

Negotiating Meanings: The Use of Diatopic Synonyms in Medieval Aragonese Literary Translations

*Dawn Ellen Prince
Iowa State Univ., Ames*

The field of translation theory and translation technique in Medieval Spain has been the subject of surprisingly infrequent study during the past several decades. The seminal works of Morreale and Russell have not been matched as yet in their intent, although more Hispanists are now turning their attention to the specific problems posed by the study of medieval translations.¹ The lack of fervor with which this area has been explored may result, in part, from the modern bias which places authorial originality above all else in the literary realm. Editing and studying a translated text is simply not deemed as valuable as working with an original composition. This culturally anachronistic view does not take into account the medieval predilection for authoritative works which had been extensively translated, glossed and commented.

In recent years, scholars have benefitted from critical editions of several medieval translations into Castilian, Aragonese, and Catalan.²

1 Morreale's brief yet far-sighted piece points to the need to examine the principles of literary and scientific translation in the Spanish Middle Ages. Russell undertakes just that in his survey of the translation processes used in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain.

2 These include: Af Geijerstam (*La gran crónica*), Nitti, Wittlin (*Las décadas*), Capuano, Prince. The Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies has also published transcriptions and concordances of the

Utilizing a sampling of these editions, we will examine the use of synonymic word pairs in the translation process, specifically those pairs which are dialectal or diatopic in nature. The contextual dimension of the diatopic variants shall be viewed with particular attention, since context, both intra- and extra-textual, appears to be a prime factor in the mental choices made by the translator.

The use of synonymic pairs was a classical rhetorical technique promoted in the writings of Cicero and widely utilized in legal documents reaching back into Antiquity.³ These pairs were a primary ingredient in literary juridical, religious, and scientific translations during the medieval period for reasons of clarity and specificity.⁴ The motive of the medieval scribe in using this technique was “el afán por alcanzar la mayor claridad posible del mensaje...mediante la reiteración de las ideas expuestas, o el puro didactismo” (Frago Gracia 218). The use of synonyms, or binomials, is also characteristic of the Isidorian style, whose legitimacy is promoted by the Latin rhetorical *amplificatio* taught in the medieval schools.⁵

For purposes of clarity, I would like to review the accepted definition of synonymic variant or binomial pair. A synonymic pair occurs when a translator replaces one word in the source text with two words in his translation by means of a copulative conjunction (Sp. *y, o, ni*): e.g., Fr. *tort* is replaced by Arag. *tuerto o injuria* (Tras. II.28.5), Fr. *apeticent* by Arag. *achiquecen et mjnguan* (Tras. I.117.2) or Fr. *hain* by Arag. *yra e desplazer* (Tras. I.154.8). Each term used in the translation is an attempt to either partially or completely convey the meaning of the source.

In a noteworthy article, Colón questions the degree to which two words can be considered completely synonymous, suggesting that “perfect” synonyms do not exist. The issue is addressed from the perspective of context. Colón, building on Coseriu, identifies four types of variables that can exist in a language, and posits four contexts in which a synonym pair can appear. According to this model, synonyms can be diachronic

complete works of Alfonso X and Juan Fernández de Heredia, both of whom worked extensively with translated material in their compilations.

- 3 See Marouzeau and Wittlin (*Repertori*) for comments on the Ciceronian promotion of the *copia dicendi*.
- 4 For two notable articles on the use of legal formulas in the vernacular language see Smith and Dutton.
- 5 Curtius (274-82) lists a series of rhetorical mannerisms, referred to as the *ornatus*, which includes hyperbaton, circumlocution or periphrasis (a division of the classical *amplificatio*), *anominatio*, and metaphor.

(temporal), diastatic (social), diaphasic (situational), or diatopic (dialectal) in their opposition to each other (Colón 177).⁶

Of most interest to Colón are the diatopic or geosynonyms. He adopts Coseriu's category of "diatopisme," and claims that modern sociolinguists use this term to avoid the negative connotations of "dialectalism." Colón differentiates between the diatopic and the purely dialectal dimensions in the lexicon, stating that:

Considero variant diatòpic dins una llengua determinada aquella que es troba a l'interior de la 'norma.' Com es veu, és una distinció que aplico a l'expressió literària, bé que, en principi, aquesta limitació no s'imposa. (177)

Diatopic variants are thus a pair of words of similar meaning accepted within the same standard language -one word, however, bearing a shade of marginality, e.g., Sp. *tiesto/maceta* 'flower pot,' Cat. *glan/bellota* 'acorn'.⁷

