Identifying Translation Teaching Strategies: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a research study developed in a Colombian university about translation teaching strategies. It aims at identifying the best way to develop translators' competencies in Modern Language students, who will work for companies as language experts, including translation as one of their tasks. It is based on theoretical research compared to a survey applied to students of financial and economic translation and shows how their professors apply different teaching strategies, resources, activities and assign roles. It also includes how students interact in classroom compared to the real translation practice, the languages they combine in their translations and the textual genres used. Finally, it describes how students are assessed, as a strategy to close their learning process. As a result, conclusions and recommendations propose the use of current teaching strategies following the socio-constructivist approach.

Key Words: Translation, teaching, competence, resources, strategies, activities, textual genres.

1. Introduction

Although translation has shaped the world through time, contributing to the development of people, translation teaching really began in the 20th Century. Translation professors have a very hard responsibility to develop translator's competence and educate professionals, who will help the world become global. That is why, it is very important to analyze the translation teaching method, that is being used. This article aims at identifying translation teaching techniques and strategies. It also compares them with the advances in translation didactics, in order to emphasize on a reflective translation process for both professors and students.

2. Current Trends in Translation Teaching

Translation studies are new, compared to the time when this activity began. According to Santoyo (1987), the first translation studies began in the mid-20[th]Century in Geneva and Sorbonne, using traditional approaches. Authors like Newmark (2001) represent the traditional approach, which bases its methods on translation manuals, traditional language teaching and the translation practice. He describes translation methods depending on how close they are to the source or to the target language.Other authors likeVinay and Daberlnet (1995) represent contrastive approaches that describe direct and oblique translation methods, based on linguistic approaches. López and Minett (2001) also represent this contrastive approach, and contrasted linguistic aspects between source and target languages.

After these traditional and merely linguistic approaches, there was a big step in translation teaching, changing to the functional approach. Nord (2009), emphasizes that translation teaching should be similar to the real practice of translation.

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She proposes the "functionalist didactics" that includes criteria to select texts to be translated in class, how to classify translation problems and procedures, how to monitor students' progress, and how to evaluate translations. Then, as a complement, Gile (2009) states that translation teaching should be centered on the translation process, instead of on the analysis of translation errors. He also proposes class discussions about basic translatological concepts such as: communication, quality, fidelity to the message, understanding, and knowledge acquisition by using sources of information. Gile refers to an initial learning stage where students gather concepts and basic models, while receiving feedback from their professors.

While these theories were developed, Kiraly (1995:32) referred to a gap in translation pedagogy by stating that there are no clear principles that promote the translator's competence:

> …courses in translation skills instruction are usually not based on a coherent set of pedagogical principles derived from knowledge about the aims of translation instruction, the nature of translation competence, and an understanding of the effects of classroom instruction on students' translating proficiency.

Kiraly (2000) states that translation comes from the construction of meaning and knowledge in the mind of each person. Therefore, *"translation is not a process to repeat or transfer"*. He proposed his own approach based on: *"collaborative learning, social constructivism, empowerment and reflexive practice to teach translation"*. Kiraly(2003) referred to the collaborative learning environment as the place where students learn, guided by their professors. They facilitate the individual construction of knowledge to solve complex and real problems, which develop cognitive flexibility and self-concept to solve translation problems.

Finally, it is important to mention González (2004:3), who does not really agree with following "the best" method. She says:

> The 'read and translate' directive to teach translation is probably as obsolete and unproductive as the Grammar-Translation Method is to teach a foreign language. However, not all students and teaching contexts are the same even though, in the literature on translation training, one often receives the contrary impression. Bridges can surely be built to share common ground while respecting local and individual differences.

All the above presented approaches can be complemented with the principles mentioned by Hurtado (2005:130), who states that there are three basic elements in any translation teaching process, that are: *"translation as what is going to be taught, translator's competence as knowledge and abilities required to translate, and the acquisition of the translator's competence as the mean to develop this competence"*. This author also represents a theoretical framework of translation teaching that is presented below in Figure 1. It integrates translatological and pedagogical aspects to acquire the translator's competence by following a learning process.

