ISSN: 1579-9794

Colloquial Language and Identity: A theoretical framework for fostering L2 sociolinguistic competence through translation

Lenguaje coloquial e identidad: un marco teórico para fomentar la competencia sociolingüística de L2 a través de la traducción

HANNAH LEONARD
hannah.leonard22@mail.dcu.ie
Dublin City University

LUCÍA PINTADO GUTIÉRREZ
lucia.pintado@dcu.ie
Dublin City University

JENNIFER MARTYN
jennifer.martyn@dcu.ie
Dublin City University

Fecha de recepción: 14/06/2024
Fecha de aceptación: 14/03/2025

Abstract: This exploratory theoretical framework focuses on the marginal presence of informal language in the L2 curriculum and advocates its inclusion via translation tasks to develop student agency and sociolinguistic competence. It also aims to facilitate the development of learners' L2 identity, as the ability to alternate between various styles and registers (including informal registers) can be a means to demonstrate in-group membership (Regan, 1996, 2010). Classroom-based learners often overuse formal registers, which may hinder them in day-to-day interactions with native speakers (Mougeon et al., 2010) and affect their agency and self-confidence if they feel the language they use is inappropriate. Translation shifts the focus onto the decisions behind the selection of certain pragmalinguistic or sociolinguistic variants over others, and the resulting impact on the style and message of the text. When tasked with establishing equivalence, the learners interact with the indexical nature of language, thus enhancing their understanding of the social and symbolic meaning of sociolinguistic variation. This investigation therefore lies at the intersection of learner agency and the use of informal language in the L2, the role of translation in L2 teaching as a

tool to introduce informal language, and the relationship between sociolinguistic competence and identity in the L2.

Keywords: Sociolinguistic variation, Translation in Language Teaching (TILT), Identity

Resumen: Este marco teórico exploratorio se centra en la presencia marginal del lenguaje informal en el currículo de lenguas extranjeras (L2) y aboga por su inclusión a través de tareas de traducción para desarrollar la agencia y la competencia sociolingüística del alumnado. A la vez, pretende facilitar el desarrollo de la identidad de los alumnos en la L2, dado que la capacidad de alternar entre varios estilos y registros (incluso los registros informales) puede ser una manera de demostrar la pertenencia a un determinado grupo (Regan, 1996, 2010). En el aprendizaje en el aula, los estudiantes tienden a utilizar registros formales, lo que puede presentar desafíos comunicativos en sus interacciones cotidianas con hablantes nativos en otros registros (Mougeon *et al*., 2010), y afectar a su agencia y la confianza en sí mismos si consideran que la lengua que utilizan no es adecuada. La traducción desplaza el centro de atención hacia las decisiones que subyacen a la selección de determinadas variantes pragmalingüísticas o sociolingüísticas frente a otras, y cómo repercute en el estilo y el mensaje de dicho texto. Cuando se le encomienda la tarea de establecer equivalencias, el estudiantado interactúa con la indexicalidad de la lengua, mejorando así su comprensión del significado social y simbólico de la variación sociolingüística. Por lo tanto, esta investigación se sitúa en la intersección de la agencia del alumnado y el uso del lenguaje informal en la L2, el papel de la traducción en la enseñanza de la L2 como herramienta para introducir el lenguaje informal en su aprendizaje, y la relación entre la competencia sociolingüística y su identidad en el contexto de la L2.

Palabras clave: Variación sociolingüística, Traducción pedagógica, Identidad

INTRODUCTION

This exploratory theoretical framework proposes the use of translation tasks as a promising approach for improving second/foreign language (L2) learners' sociolinguistic competence. It departs from the marginal presence of informal language in the L2 curriculum and argues that translation raises awareness of sociolinguistic variation in the classroom, facilitates the development of learner agency and as a result fosters sociolinguistic competence, while respecting the learners' L2 identity. The objective of this article is therefore to examine the construct of sociolinguistic competence in

the L2 classroom as an integral component of communicative competence; awareness of the role of sociolinguistic variation in the L2 learner's identity and agency; the potential of translation to enhance colloquial language against various frameworks, including the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) and the *Instituto Cervantes Curricular Plan* (PCIC); and future avenues for research such as didactic audiovisual translation (DAT), also in line with the *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (FREPA) and the acquisition of plurilingual and pluricultural competence (PPC).

Sociolinguistic competence is widely considered to consist of two core skills: the ability to understand the sociocultural context of communication; and the ability to use appropriate language in a given context (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). As such, it is concerned with both receptive and productive skills. More recently, (Geeslin, 2018, p. 550) has described sociolinguistic competence as "the ability to produce variable structures according to social norms and also to interpret linguistic and extralinguistic information". Fundamentally, this interpretation of sociolinguistic competence recognises the plurality of social norms—what is appropriate according to one norm may be inappropriate according to another. With this in mind, the present article views sociolinguistic competence as the ability to produce and/or understand variable structures in relation to social norms and to interpret linguistic and extralinguistic information. It is not a siloed competence but rather forms an integral and interdependent part of communicative competence as a whole.