Colón recognizes the difficulty in determining whether any word is inside or outside of the linguistic norm of a language. Territorial preferences and authorial credibility are just two of the many factors which determine the degree of acceptance of a word in a given lexicon (178). Geographical expansion of a language -for example, Castilian in the Middle Ages or English today- results in the proliferation of dialectal variation and, logically, diatopic pairs.⁸

Working within this scheme, Frago Gracia focuses on the use of diatopic or dialectal synonyms in Aragonese of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a period of rapid castilianization of the language. He concurs

6 Colón's source for this model of classification is Coseriu, which describes the vocabulary of a language as having three types of internal opposition (199): opposition in geographic space, called "différences diatopiques"; opposition in the socio-cultural "varieties" of the linguistic community, called "différences diastatiques"; and opposition in the degrees of politeness "différences diaphasiques". Coseriu adopts the first two terms from Flydal, and adds the third term (diaphasique) himself. Colón, seeking greater specificity, adds a fourth term (diachronic).

7 Further examples in the diatopic series according to Colón (193) are: "*vermell-roig, rusc-arna, mirall-espill, ocell-moixó, treure-llevar, sortir-eixir, llevar-se -alçar-se, matò-brossat*." He qualifies the primary acceptance of Coseriu's "diatopisme," observing that modern sociolinguists use this term to avoid the negatively charged term "dialectalism."

8 Diatopic synonyms will also be referred to as geosynonyms, geographic synonyms, and dialectal synonyms.

with the quadripartite categorization of synonymic pairs, and notes that those likely to utilize synonymic constructions in the Middle Ages were the educated and literate upper class (216). This type of lexical acquisition depended on the study of the written word, which was more suitable to the practice of using synonyms than is the spoken language because of the reflective elaboration and correction inherent in it.

Frago Gracia asserts that of Colon's four categories of synonyms those with a diatopic dimension least function as truly interchangeable synonyms because the two terms are not equally comprehensible: "con enorme frecuencia es el caso de una única cosa u objeto nombrado con diversas palabras en diferentes áreas" (219). These diatopic pairs are useful illustrations of the gradual castilianization of the Kingdom of Aragon.

Castilian phonetics first began to substitute for Aragonese forms at the onset of the fifteenth century. The last half of the century, however, witnessed the potent onslaught of Castilian vocabulary, which over the course time had nearly replaced the autochthonous dialect. Aragonese texts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries betray an escalating number of diatopic synonyms in Castilian and Aragonese.⁹ These word pairs reveal the growing linguistic tension in the language, which obeyed two norms, namely that of Castilian, the official language, and that of the local dialect, which by this point already shared many Castilian characteristics. Frago Gracia illustrates the situation with a series of diatopic variants in which Aragonese dialectalisms are paired with newer Castilian forms, e.g., Arag. *escalfecer* and Cast. *apollar*, Arag. *ordinación* and Cast. *estatuto* (221).

Here, we will scrutinize the notion of diatopic variants in Aragonese from the earlier vantage point of the fourteenth century, a period of escalating cultural and political prosperity in the kingdom. During the course of the fourteenth century, Castilian linguistic penetration is less-common (Pottier 239). Of greater vitality is the influence exerted on Aragonese by the language of the ruling dynasty, Catalan.

9 Pottier (240) reiterates the linguistic outcome of the Aragonese kingdom in the following fashion: "A partir del s. XVI, sólo se puede reconocer un texto oficial aragonés por sus voces dialectales (préstamos del catalan, etc.)."

The medieval Crown of Aragon recognized three official languages in the kingdom: Aragonese, Catalan, and, of course, Latin. All Royal privileges, *fueros*, and concessions of noble titles were written in Latin, whereas administrative documents were composed in either Aragonese, Catalan, or Latin (Sevillano Colom 223). Many of the royal secretaries, notaries, and scribes were thus compelled to compose adequately in both Aragonese and Catalan, as witnessed by the Chancellery registers.¹⁰

The very real Aragonese-Catalan bilingualism that existed in the kingdom during this period is reflected in the manifestation of diatopic synonyms in fourteenth-century Aragonese texts prepared by chancellery scribes. Of particular note is the use of these dialectal pairs in literary translations, for one can compare the resultant synonyms with their source text.