The theoretical basis presented represents a useful tool to identify the current approach applied to develop translator's competence.

3. An Exploratory Study about Translation Teaching

A study was developed in a Colombian university in order to identify translation teaching strategies in Modern Languages students who will work for organizations as language experts, following translation processes as one of their daily tasks. A survey was designed to collect relevant information, and applied to a sample of 57 students of the Business Translation II Course[3], part of the curriculum of the Modern Languages Program at a university in Bogotá, Colombia. The sample corresponds to 100% of the students taking this class, distributed in five different groups, according to the schedule. The survey includes topics such as resources, activities, categories and modalities of the courseand the findings in the collected data are intended to support the conclusions and recommendations of this study, as presented below question by question.

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[3]Economic and Financial Translation.

3.1 Translation Resources

The list of translation resources, shown in Figure 2, was presented in the first question. It included online dictionaries and glossaries, parallel texts, translation memories, printed dictionaries, company sites and specialized press. Students had to organize them, according to their frequency of use.

The vast majority of students (87.7%) selected online dictionaries and glossaries as their most important research tool, resulting in a score of 5.65 out of 6. This evidences the impact of the Internet in the way students research and translate in Colombia. Parallel texts resulted as the second most used tool, with a score of 3.88 out of 6. However, when analyzing the data, it is clear that students have different opinions about the importance of these resources, getting a score of 5 from 18 students, a score of 4 from 16 students, and a score of 3 from 13 students. This is evidenced in the highest standard deviation of the score given by students (1.27 vs. 0.89 for online dictionaries).

Although translation memories (3.09) had the third highest score, it is notable that printed dictionaries (2.88) were assigned 12 times a score of 5, vs. the 9 times of translation memories. So it seems that, for some students, it is still more important to have a printed dictionary than a translation memory, maybe because they do not really know how to use it. The lowest scores were assigned to company sites (2.79), and specialized press (2.72), demonstrating that terminology causes the biggest translation problem and students tend to solve it at first, by using dictionaries.

3.2 Translation Activities

The options of activities that can be developed in class are shown in Figure 3: translation activities. It is clear that total or partial translation of a text, the most traditional translation activity, is the most used,with an average score of 4.7. Summary of a text in a language other than the original and translation proofreading have virtually the same score, putting them both as the second most used activities. Lastly, and with a significantly lower score, are simulated translation project management and sight translation, both of which got the lowest importance score from more than 40% of students. It is very important to notice that translation project management is the closest activity to the real translation practice, and one of the less used in class.

3.3 Activities Additional to Translation

This question showed a range of translation classroom activities additional to the practice of translation,that can be seen in Figure 4. It is clear that explanations from the teacher and preparation of a terminology database are the two most widely used methods. They were both given a score of 6 or 5 by more than 50% of students. This result may be given because the teacher is still the center of knowledge in the classroom, which is closer to the traditional approach, than to the socioconstructivist method. In contrast, the option with the less percentage (10%) is discussions about translation criteria, showing that having reflective practice is not a common activity. It reflects that theory is not currently put into practice.

3.4 Classroom Interaction for Translation Practice

This question asked for classroom interaction in the translation process. Its purpose was to know if students followed real translation practices or if they simulated to translate and hand in a document. The results can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5 evidences that individual translations are the most used in class, as students estimated it was used in 46% of the tasks. Group translations are used 37% of the times, while simulated project management was used only 17% of the times. This figure shows a gap between the way students interact in class and the way professional translators should interact in the real practice.

3.5 Language Combinations

The possible language combinations that can be used to translate in class are shown in figure 6, as well as its results of the survey. The findings show that the main language combinations are English to Spanish, which is almost twice as frequent as Spanish to English.

According to the average frequency assigned by students, 59% of the times, an English to Spanish translation is assigned, while only 33% of the times a Spanish to English translation is assigned. Translations to, and from other languages are not statistically significant in this sample (less than 4%).