Despite being a crucial component of communicative competence, it is generally recognised that instructed learners face difficulties in developing sociolinguistic competence and often tend towards monostylistic communication and overuse formal variants (Mougeon et al., 2004, 2010; Nadasdi et al., 2005; Regan, 1995, 2004). While such usage may reflect proficiency in other areas like linguistic competence (following the terminology used by Celce-Murcia et al., 1995), or grammatical competence/knowledge (following Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980), a lack of focus on developing the learner's accompanying sociolinguistic competence can result in difficulties in real world contexts as students are unfamiliar with more natural, informal registers (van Compernolle & Williams, 2011). Van Compernolle and Williams (2009) posit that advanced learners eventually overcome the hurdle of sociolinguistic variation through increased exposure to the target language. This stance is widely supported in the literature documenting learners' improved understanding and use of sociolinguistic variants following prolonged contact, such as after a study abroad period

(Geeslin et al., 2010; Howard et al., 2006; Knouse, 2013; Ringer-Hilfinger, 2012; Salgado-Robles, 2011). Social networks, as highlighted by Milroy (1980) are also instrumental in L2 acquisition of sociolinguistic variation during these periods. The increased contact with informal variants afforded by positive relationships with speakers of the target language and multiplex social networks correlates with higher usage of such variants (Gautier & Chevrot, 2015; Isabelli-García, 2006).

Much of the research on non-native speakers' use of sociolinguistic variation uses the term second language/L2 as many of these studies investigate contexts where the target language is spoken in the learners' community (e.g. French in Canada). By contrast, foreign language (FL) refers to contexts where the target language is not widely spoken in the community (e.g. Spanish in Ireland), meaning many learners may have limited extracurricular contact with the language. While these terms are not wholly interchangeable, in line with the terminology used by many authors in this field, the present article uses L2 as an umbrella term for the language(s) acquired by learners other than their native language (L1), including foreign languages. Instructed L2 learners face an additional obstacle in terms of input, as teacher talk and learning materials are often lacking in sociolinguistic variation, thus reducing the range of variants that learners are exposed to (Etienne & Sax, 2009; Rehner & Mougeon, 2003; Yang & Rehner, 2015).

The framework proposed and discussed in this article draws upon empirical research documenting improved sociolinguistic knowledge following explicit instruction and contextualises the sociolinguistic choices that learners may make in relation to their identity. It then presents an overview of translation in language teaching, including its applications and benefits, with the goal of demonstrating how and why translation can be leveraged in the classroom to foster L2 sociolinguistic competence. This article focuses in particular on Peninsular Spanish sociolinguistic variation.

1. SOCIOLINGUISTIC VARIATION AND L2 EDUCATION

Colloquial Spanish is the term used to refer to the informal register in Spanish (Briz, 1998; Cortés, 2002; López Serena, 2007). This variety, used across various groups of speakers in everyday language is an area that L2 Spanish learners tend to struggle with (Albelda & Briz, 2017; Albelda & Fernández, 2006; Azúar Bonastre, 2014). Azúar Bonastre (2014) notes that learners report that their lack of familiarity with colloquial Spanish results in the inability to understand certain messages, their utterances being perceived as strange or humorous, losing their turn in a conversation and being misinterpreted or perceived as pedantic. Hence, there have been a growing number of calls for the inclusion of colloquial Spanish in the L2 classroom

(Briz, 1998, 2002; Garrido Rodríguez, 2000; Laguna & Porroche, 2006; Pedrola, 2021).

Outside the classroom, L1 speakers seem to welcome the use of colloquial Spanish by L2 speakers. Although DuBois (2019) found that L2 users were sometimes judged more harshly when using the same colloquial variants as L1 users, the quantitative difference was not so great as to discourage the use of these variants by L2 speakers. Many of the L1 participants acknowledged the ubiquity of colloquial language in day-to-day communication and deemed knowledge of such variants as essential for a holistic understanding of Spanish. Indeed, one L1 participant even commented that not accepting L2 users' use of slang could be taken as "linguistic social exclusion" (DuBois, 2019, p. 120). In this regard, DuBois (2019, p. 133) defends the use of slang by L2 users provided that they "remain sensitive to the contextual demands of the situation"—although some users may approve of colloquial language while others may disapprove, its usage seems generally accepted. DuBois therefore advocates a policy of careful consideration in the application of colloquial language in the classroom, highlighting that particular attention must be paid to situational constraints in relation to the level of formality required in different contexts, despite the fact that (L1) users may have widely differing opinions on the use of colloquial language. Likewise, L2 users may also have varying opinions regarding the use of colloquial language in their interactions.