A modest selection of twenty diatopic pairs from three Aragonese translations has been used to illustrate context and use of these dialectal synonyms by the translator. The texts, selected for their accessibility, are: Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou trésor*, Palladius' *De agricultura*, and Fernández de Heredia's compilatory *La grant cronica de Espanya*. The synonymic pairs culled from these texts have been examined to determine the nature of their lexical opposition and the reason for their use. Seeing geosynonyms in context assists in positing a reason for the use of this technique in the translation process, either as the product of a bilingual translator mediating his own linguistic duality, or as an aid incorporated by the translator for the benefit of his bilingual audience. In either instance, dialectal variants signal the very real linguistic complexity of the Kingdom of Aragon during the fourteenth century and the task faced by its corps of translators.

All three texts chosen for discussion treat matters of practical concern to the common man, and may have been considered "manuals". Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou trésor* (1267) bears the distinction of being the first encyclopedia composed in a Romance vernacular. *El libro del trasoro* was translated from French into Aragonese in the last decade of the fourteenth

10 See Rubió i Lluch for a complete introduction to the materials housed in the *Archivo de la Corona de Aragón*.

century by an Aragonese nobleman.¹¹ Palladius' *De agricultura* (fifth century A.D.) is a classical treatise on the nature of agricultural practices. *El libro de Paladio* is an Aragonese translation of the Latin prepared by the Catalan notary Ferrer Sayol in 1385.¹² Juan Fernández de Heredia's encyclopedic *La grant cronica de Espanya* is a lengthy history compiled from various classical sources by the Grand Master of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem between 1371-85.¹³

The dialectal variants found in these texts are concentrated in passages on basic history, domestic life, nature, and concrete religious concepts like sin. While widely disseminated traditions like Biblical history or astrology showed greater lexical homogeneity among neo-Latin cultures, the names of plants, animals, and terrain varied noticeably from one geographical area to another.¹⁴ For this reason, medieval translators saw the need for intervention in the contexts noted above.

The first group of data treats the realm of the natural world, primarily plants and animals:

TEXT	TRANSLATION	SOURCE
<i>Tras.</i> I.25.1	<i>balsa o laguna</i>	< OFr. <i>estanc</i> 'pond'
GCE	<i>lagunas o balsas</i>	< L. <i>paludes</i> 'swamps'
<i>Tras.</i> II.60.5	<i>auzeles o aues</i>	< OFr. <i>oisiaus</i> 'birds'
<i>Tras.</i> I.148.1	<i>esparuers o gaujjan</i>	< OFr. <i>esperviers</i> 'sparrow-hawk'
<i>Pal.</i> 7.5.2	<i>escorça o corteza</i>	< L. <i>cortice</i> 'bark, shell'
<i>Pal.</i> 7.5.1	<i>el gingolero o açufeyfo</i>	< L. <i>zizyfum</i> 'jujube'
<i>Pal.</i> 6.1.1	<i>granar o engrossir</i>	< L. <i>grandescens</i> 'to grow'
<i>Pal.</i> 6.3.2	<i>vergas o rramas</i>	< L. <i>virgultis</i> 'thickets, brushwood'
<i>Pal.</i> 6.3.1	<i>çequjas o grandes cauas</i>	< L. <i>fossarum ductibus</i> 'lines of the ditches'
<i>Pal.</i> 6.3.1	<i>çequjas o surcos</i>	< L. <i>sulci</i> 'furrow, ditch'
<i>Tras.</i> I.131.1	<i>maxiella, ... bariellas susanas</i>	< OFr. <i>maisselle</i> 'jaw'

11 Data cited from Brunetto's Old French text is taken from the critical edition of Carmody. The Aragonese material is found in Prince.

12 Latin material from *De Agricultura* is cited from the critical edition of Rodgers. Capuano is the source for the Aragonese data.

13 All citations from *La grant crónica de Espanya* are found in the partial edition of Af Geijerstam (*La gran crónica*).

14 In his *Repertori d'expressions multinominals*, Wittlin (*Repertori* 73) blames the lack of substantial diatopic pairs in his index on the type of texts that were utilized in its compilation: "l'esperança de trobar també bons exemples de geosinònims agrupats ha estat fallida. A causa del caràcter dels textos traduïts, el vocabulari del *Repertori* no és ni abundant ni popular" (73). This reiterates the notion that more popularizing or practical text were those best served by the dialectal pairs.

The source words in these examples are either French or Latin. In most instances, the translator renders the model into Aragonese and then provides a more transparently castilianizing gloss. Since the Aragonese and Catalan lexicon share many similar features, the opposition in these examples appears to be catalanizing v. castilianizing, e.g., OFr. *estanc* 'pond' and L. *paludes* 'swamps' are both translated by *balsa* or *laguna*. While *balsa* is an Aragonese term (Andolz 31 *balsa*) etymologically related to Cat. *bassa* 'hueco de terreno que se llena de agua,' (DCECH 1: 479), the variant *laguna* (DCECH 3: 558) is clearly castilianizing.

