students at two different university centers, (24 students in each group) participated in this study: Group A were Kurdish-Persian-English trilinguals who were B.A. translation students from Payame Noor and Jihad University of Kermanshah, Iran. They spoke Kurdish and Persian from childhood (compound bilinguals) and learned English as their third language; Group B were Persian – English bilinguals who were B.A. translation students from Shaikhbahaee University of Isfahan, Iran. They spoke only one language (Persian) from childhood and learned English as

their second language. The trilingual participants were chosen from among those whose parents, according to the information elicited from a background questionnaire, were both bilinguals and speak the two languages at home. They were mostly female (40 female and 8 male), as the result, the gender factor was not considered or evaluated in this study. The participants were between 22 to 25 years old.

In the present study two sets of tests were applied; the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and Translation Test. In order to have valid results, the university level of translators was not the only criterion for determining participants' ability in translation; so, a standard general test was administered to the participants to know about their level of English language proficiency. The test was Oxford Placement Test. It is a multiple-choice test of grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Thirty English sentences were given to the participants to be translated into the Persian language. The sentences were extracted from texts of common knowledge. Since background knowledge affects the translator's competence and ability in order to translate, it was emphasized that both bilinguals and trilinguals get the same impression from the sentences.

2.2. Procedure

To accomplish the purpose of the study, the following steps were taken during the research process. The participants were presented with two sets of tests that were composed of OPT and translation test to be answered. First the OPT was administered. They were requested to write their name and languages they can speak (bilinguals or trilinguals). After finishing the test, SL translation sentences were distributed and all the participants were asked to translate the sentences. Both the OPT and the translation test were numbered allowing the instrument to be paired up later for analysis. To process the research, the following scores were calculated for every participant: a) the OPT scores and b) total translation quality (TQ) scores of 30 sentences.

Each participant's OPT questions was scored based on the guideline provided by OPT. The total OPT scores were computed. The participants were then given the translation task to be carried out in the classroom. After collecting the participants' translations, expert evaluation of the translations of the sentences was done for each student by three raters. The raters were requested to judge the quality of the sentences translated by both groups. Then, the scores of the two groups from 20 were compared. The results were, then, submitted to analysis to find out whether EFL learners' multilinguality had an impact on their quality of translation. In

order to increase inter-rater reliability, Pearson’s correlation coefficient was administered.

3. Results

The results of the translation task are illustrated in the following tables. It must be added that Bilingual 1 and Trilingual 1 refer to participants’ translations evaluated by Rater 1, Bilingual 2; Trilingual 2 refers to participants’ translations evaluated by Rater 2 and Bilingual 3 and Trilingual 3 refer to participants’ translations evaluated by Rater 3.

Table 1. *Descriptive Data among the translation scores of Bilingual 1, Bilingual 2, Bilingual 3 and Trilingual 1, Trilingual 2, Trilingual 3*

Group	n	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Bilingual 1	24	10.41	3.55	.72
Trilingual 1	24	13.62	2.79	.57
Bilingual 2	24	10.00	2.77	.56
Trilingual 2	24	14.10	3.28	.66
Bilingual 3	24	13.18	3.63	.74
Trilingual 3	24	15.37	3.629	.74

As illustrated in Table 1, the mean score of trilinguals’ translations was higher than that of bilinguals’ translations. The mean score of Rater 1 for trilinguals was 13.62 and for bilinguals was 10.41. The mean score of rater 2, for trilinguals was 14.10 and for bilinguals was 10.00. The mean score of Rater 3, for trilinguals was 15.37 and for bilinguals was 13.18.

Table 2. *Descriptive Data of the translation scores of Bilinguals and Trilinguals*

Group	n	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Bilinguals	24	11.2014	2.75925	.56323
Trilinguals		14.3681	2.91733	.59550

As illustrated in Table 2, the mean score of three raters for trilinguals was higher than that of the three raters for bilinguals. The mean score of trilinguals’ translations was 14.36 while the mean scores of bilinguals’ translation was 11.20.

Table 3. *T-Test for the Mean Score of Bilinguals’ and Trilinguals’ Translations*

		Levene's Test for equality of variances		T-Test for equality of means		
		f	Sig.	t	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Mean score of raters	Equal variances assessed	.01	.90	-3.86	46	.000
	Equal variances not assessed			-3.86	45.85	.000

As illustrated in Table 3, the observed t at the level of $p < .05$ was significant. The mean score of bilinguals (Bilingual 1, Bilingual 2, and Bilingual 3) was significantly different from the mean score of trilinguals (Trilingual 1, Trilingual 2, and Trilingual 3). In other words, the observed t was significant at $p = 0.000$.