Thus, while caution is recommended in L2 use of informal and colloquial language inside and outside the classroom, it is evident that it forms an important part of the sociolinguistic landscape of Spanish, and as an area that L2 learners tend to have difficulty with, it certainly merits inclusion in the L2 classroom. However, in reality this is not the case. According to van Compernolle (2013), L2 classrooms tend to focus on standard language varieties, and thus marginalise the widespread informal linguistic forms used by native speaker communities. Furthermore, on the occasions when sociostylistic variation does arise, it is often described in oversimplified or narrowly empirical terms. The frequent omission of colloquial varieties from the L2 curriculum may also stem from practical reasons, such as the limited number of teaching hours, the fact that teachers may lack sociolinguistic knowledge, or the quality of teaching materials available (Gutiérrez & Fairclough, 2006).

The incorporation of sociolinguistic variation into the Spanish language class should be done in accordance with the learners' level of knowledge of Spanish but ought to begin at the basic levels: instruction can incrementally shift from awareness of linguistic variation to productive abilities, starting with local varieties, language registers, and styles of Spanish, and then

progressing to other varieties, registers, and styles from around the world (Gutiérrez & Fairclough, 2006). Including stylistic variation is key in teaching language used by native speakers, or what Gutiérrez and Fairclough refer to as "the real language" (2006, p. 185) and colloquial conversations have been touted as rich sources for teaching such real language (Albelda & Fernández, 2006; Briz, 2002). Films, for instance, are a natural resource to teach colloquial elements with and can increase levels of enjoyment and motivation amongst students during class (Azúar Bonastre, 2014). This aligns with other studies documenting improved sociolinguistic knowledge following pedagogical interventions, as discussed in the following section.

1.1. Advances in the L2 Explicit Instruction of Colloquial Language

Much of the research indicating that explicit instruction positively impacts sociolinguistic knowledge has focused on French (Beaulieu et al., 2018; French & Beaulieu, 2016, 2020; Lyster, 1994; van Compernolle & Henery, 2014; van Compernolle & Williams, 2012a, 2012b, 2013), however positive gains have also been observed in German (Lemmerich, 2010) and Spanish (Pisabarro Sarrió, 2019; van Compernolle et al., 2016).

The majority of studies investigating the relationship between explicit instruction and sociolinguistic competence have reported an improvement in learners' knowledge and/or performance. There is however some conflicting evidence, such as the findings of Dewaele (2002), which indicated that the amount of formal instruction in French did not correlate with increased use of the vernacular first person pronoun *on* (over the standard pronoun *nous*) amongst advanced L2 learners. This study echoed findings from Dewaele and Regan (2001) who also reported that classroom instruction appeared to have no predictive value on the use of colloquial variants in advanced French interlanguage. Both studies, quantitative in nature, focused on performance by centring on interlanguage corpora. Although Dewaele and Regan suggested the absence of colloquial words may be due to a lack of linguistic or sociopragmatic knowledge, it has also been recognised that learners may actively choose to eschew nonstandard variants despite being familiar with them (Dewaele & Regan, 2001; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004). Such resistance to the use of nonstandard variation may stem from reasons related to the learner's identity and their imagined communities.

1.2. Language Learners' Identity, Agency, and Informal Language

In the social sciences, identity is generally conceived of from a poststructuralist viewpoint, where it is framed as "socially constructed, self-conscious, ongoing narratives that individuals perform, interpret and project in

dress, bodily movements, actions and language" (Block, 2007, p. 27). The crux of this stance is that identity is not fixed, but rather is something fluid, undergoing constant (re)construction. Noting the social facet of identity, Kiesling (2013, p. 449) explains that "identity is like language in its occupation of space between the individual and the social, and identity represents a negotiation of the intersubjective meanings of social practices". Another key component of identity is therefore its inherent relational nature: an individual may perform or enact particular social processes or identities, but these social processes and identities are interpreted by others through the ideological and cultural framework in which they are embedded (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Highlighting the simultaneously individual and social essence of identity, Kiesling (2013, p. 450) defines it as "a state or process of relationship between self and other; identity is how individuals define, create, or think of themselves in terms of their relationships with other individuals and groups, whether these others are real or imagined". This notion of defining oneself in relation to others often underpins learners' motivations for embracing or rejecting colloquial language. The degree to which they perceive themselves as L2 learners (and/or "outsiders") rather than authentic users of the L2 can greatly influence their language choices, as can their sense of connection to genuine or imagined communities of users of the L2.

1.2.1. The Role of Learners' Foreign/L1 Identity

Identity and language use are closely interrelated, to the extent that L2 learners may be reluctant to use slang or colloquial terms. Kinginger and Farrell (2004) emphasise that many learners may avoid using nonstandard language, even if they are familiar with such forms, as "[t]he status of 'learner' or of 'non-native' language user tends to convey with it an attitude of caution when it comes to employing the full range of available second language resources" (p. 19). In addition to caution, learner identity can also evoke feelings of discomfort in relation to nonstandard variation, with learners reporting feeling "fake", "artificial" and "embarrassed" (Soruç & Griffiths, 2015, p. 32), or worrying that they would "sound stupid" (Fernández, 2013, p. 181). Some students report actively avoiding L2 informal speech norms due to perceived negative impact on their comprehensibility when interacting with L1 speakers (French & Beaulieu, 2016). Interestingly, some students in Soruç and Griffiths' (2015) study claimed that the status of their interlocutor (native speaker vs non-native speaker) had the opposite effect and felt that informal variants were of more use to them in conversation with native speakers rather than non-native speakers.