OFr. *oisiaus* 'birds' is rendered by *auzeles* o *aves*, of which the first is akin to Cat. *ocells* (DECLC 6: 28) derived from the Latin diminutive, and the second to the more Castilian *aves*. A third example is OFr. *esperviers* 'sparrow-hawk' which is the translators glosses as *esparuers* o *gaujlan*. The form *esparuers* is Aragonese, related to Catalan *esparver*, *esparverany* (DECLC 3: 621).¹⁵ Corominas labels *gavilan* a Castilianism stating that: "el vocablo como nombre de ave es ajeno a la lengua catalana" (DCECH 3: 127), although it was borrowed in certain dialects of Valencia and Menorca.

In these examples culled from the *Trasoro* and the *GCE*, the translator provides two dialectal names for the same object, one with obvious affinity to Catalan, and the other possessing a clearly Castilian veneer. In the *Paladio*, the semantic field of agriculture undergoes similar treatment in the translation process. Clearly diatopic in their dichotomy are the following: from L. *cortice* 'bark, shell' the translator derives Arag. and Cat. *escorça* (DECLC 3: 546) and the wholly Castilian *corteza* (DCCH 2: 214).¹⁶ L. *zizyfum* 'jujube' is translated as *gingolero* and *açufeyfo*, the first term being clearly Arag. and Cat. (DCECH 1: 438), the second conclusively Castilian, derived from Arabic. In the case of L. *virgultis* 'thickets, brushwood,' the translator chooses Arag. and Cat. *vergas* (DECLC 11: 160) alongside castilianizing *rramas*.

15 Andolz (127) identifies *esparabé* as the Mod. Arag. form. The variants *esparabé*, *esparabel*, and *esparaber* are still current in the Aragonese dialects.

16 Corominas (DCECH 2: 214-15) defines *corteza* < L. CORTEX as 'parte exterior del árbol, de algunas frutas, del pan, queso, etc.' The forms *escorça*, *écorce*, *scorza* < L. SCORTEA are characteristic of Catalan, Gallo-Romance, and Rhaeto-Romance.

The Latin nouns DUCTUS 'row' and SULCUS 'furrow, trench' are both translated in similar fashions: *fossarum ductibus* 'lines of the ditches' is glossed by *çequjas o grandes cauas*, and *sulci* 'furrows, ditches' is rendered *çequjas o surcos*. The gloss *çequjas* is frequent in Old Aragonese (DCECH 1: 33). Cat. *sèquia* and Cast. *acequia* are documented diatopic variants; however, the translator prefers to make use of Castilian nomenclature in *cauas* and *surcos*.

A last example from the semantic field of the natural world is the gloss of OFr. *maisselle* 'upper jaw.' This term is translated as *maxiella, ...bariellas susanas*. The use of the forms *maxilla/mexilla*, etymologically related to Mod. Cast. *mejilla* 'cheek', is documented in Old Aragonese texts. A second, equally Aragonese form, based on Cat. *barra (de dalt)* 'upper jaw', is witnessed in the synonymic *barriellas susanas* (Andolz 34 'bariella'). Further proof of the dialectal opposition of these forms is the synonymic pair *maxil.les o barres* which appears in a medieval Catalan translation produced during the same period (see Wittlin, *Repertori* 163).

These diatopic synonyms are unique in that they incorporate two dialectal translations of the source: one term is always Aragonese, albeit a term shared with Catalan; the second term is uniformly castilianizing. Wittlin (*Repertori* 73) asks whether the use of dialectal forms have "la intenció de fer el text accessible a tot el territori catalanoparlant." It is highly likely that the translator provided these glosses for his audience, who spoke either a variety of Aragonese closer to Catalan or the rapidly expanding Castilian (diluted) variety of Aragonese. Thus, the use of diatopic variants in these practical texts can be seen as an attempt to appeal to the needs of the general reading public. The pairs are used to negotiate a dialectal tension in the linguistic territory or among the intended readers.