3.6 Roles Additional to Translator

This question was designed to identify how the different roles of a translation process were assigned within the classroom or as an extra classroom activity. Results can be observed in Figure 7.

The most frequent role was proofreader with an average frequency of 47% (i.e. every student had this role in average 1 out of every 2 translation exercises). Then, terminologist had an average frequency of 42% (i.e. approximately 1 out of every 2.5 translation exercises). Analyzing the data, 10% of students indicated they took on the role of terminologists for 100% of the tasks. On the other hand, more than 50% of the students indicated they assumed this role for 30% of the exercises or less. Copy editor had an average frequency of 36% (i.e. approximately 1 out of every 2.8 exercises). Notably, the frequency of this role is skewed towards the low end, with more than 56% of students stating they assumed this role 30% of the exercises or less.The least frequent role was documentalist, with an average frequency of 19.5% (i.e. a student would have this role in only 1 out of every 5 translations), and also almost 50% of students confirmed they had never taken this role, at a 0% frequency. In general, and due to the low average frequency for each role, it can be deduced that students did not assume only one specific role. This fact demonstrated that students are taught to follow different steps before they hand in a translation.

3.7 Text Genres

The purpose of this question was to present different textual genres of financial and economic areas, in order to identify the most commonly used in classroom. The results can be observed in Figure 8. The results show that two types of documents are the most commonly used in translation exercises: financial statements (96%), and balance sheets (86%). These findings demonstrate that specialized textual genres are used in class, which results in the use of specialized terminology and specific translation techniques.

3.8 Assessment

This question shows how students are assessed and how their errors are detected. The results can be observed in Figure 9, which shows that professors tend to correct to the whole group, then they tend to give a correct version, then correct individually indicating the errors to each student and the less used option is to give the correct version to each student. These results show that identifying errors is more important than grading.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

After analyzing the results obtained in the survey, it is clear that professors use different resources and activities trying to develop the translator's competence in their students and also trying to make them feel in a real, professional context. However, there are different aspects that can be analyzed in detail, which are the following:

Although online dictionaries, the most commonly used resources, are very useful, students could take a greater advantage of the information found in parallel texts, printed dictionaries, company sites and specialized press. These tools can be a convenient guide during the translation process, for terminology and documentation purposes.

In addition, students could be encouraged to work according to the translation project management methods, which prepare them for their real-life work experience. When students work in a collaborative project in class, they become familiar with the project scope and the planning of the different steps, also assuming different roles. They learn about resources analysis, work distribution, expected quality standards, schedules and ethical considerations, among other project related terms.

Although the most commonly used translation activity in class is total or partial translation of a text, there are other pre-translation activities such as sight translation that could be used more often in class. This practice demands a fast analysis of the text and a creative, yet precise interpretation. It could be useful as part of the process to prepare students for their future simultaneous and consecutive interpretation tasks.

The discussions about translations criteria and commented readings are also additional activities that could be used more often in class, in order to get deeper foundations about the translator's task and motivate collaborative learning approaches. The characteristics of a simulated project management make it a useful way to work in group. The whole class is motivated to achieve a common goal, through socio constructivist processes. A simulated project management sets a series of steps that include monitoring, evaluation, creativity, interaction and constant sharing of ideas. This "learning together" certainly enriches the results of the translation task and promotes respect, acceptance and creativity among students.

Developing skills in class to translate to and from English is advisable in view of the current trend. Companies in Colombia mostly require English to Spanish translations, but due to new worlwide commercial agreements, translations from Spanish to English are in great demand.