The deliberate avoidance of L2 informal speech is therefore closely linked to our identities, which are produced through the practices that we engage in, as well as those which we avoid. As such, our identities are

relational, defined by both what we are as well as what we are not (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, while the learners may view themselves as part of the target language community in that they possess a degree of competence in that language, they might also distinguish themselves from native speakers by choosing not to participate in certain native speaker practices of different communities in a given language.

1.2.2. The Role of Learners' Imagined Communities

Pursuing or rejecting certain language practices is intimately related to the learner's sense of identity. According to Pavlenko and Norton (2007) language learners' memberships in imagined communities, whether actual and/or desired, affect their trajectories as learners and have an impact on aspects such as their agency, motivation and endurance. Imagined communities refer to affiliations across time and space between members who may never have any direct dealings with one another, but who nonetheless experience a sense of community (Anderson, 2006; Norton, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2011). They are the result of imagination as a social process and membership in these communities impacts a learner's decisions and behaviours, including their linguistic practices such as: (a) favouring local usage patterns when planning to remain in that community (Regan, 2014); (b) prioritising varieties related to their actual and desired social networks (Fernández, 2013; van Compernolle & Williams, 2012a; Martyn, 2022) and; (c) favouring the standard variety due to academic/professional goals (van Compernolle & Willliams, 2012a; Fernández, 2013).

In relation to colloquial language, a lack of knowledge of informal variants can be perceived as an obstacle to gaining membership in these desired communities. For example, difficulties in transmitting one's sense of humour or engaging in informal day-to-day conversations in the L2 often leave learners feeling frustrated as they hamper their ability to form interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Lazzaro-Salazar, 2013; Myles, 2009) or in wider contexts. Furthermore, failure to introduce informal language in the classroom may cause learners to perceive the classroom register as "artificial" and thus a hindrance to their goal of becoming authentic members of the target language community (Dewaele, 2004).

It is clear that L2 users' language learning trajectories are simultaneously unique, complex and varied, particularly in terms of the enthusiasm or caution with which they approach slang and colloquial language. However, it is precisely this ability to exert agency in the adoption or eschewal of such language that transforms L2 learners into language users. Nowadays L2 users are regarded as authentic speakers in their own right once they are able to appropriate and adopt new linguistic forms and

meanings that align with their identities and "performed ideas" (Blyth & Dalola, 2020, p. 106). While an L2 learner is free to choose the variants that best serve them, the widespread use of slang in everyday language means that at the very least, learners should develop a receptive competence. As summarised by Mattiello (2005):

> first, a passive knowledge of slang is often vital for understanding conversations in the media and real situations and may allow learners to identify people's origin and their belonging to a social group or place; second, some active knowledge of it will also allow learners to act in everyday life, to socialize and to create intimacy with their peers; third, some aspects of slang will make the learners' speech vivid, colourful and interesting, and will get them closer to the expressive trends and styles of native speakers (p. 36).

The question then is, how do we respect learners' autonomy but also equip them to make informed choices about the language they use? Although various approaches to teaching sociolinguistic variation have been explored, there is room for further investigation in this area, with specific focus on identity. Indeed, Blyth and Dalola (2020) go as far as to call for a shift in language education that adopts sociolinguistically oriented teaching practices, thereby respecting the multiple social identities of language learners-users, as well as their cultural practices and communicative goals. In order to alert students to the meaning making capacity of language, we need to draw their attention to the indexical nature of sociolinguistic variation and its interrelationship with culture, the self and intentions. Indexicality refers to the way in which linguistic elements which are marked as pertaining to a certain group can be used to index membership to, or characteristics or stances associated with that group (Silverstein, 2003). One teaching practice which allows us to work with multilayered and multifaceted aspects of language and respects its multiplex nature is the use of translation as a pedagogical tool in the L2 classroom (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011; Pintado Gutiérrez, 2012).

2. Translation and Sociolinguistics: Implications for Practice

While translation in L2 teaching has become an increasingly accepted practice over the last two decades, to date, the use of translation to aid and/or advance the acquisition of sociolinguistic variants and the development of sociolinguistic competence is scarce. Without a doubt, interest in the implementation of translation in L2 education is growing, however, there remain many novel applications to be explored. The framework proposed in this article departs from the idea that by problematising the equivalence of referential meanings, the translation processes enhance the learner's awareness of the differences between their L1 and their L2, while also

highlighting the variable relationships between form and meaning (Kramsch, 2002, p. 72). In other words, by tasking learners with exploring the equivalence of semiotic symbols in the L1 and L2, translation draws their attention to the meaning-making capacity of sociolinguistic variation and as such can contribute to the development of language learners' sociolinguistic competence. Before continuing, it is important to first consider the place of translation in language teaching, and what we mean by translation.