Diatopic sequences of this type may very well indicate that the translator of a text was bilingual, as in the case of Ferrer Sayol, translator of the *Paladio*. Sayol appears to have been bilingual and was able to translate *De agricultura* into both Catalan and Aragonese. Capuano, in his edition of the Aragonese *Paladio*, notes that in the translated text the lexicon wears a thick Catalan veneer, which generated "un carácter híbrido de lenguaje, a menudo forzado y artificial" (vii). He attributes the Catalan slant of the lexicon in the Aragonese *Paladio* to "la interferencia de la lengua nativa del traductor" (xiv), which is known to have been Catalan. Worth, in a study of Renaissance translators, contends that

Renaissance writers able to function in both Latin and the vernacular “may be influenced by their knowledge of Latin even when they are not seeking to produce the echo of a classical work” (224). The same state of affairs could be said to hold true for the bilingual scribe like Sayol, who produces an “echo” of Catalan in his “Aragonese” translation. The emergence of castilianizing forces during the course of the fifteenth century further complicated matters. Worth’s recommendation that Renaissance scholars study “the ways in which bilingualism may subconsciously affect the process of literary creation” (224), should be heeded by medieval scholars as well.

The encroaching castilianization of medieval Aragonese is bolstered in the fifteenth century with the Compromiso de Caspe (1412) and the seating of the Castilian Fernando de Antequera on the Aragonese throne. Before this point, however, one notes a decisive vacillation in the language as testified in the written texts. In her study on bilingualism in the works of Fernández de Heredia, Af Geijerstam perceives an Aragonese language characterized by the speakers’ fluctuation between catalanizing and castilianizing tendencies (507). During the last two decades of the fourteenth century, Aragonese grew more and more like Castilian and less and less like Catalan with which it once shared many traits. Af Geijerstam claims that the educated translators possessed two grammars or “dos sistemas aragonesos: un, un xic anterior i, per tant, més prop del català, i un altre que representaria el seu idiolecte personal, més castellanitzat” (507-08). Thus there exists an archaic system and an innovating linguistic system at work.

Several examples culled from our data illustrate an apparent tension between Gallo-Romance (Catalan) and Hispano-Romance (Castilian) variants in Aragonese. The dichotomy *parlar/hablar* ‘to speak’ is one such case. OFr. *bons parliers* ‘good speaker’ and *parladura* ‘chatter’ are translated, respectively, as *bien faulant e buen parlero* (Tras.I.62.5) and *parladura o fauladura* (Tras.II.62.6), betraying a neat etymological struggle (see DECLC 6: 276). Another instance of dialectal tension is observed in the use of *blasmar*, a verb common to Aragonese and Catalan (DECLC 1: 824), but unknown in Castilian. In a concession to the more recent castilianizing forces, OFr. *blasmer* and *le blasme* are translated respectively as *blasmar o menospreciar* (Tras.II.26.4) and *los blasmos o mjedos* (Tras.II.62.2). Additional synonymic pairs reveal this evident linguistic shift in Old Aragonese, from an archaic (catalanizing) to

an innovating (castilianizing) lexicon: Cat. *contero* > GCE *martilogio o contero*; OFr. *deshonour* 'dishonor, shame' > *Tras.II.27.1 desonores e barallas*. Arag. and Cat. *baralla* 'riña, contienda' is registered in both Andolz (162), and in DECLC (1: 625); OFr. *joians* 'joy, happiness' > *Tras. II.52.10 alegre o goyoso*. The combination of Arag. and Cat. *goyoso* (Andolz, 154) with Castilian *alegre* is found so often that Wittlin (*Las décadas*) considers it a virtual formula; OFr. *se pourchace* '[he] pursues, obtains' > *Tras.II.44.1 se percacha o busca* (DECLC 2: 374); OFr. *frioles* 'superfluous' > *Tras.II.63.6 folles o locas*.

The linguistic tension experience by the translators during this period is evidenced in the extant texts examined. Whereas in works of a more official or regal nature a uniform Latin sufficed, in more practical manuals and guides the vernacular was essential. Furthermore, it was necessary to negotiate meaning to the general reading public through the use of diatopic synonyms.

In medieval Aragon, these dialectal binomials did not emerge primarily as acoustic or erudite embellishments of the written texts, although their origin can be traced to the rhetorical *copia dicendi* and the medieval *cursum*. Rather, these pairs surfaced for two reasons: firstly, as has been reiterated throughout our discussion, they were utilized by translators in practical texts and manuals to better communicate to the various dialect groups of the kingdom, groups which spoke either a more archaic variety of Aragonese (catalanizing) or one of the newer innovating strains (castilianizing). Secondly, these pairs undoubtedly resulted from the dual linguistic abilities of the multilingual Aragonese notaries, scribes and secretaries, who were charged with the production of vernacular translations. In the future, the editors of medieval vernacular translations should scrutinize their undoubtedly lengthy lists of synonymic pairs for the presence of diatopic opposition. Careful consideration of this characteristic will aid in identifying the growth of dialectal tension, as well as dialectal flexibility, in a given geographic region as reflected in its literary texts.

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