Finally, companies require the translation of different textual genres in the areas included in this study, and therefore it would be advisable to give students the opportunity to translate different types of financial documents. In the collaborative approach students would be able to share their results with the rest of the class and build their own knowledge.
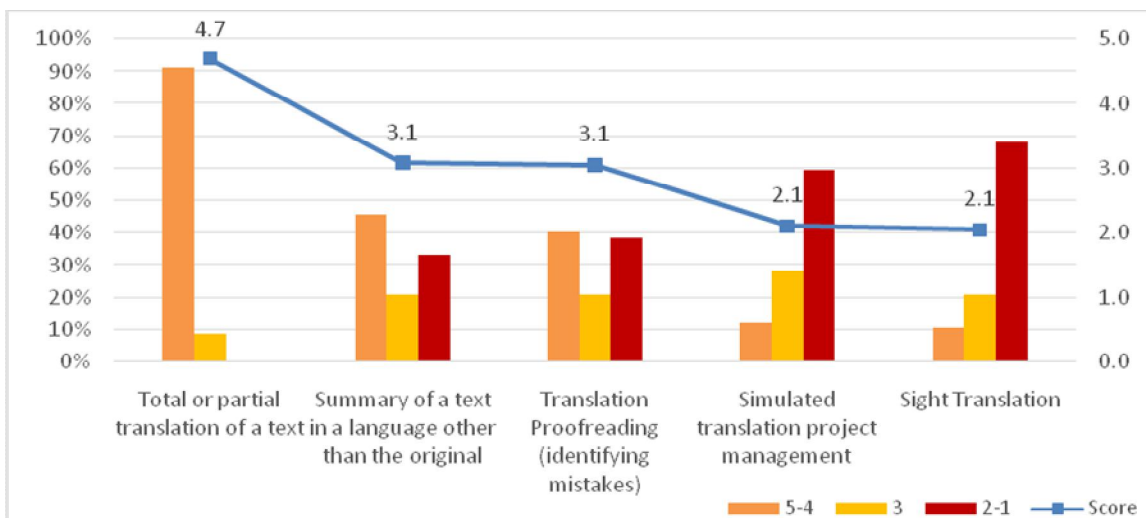
Figure 1: Theoretical framework of Translation teaching.
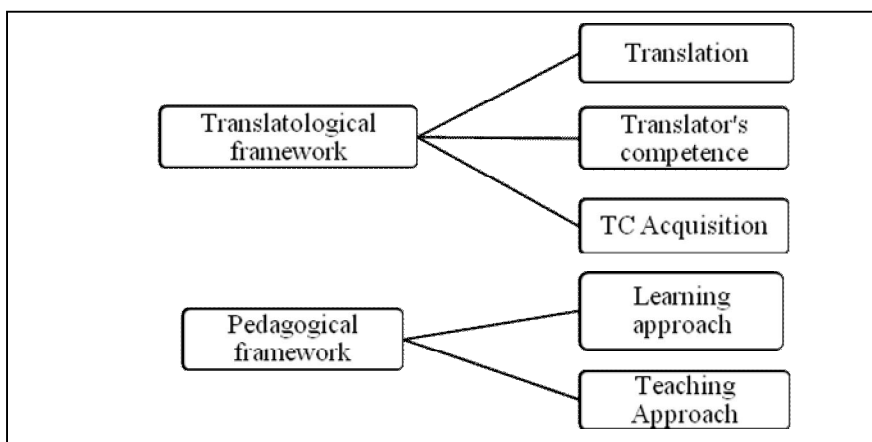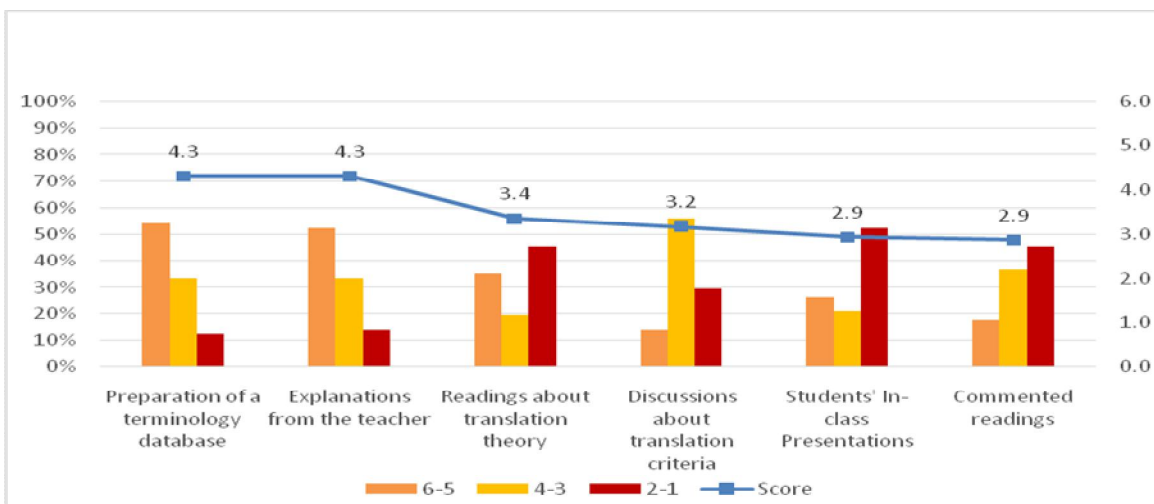