2.1. Translation and L2 Learning

Translation has experienced a somewhat rocky road in the field of language education, due in part to its association with grammar translation, a traditional method which focused on reading and writing skills in the form of direct translation from the target language into the native language (for a detailed review see Cook, 2010). Subsequent language methodologies such as the Reform Movement and the Direct Method discouraged the use of translation, instead advocating a focus on speech and orality. During this period, it was also argued that learners' L1 negatively impacted their L2 acquisition, which further contributed to the demise of translation (Bazani, 2019). Today, translation-related activities are increasingly accepted, by scholars, teachers and L2 students as being of pedagogical value (Carreres, 2006; Fernández Guerra, 2014; Kelly & Bruen, 2015; Laviosa, 2014; Leonardi, 2010). Indeed, the debate has shifted, as illustrated by Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez (2011) who posit that "the focus of reflection and research is now not so much on whether translation has a place in language teaching, but on how best to use it in the classroom" (p. 282).

2.2. Defining Translation and its Place in L2 Education

Translation is a complex process which often involves the use and/or knowledge of multiple skills simultaneously. This communicative activity, according to Malmkjær, is clearly not independent of the other skills, but it is in fact "dependent on and inclusive of them" (1998, p. 8). Translation enhances learners' awareness of language in terms of both meaning in context and form, and it improves the learners' skills, particularly reading and writing in the L2 (Machida, 2011). It also allows learners to practise with other areas such as language discourse, text analysis, etc (Pintado Gutiérrez, 2012). While Malmkjær referred to the four traditional skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), the CEFR suggests that the same is true for the communicative language activities (reception, production, mediation, and interaction) (Council of Europe, 2001).

Although translation in relation to professional practice and translation in L2 teaching are distinct areas, they do have important points of contact that make translation in language pedagogy a rich and complex practice. In the

first type, the goal is to produce a translated (or target) text; the latter involves the use of translation for specific purposes in L2 education (Carreres, 2014; Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011; Klaudy, 2003; Vermes, 2010). One example of where these fields intersect is in Kelly's (2014, pp. 83-84) list of the subcompetences that a translator may need to develop:

- Communicative and textual competence (in at least two languages and cultures)
- Cultural and intercultural competence
- Subject area competence
- Professional and instrumental competence
- Attitudinal or psycho-physiological competence (self-concept, self-confidence, attention/concentration, memory, initiative)
- Interpersonal competence
- Strategic competence

Many of these are competences which we also hope to inculcate in the L2 learner, which in turn contributes to the argument for translation's inclusion in L2 education. However, one issue which continues to obfuscate translation's role is the variety of constructs of translation in L2 teaching, causing substantial confusion in the terminology used. The impact of the terminology on the understanding of what translation in L2 education is, and its acceptance or rejection, is problematised by Pintado Gutiérrez (2018) who revisits a plethora of terms and concepts associated with the construct. Building on conceptualisations of pedagogical translation in various theoretical and empirical frameworks, she proposes the use of Cook's (2010) term Translation in Language Teaching (TILT) as an umbrella term for the various uses of L1/L2 and/or additional languages in the language classroom. These uses include "translating per se, translation in relation to linguistic skills, translation and language alternation, and also translation as a cognitive strategy" (Pintado Gutiérrez, 2018, p. 234). Elsewhere, González-Davies (2020, p. 434) refers to translation in L2 as Translation for Other Learning Contexts (TOLC), that is "translation to acquire linguistic and intercultural mediation skills in fields other than translator training". The same author also posits that translation is both a translanguaging scaffolding activity and a "dynamic process of communication" (Hatim and Mason, 1990 cited in González-Davies, 2017, p. 129). Both Pintado Gutiérrez' and González-Davies' conceptualisations of translation stress the broad scope of the construct, where the focus of translation is not necessarily purely linguistic, and it can relate to a range of mediation skills, in line with other frameworks

(see also Pintado Gutiérrez & Torralba, 2022; Torralba & Pintado Gutiérrez, 2024).

Indeed, as the value of translation in language teaching has increasingly been recognised in academic circles, so too has its place in institutional frameworks. Translation was included under mediation as one of the four principal communicative activities in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) (the others being reception, production and interaction). Although this early conceptualisation of mediation primarily related to the processing and production of written and spoken texts, nowadays, under the umbrella of mediation, translation requires language users to interact with other language users/texts/ideas/forms of input and draw upon receptive and productive skills. The 2020 CEFR Companion Volume (CEFRCV, Council of Europe, 2020), key in developing a framework solely dedicated to mediation with specific descriptors that define this activity/strategy, was followed by the publication of *Enriching 21st-Century Language Education: The CEFR Companion volume in practice* (Council of Europe, 2022) where a variety of case studies present best pedagogical practices focusing on mediation, plurilingualism and the user/learner as a social agent. Thus, the value of mediation and translation as tasks that embrace cultural and linguistic diversity is recognised across these three fundamental publications, which are cornerstones in L2 education guidelines throughout Europe and beyond.