As demonstrated in Table 4, the correlation at 0.05 level (2-tailed) appeared to be moderate and the correlation at the 0.01 is high. The correlation between bilingual 1 and 2 is 0.76, which is moderate at the 0.05 level. The correlation between bilingual 1 and 3 was 0.42, which is moderate at the 0.05 level. The correlation between Bilingual 1 and the mean score of Bilingual 1, 2, and 3 was 0.87, the correlation between Bilingual 2 and the mean score was 0.85, and the correlation between Bilingual 3 and the mean score was 0.76 which are all high. It is concluded from Table 4 that the correlation between bilingualism on the one hand and the translation quality on the other was significant.

Table 4. *Correlation between Bilingualism and Translation Quality*

		Bilingual 1	Bilingual 2	Bilingual 3	Mean 1,2,3
Bilingual 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.766*	.424*	.873**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000	.039	.000
	N	24	24	24	24
Bilingual 2	Pearson Correlation	.766*	1	.441*	.858**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000		.031	.000
	N	24	24	24	24
Bilingual 3	Pearson Correlation	.424*	.441*	1	.769**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.039	.031		.000
	N	24	24	24	24

Mean 1,2,3	Pearson Correlation	.873**	.858**	.769**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	24	24	24	24

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As shown in Table 5, the correlation between Trilingual 1 and 2, the correlation between Trilingual 2 and 3 and the correlation between Trilingual 1 and 3 were all high at the $p < .01$. Furthermore, the correlation between Trilingual 1 and the mean score, the correlation between Trilingual 2 and the mean score, and the correlation between Trilingual 3 and the mean score were high $p < .01$, too. It is thus concluded from Table 5 that the correlation between trilingualism on the one hand and the translation quality on the other was significant.

As Table 4 and Table 5 show, the correlation between trilingualism and the translation quality was higher than that between bilingualism and the translation quality.

Table 5. Correlation between Trilingualism and the translation quality

		Trilingual 1	Trilingual 2	Trilingual 3	Mean 1,2,3
Trilingual 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.70*	.68*	.86**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000	.039	.000
	N	24	24	24	24
Trilingual 2	Pearson Correlation	.70*	1	.75*	.91**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	24	24	24	24
Trilingual 3	Pearson Correlation	.68**	.75**	1	.91**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	24	24	24	24
Mean 1,2,3	Pearson Correlation	.86**	.91**	.91**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	24	24	24	24

**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study posed a new question on the differential role of bilingualism and trilingualism on translation quality. Previous literature has been concerned with the notions of gender, personality, and emotional intelligence while struggling to look at the translation quality from the psychological point of view whereas the present study attempted to investigate the matter from the linguistic viewpoint. In this study, trilinguals were compound bilinguals from childhood. Consequently, they had heightened intelligence, creativity, flexibility, problem-solving ability, and metalinguistic awareness. These capacities help a trilingual translator to find the best equivalent form and message of the SL and reproduce the same effect, function and message in the TL. The reason is that the trilinguals' metalinguistic awareness is always active in order to speak according to the addressee and choose the relevant language; they are quite acute in language choice and problem solving. Since trilinguals deal with three languages and cultures, trilingual translators are competent in translating cultural terms. It seems that they counter difficulty in rendering cultural terms to a lesser degree. As it observed in their translations evaluated by three raters, trilinguals compared with bilinguals were more competent in transferring terms, phrases and idioms that were culturally embedded. They successfully inferred the intended message and transferred this message appropriately. In line with previous research findings, the results of the present study confirmed that trilingualism played a significantly positive role in the quality of translation. That is to say, trilingualism affects positively the intelligence and problem-solving ability. As House (2009) asserts, translation is a secondary communication with a complex series of problem-solving and decision-making operations. Moreover, Robinson (1997) points out that “translation is an intelligent activity, requiring creative problem-solving in novel textual, social, and cultural conditions” (51). To sum up, the findings of the present study verified the previous claims. That is to say, there is a high correlation between trilingualism and the quality of translation.

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