Source: Hurtado 2005.

Figure 2: Translation resources.
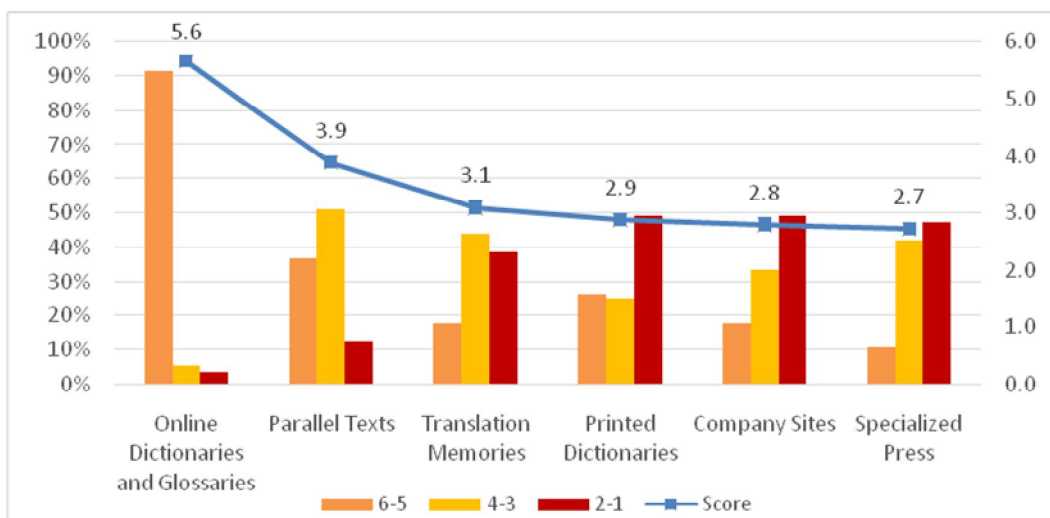
Source: the authors.

Figure 3: Translation activities
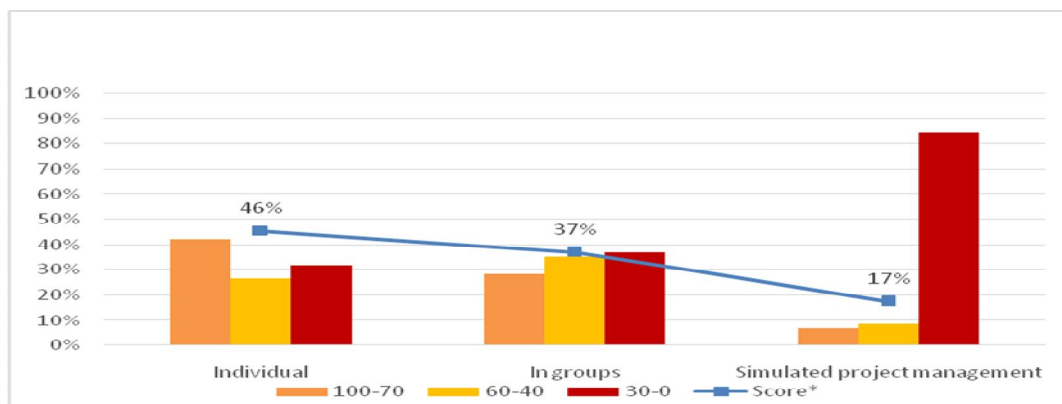

Source: the authors.