In expanding mediation into a much more developed construct, the CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2020) also highlighted the vast range of activities which mediation encompasses (see North & Piccardo, 2016, pp. 17-20), including the use of idiolects, sociolects and the relationships between styles and textual genres; linking and transferring between different components and spaces, where the individual and their social world meet and; appropriating language as a semiotic tool in order to facilitate cognitive processes. Furthermore, the first descriptor in the sociolinguistic appropriateness scale in the CEFRCV (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 137) states that a C2 user "can mediate effectively and naturally between users of the target language and members of their own community, taking account of sociocultural and sociolinguistic differences". Thus, it is evident that mediation often constitutes a social activity in and of itself and is also a key component of advanced sociolinguistic competence. This sociolinguistic role of mediation lends weight to the argument that translation is a helpful tool to facilitate the development of sociolinguistic knowledge. Indeed, many of the other descriptors in the sociolinguistic appropriateness scale, particularly those for B2 and above, reference receptive and productive skills which are drawn upon when translating colloquial language. Examples include recognising register

shifts and colloquialisms; understanding humour and nuanced meaning; use language for social purposes such as emotional, allusive and joking usage; adjusting their level of formality and recognising and interpreting sociolinguistic and sociocultural cues.

Two other frameworks worth mentioning are FREPA and the PCIC. The Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA, Candelier et. al., 2012) is an important tool from a sociolinguistic perspective because it emphasizes the role of language and culture diversity in education. By promoting a pluralistic approach, it acknowledges the complex social dynamics of multilingual and multicultural societies and encourages an understanding of how language practices intersect with social identities, power dynamics, and cultural values, which are central in sociolinguistics fostering intercultural communication, essential for bridging linguistic and sociocultural divides in education.

Finally, the *Instituto Cervantes Curricular Plan* (or PCIC, Instituto Cervantes, 2006) covers key aspects of language education of Spanish as L2. It includes content on cultural references, sociocultural behaviours and intercultural skills and attitudes, although sociolinguistics appears to be an informative element, rather than an explicit part of the curricular content to help learners grasp the social dimensions of language. In other words, the PCIC does not specifically focus on translation, but it does address aspects related to the teaching of the Spanish language and the training of teachers of Spanish as a L2, which could indirectly touch on issues related to translation, particularly in terms of pedagogical approaches and understanding language in diverse contexts and looking at the development of communicative competence and an understanding of the cultural and linguistic nuances of the language. The PCIC, on the other hand, touches on sociolinguistic competence as a key aspect of language learning. While the PCIC's primary aim is to develop overall communicative competence, it integrates sociolinguistic elements to help learners understand the social and cultural contexts in which Spanish is used, such as recognising language usage in different situations, through a variety of registers and adjusting speech based on factors like formality and social status.

2.3. Applications and Benefits of Translation in Language Education: The Development of Pragmatic Competence and Sociolinguistic Agency in Language Education

While research on language education and translation studies or language education and sociolinguistics is extensive, work at the intersection of translation, sociolinguistics and language learning is less common. There are, however, a number of studies of note in relation to language education, translation and pragmatic competence. Given the entwined nature of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, these works are included in this section's review of studies which make a case for the role of translation in the development of sociolinguistic competence.

A good starting point is Elorza's study (2008), which identifies translation as a useful tool for enhancing learners' metacognitive awareness of themselves as language users and members of a culture or community. Fois (2020) advocates the use of translation as a task-based approach for fostering intercultural competence, where the learner communicates between different linguistic communities. These linguistic communities are not just monolithic L1/L2 communities, but rather multiple overlapping subcommunities of language users. In light of this, translation constitutes a literacy practice which draws on relationships "between text and reader, student and teacher, classroom and community, in local, regional and transnational sites" (Norton, 2013, p. 116). Reflecting on these relationships, Norton (2013) argues that when language learners invest in literacy practices, they simultaneously invest in various possible and imagined identities. Thus, by bringing learners' attention to their own and alternate linguistic communities, translation activities highlight existing, potential and future affiliations to various real and imagined communities.

In mediating between such linguistic communities, translation also provides the opportunity to understand and experience the cultural pragmatics of one's own community and that of the L2 (Fois, 2020), which can in turn enhance pragmatic competence. Kim (2013) demonstrates learners' reliance on naturally occurring translation to develop their conceptual and functional understanding of the pragmatic feature of sarcasm. While this study used concept-based instruction rather than translation as the pedagogical method, it demonstrated that Korean adult learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) relied on translation and their L1 cultural schema to process sarcasm in the L2. By translating from the L2 to the L1, the learners drew on L1 semantic knowledge to help detect and understand L2 sarcasm. In addition, learners incorporated their L1 perceptual knowledge of appropriate intensity and politeness when using sarcasm, which on occasion differed from that of native speakers with regard to level of formality or register. Therefore, while the use

of the L1 cultural schema was occasionally problematic when there was a lack of conceptual equivalence between the L1 and L2, translation was nonetheless heavily relied on during the development of a feature of pragmatic competence, and provided a natural form of scaffolding for the learners.

Other studies that focus specifically on translation in language teaching include Guzman and Alcón (2009), who make a case specifically for the use of translation as a communicative-pragmatic practice in the EFL classroom. The authors propose translation as an act of communication which spans cultures, emphasising the role of linguistic resources in expressing interpersonal meaning and communicative acts "while paying attention to the social perceptions underlying participants' interpretation and performance of communicative acts" (p. 239). Contextual knowledge and linguistic ability are therefore understood as complementing variables which come together in the comprehension of L2 culture. This stance forms the basis of their rationale for the use of translation in the L2 classroom as a means to raise learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic awareness. Guzman and Alcón's intervention focuses on the requests through contextualised examples in translation making a case for the use of translation evaluation used as a form of guided observation which draws learners' attention to the connections between linguistic forms and pragmatic functions as well as the impact of sociopragmatic factors.

More recent studies present promising results for the use of translation to foster pragmatic competence. Lertola and Mariotti (2017), report positive gains in pragmatic awareness following their quasi-experiment on the effects of (a) reverse dubbing, (b) subtitling and (c) traditional translation tasks in an Italian English as a Second Language class. While no statistically significant differences were found, the reverse dubbing and subtitling groups outperformed the traditional translation tasks and control groups in both the post-test and the delayed post-test. The authors argue that this, coupled with the learners' reported enjoyment of the activities, suggest that the relationship between L2 pragmatic awareness and the interactive use of audiovisual translation materials merits further investigation. Aydin's (2023) study on the effects of implicit and explicit form-focused instruction on the development of L2 pragmatic competence also made use of translation-related activities—either translation exercises using target forms or asking learners to compare role play scripts that they had written with role play scripts written by native speakers. While explicit instruction was deemed to be more effective than implicit, both methods and sets of activities resulted in improved pragmatic performance. One of the few studies that includes sociolinguistics, translation and language teaching is that by Kargar and Ahmadi (2021), who reveal an improvement in learners' sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge

following collaborative translation tasks either from or to the target language, in a supportive expert-novice environment.

House (2008) delves into the specific strengths and characteristics of translation which lend themselves to development of L2 pragmatic competence, and discusses how to incorporate translation-related activities in the L2 curriculum. The author stresses the importance of the bidirectionality of translation, where the two-way relationship affects both the meaning of the message and how it is presented, e.g. its style. House perceives translation as communication across cultures, where the social and historical layers of culture form the sociocultural context anchoring both original and translated texts. This context includes the physical environment, but also the cognitive, which manifests itself in the expectations, norms, and values of members of a given linguistic-cultural group. As well as the macro context of culture, there is also the micro context of a given situation, which House (2008, p. 138) refers to as "the pragmatic embeddedness of a text". Her argument departs from the assumption that the original text and translation must be equivalent in meaning and function, where the function is the application or use of a text in a specific context of situation. Thus, rather than being two distinct entities, the context of situation is ingrained in the text through the language used and the social environment. Therefore, textual analysis must include an analysis of the situation in which it is nested. It is in this situational and contextual emphasis, House argues, where the pedagogical value of translation as a complex cross linguistic activity lies:

> If translation is used in a way that its pragmatic potential is fully exploited, it would be carried out as an exercise in establishing functional, pragmatic equivalence by relating linguistic forms to their communicative functions as utterances in a context of situation and culture as described above. Translation would thus play an eminently useful role in developing learners' communicative competence. (House, 2008, p. 147)

The idea of relating linguistic forms to their communicative functions as utterances essentially explores the use of pragmalinguistic devices to enact sociopragmatic concepts. While House advocates the use of translation as a means to improve pragmatic competence, it is interesting that many of the translation activities she proposes involve reproducing a text in accordance with altered sociolinguistic constraints such as the register or geographic context, that is, exploring intralinguistic variables in the L1 and/or L2. Knowledge of the correlation between form and function allows the learner to make informed choices in terms of the language that they use. Such knowledge aligns with the premise of the CEFRCV to present the language

user/learner as a social agent who interacts in the social world, wielding their agency in the learning process (Council of Europe, 2020).

This equation of the language learner to a social agent coincides with van Compernolle and Williams' (2012a) understanding of self, identity and agency as being inextricably intertwined. Rather than referring simply to the ability to act, agency also encompasses "the ability to assign relevance and significance to things and events" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 143). Thus, van Compernolle and Williams define sociolinguistic agency as:

> the socioculturally mediated act of recognizing, interpreting, and using the social and symbolic meaning-making possibilities of language. It consists of an understanding of how the use of one linguistic variant or another simultaneously reflects and creates the context in which it is used, is a performance of one's social identity at the time of utterance and affects one's environment and interlocutor(s). (van Compernolle & Williams, 2012a, p. 237)

According to the authors, sociolinguistic agency is not a characteristic nor a property of a speaker but rather something which is enacted in the moment at a micro-level between interlocutors. Therefore, it can be argued that a sociolinguistically competent language user is someone who is able to exert sociolinguistic agency: in addition to being aware of appropriate language use in context, they are also aware of how the language they use can (co)construct this context.