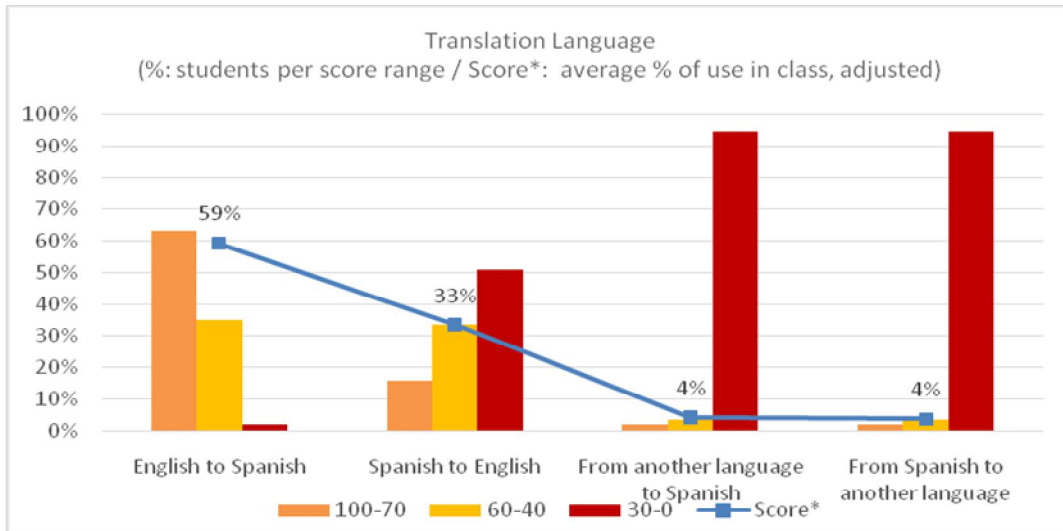**Figure 4: classroom activities additional to translation.**

Source: the authors.

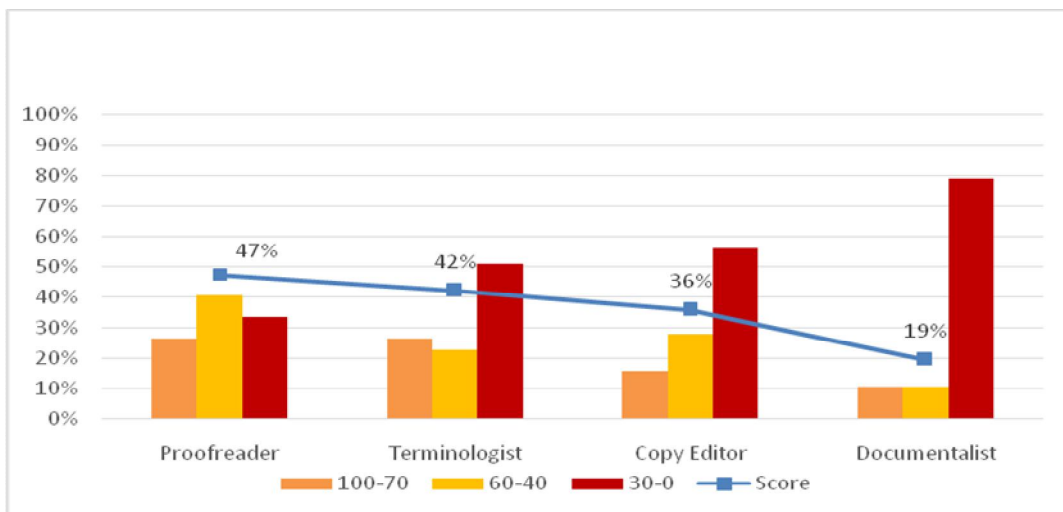**Figure 5: classroom interaction for translation practice.**