Although the empirical studies discussed in this section evidence the impact of the use of translation in language teaching and learners' naturally occurring translation mostly with regard to language learning and identity, or translation and pragmatic development, an as yet underexplored avenue is that of translation for the development of sociolinguistic competence. The lack of studies in this area is not due to a lack of potential but rather the implementation problem, which McLaughlin (2022, p. 3) refers to as the discrepancy between scholarly literature, where translation is now highly valued, and classroom practice, where it often remains overlooked. Pintado Gutiérrez (2022) echoes this sentiment stating "[w]hile the advocacy of integrating the use of translation in L2 teaching and learning seems to be gaining ground in the last decade, specific ways of introducing translation into the L2 curriculum by means of examples are still scarce" (p. 47). Schaffner (1998) identified the development of the students' L2 style as a benefit of pedagogical translation. A broader sense of the relevance of pragmatics and translation in L2 education, was enhanced by Pintado Gutiérrez (2022), for whom the nature of translation tasks is to enhance the development of specific language but also translation skills grounded in various aspects including key pragmatic issues in the L2 classroom, such as "language awareness,

accuracy, pragmatic and intercultural competence, creativity, problem-solving, autonomy, and collaboration, among others" (p. 234). However, this relationship has yet to be fully investigated.

Conclusion and Future Avenues: A Place for Translation and Sociolinguistic Agency in L2 Education

As illustrated above, translation has not yet been fully proposed with a view to developing sociolinguistic competence. However, given the interrelated nature of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, works which have explored the use of translation in developing pragmatic competence can provide the basis from which to develop a case for the use of translation in the development of sociolinguistic awareness and competence in the L2 classroom.

Resources available at present are also limited. It is Carreres, Noriega-Sánchez and Calduch's *Mundos en palabras* (2018) that best highlights the role of translation and [Spanish] sociolinguistic variation within the overall field of translation in language teaching. This manual, aimed at advanced L2 Spanish students, dedicates a full chapter (chapter 12) to linguistic variation and translation through a rich variety of practical tasks and focused discussion of key points.

Reflecting on what are the future avenues that will help develop the field of sociolinguistics and translation in L2 teaching and learning, we can look to Kasper (1997, p. 1), who argues that "competence, whether linguistic or pragmatic, is not teachable". His argument is based on the fact that competence is a kind of knowledge that learners may have, but which they may also acquire, develop, or lose. The challenge for L2 teaching lies therefore on whether we can provide opportunities for learners so as to facilitate the development of their pragmatic competence in their L2. Although Kasper refers to pragmatic competence, the same can easily be said of sociolinguistic competence. As evidenced in this article, translation can positively impact the development of pragmatic competence, including sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic knowledge, suggesting that the same may be true for sociolinguistic competence. Translation in L2 teaching and learning is presented as an optimal tool that challenges the learners' tendency towards a more standard use of the language. This tool creates a plethora of learning opportunities that helps the language user shift the focus onto the underlying decisions behind the use of certain pragmalinguistic or sociolinguistic variants over others and the resulting impact on the style and message of the text. When tasked with establishing equivalence, the learners are required to interact with the indexical nature of language itself and thus

fulfil “the socioculturally mediated act of recognizing, interpreting, and using the social and symbolic meaning-making possibilities of language” that constitutes sociolinguistic agency (van Compernolle & Williams, 2012a, p. 237). In addition, although learners may choose to embrace or eschew informal sociolinguistic variants for a wide range of reasons, at a minimum they will need to develop a receptive competence to be able to interact with native speakers/text(s) of the L2 or L2 media. As a form of pushed output, translation respects the fact that they may not necessarily choose to use these variants themselves but still allows them to engage with and become familiar with the sociolinguistic or sociopragmatic connotations of a given term or expression. Thus, they can then make an informed decision about whether to incorporate these terms into their sociolinguistic repertoire rather than simply avoid them with caution for fear of making a sociolinguistic blunder.

An emerging area which has significant potential to enhance sociolinguistics is didactic audiovisual translation, or DAT. This emerging, innovative field refers to the practice of translating audiovisual content (such as films, TV shows, or video materials) with the primary goal of educational purposes supporting learning processes such as language learning (Talaván, 2020; Talaván et al., 2023). Some of the studies in DAT could indeed become key to the development of sociolinguistic competence in the L2 classroom, particularly those that explore sociolinguistic variation and colloquial or taboo language (see Ogea Pozo & Hidalgo Bujalance, 2022) since offensive and taboo language, as Ávila-Cabrera (2015, 2016a, 2016b) explores, serves as a linguistic tool that conveys information about the speakers' emotions, social status, and cultural background and has a certain impact on the audience.

While we acknowledge that sociolinguistic variation is not typically part of the L2 curriculum, we make a case for using a theoretical framework that challenges the lack of informal or colloquial input in the classroom, whether because of learning materials, teachers’ input, or lack of time. Translation allows teachers and students to interact with an endless and varied array of authentic language samples through intralingual, interlingual, or intersemiotic tasks, demonstrating sociolinguistic variation in all its diversity.

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