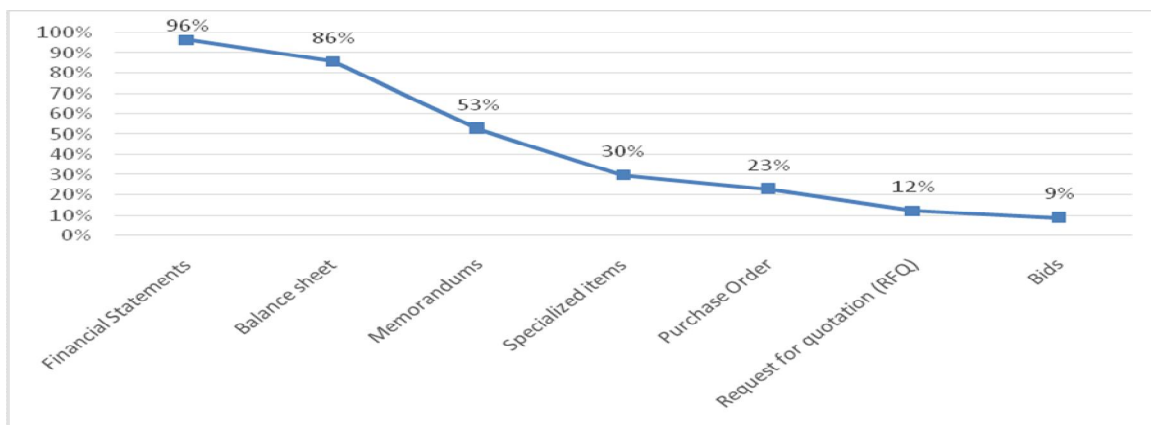**Source:** the authors.

Figure 6: language combinations.

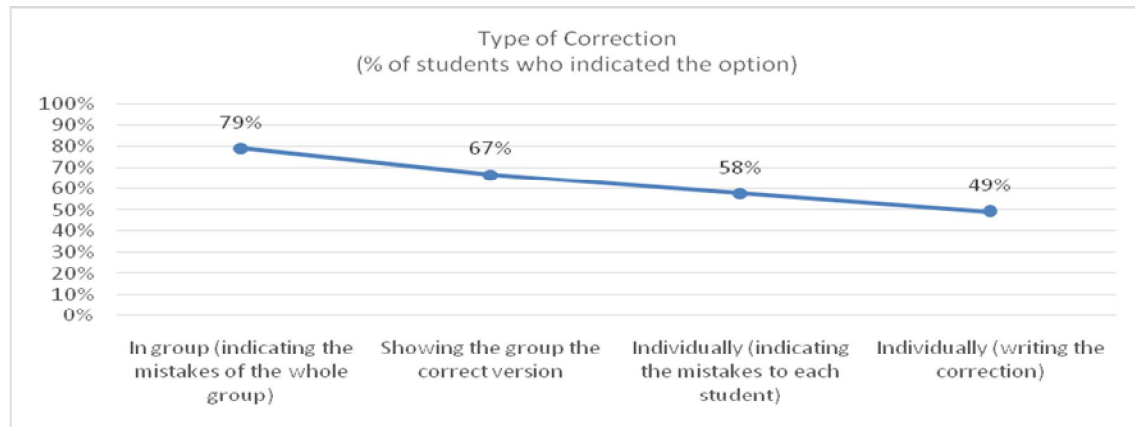**Source:** the authors.

Figure 7: roles additional to translator.

Source: the authors.

Figure 8: Textual genres.

Source: the authors.

Figure 9: assessment.

Source: the authors.

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