

Exploring Interlinguistic Mediation in the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages in Indian Universities

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Abstract

In the current globalized and technologically enabled world, our conversation is not limited to people speaking their mother tongue and/or second language. It has increasingly acquired a transborder and interlinguistic dimension. When two or more parties from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds try to establish a meaningful and successful conversation, very often the differences in language and culture serve as obstacles. These linguistic and cultural barriers can be superseded skilfully by an interlinguistic mediator who helps both the parties communicate with ease. In this entire process, successful communication plays a vital role. Such communication can be impeded due to linguistic and cultural barriers, hence, there is growing need for interlinguistic mediators in India. Taking this need into consideration, this article explores whether interlinguistic mediation is included in any form in the existing curriculum of Spanish as a foreign language in Indian universities, and whether the fresh graduates in Spanish have the skills of a professional mediator. We argue that the integration of interlinguistic mediation activities in the current curriculum of Spanish language in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) would help ease the process of learning the language as well as aid in developing inter-personal communication skills which are highly important in carrying out transborder interlinguistic communication.

Keywords: Interlinguistic mediation; Interlinguistic mediator; Interpreting and translating; Language learning and teaching; Spanish as a foreign language in India.

Introduction

The figure of interlinguistic mediator as a profession is comparatively new and not well known in India as of now. However, several countries have already recognised and others are under the process of recognising

it as a regular profession. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (CEFR:CV) also highlights that mediation “[...] has assumed even greater importance with the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of our societies” (13). Continuous advancement in technology and transportation has revolutionized the way in which people around the globe connect with each other physically and virtually. Communication today, more than ever before, is happening with people who are different linguistically and culturally. However, we are not always successful in carrying out a meaningful communication because it is not necessary that the involved parties would share the same code of languages as well as sociocultural aspects such as religion, culture, customs, traditions, beliefs, feelings, behaviours, ethnicity, education, lifestyle, tastes, etc. When the parties involved in the conversation are not well versed with each other’s language and culture, the need of an interlinguistic mediator emerges.

A mediator helps in creating a communication bridge between the sender and the receiver (two or more parties) in order to carry out a meaningful and successful interlinguistic and intercultural communication. They can perform this arduous job because they have acquired the necessary interlinguistic and intercultural skills through educational and professional training as well as through continuous field experiences. Now, it is important to highlight that the figure of a mediator is different than that of a translator and interpreter. The work of a mediator is much more versatile and demanding because they carry out several other tasks such as paraphrasing, briefing, adding, subtracting, negotiating of information along with translation and interpretation. Furthermore, it is also important to highlight that translation and interpretation are just two basic facets of activities along with several others which a mediator performs while mediating. Because of its complex nature, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (CEFR:CV) presents mediation as one of the most versatile modes of communication which includes other three modes of communication viz. reception, production and interaction (33).

Considering the growing importance of interlinguistic mediation in the current globalized world, in this article, firstly through a brief literature review we will understand the existence of mediation in sociocultural contexts as well as in applied linguistics. In the same section, we will explore the importance of an interlinguistic mediator in the modern world as well as the major skills required to carry out mediation tasks. Later, in the main study, we will locate the existence of mediation activities in Indi-

an classroom of foreign languages as well as in the professional field. We will consequently argue for the growing need and importance of integrating mediation activities and developing interlinguistic mediation skills in Indian students of foreign languages, focussing particularly on Spanish.

Literature-Review

It is important to note that mediation is not a new social activity. In fact, humankind has been practising it since time immemorial. Researchers have not found any evidence that when, where and how the process of mediation has emerged at the very outset. However, the oldest references about mediation can be found in several religious contexts. The word mediator is “originally applied to Christ, who in Christian theology mediates between God and man” (“Mediator”). Sayers highlights that in Hinduism mediation activities are performed from the time of *Mahabharata* when lord Krishna tried mediating between *Kauravas* and *Pandavas* in order to stop the *Kurukshetra* war. He also mentions that since ancient times till today, the *brahman* in Hinduism carries out the role of a mediator between the believers and various supernatural deities through different religious ceremonies and mantras. In Islam, mediation is popularly known as *was-satah* which refers to solving disputes based on mutual agreements following peaceful process (Manaf, et al.).

In the present world, mediation activities are not limited to only religious contexts, but are being used widely across disciplines in different ways to fulfil different purposes. For example, it is widely practiced in the judiciary to solve disputes between two or more parties. “A skilled mediator helps the parties talk about the issues, identify a range of possible solutions and work towards an agreement that will end their dispute” (“What is mediation?”). In sociocultural contexts of India, a mediator still plays an important role in arranging marriages, solving matrimonial disputes and fixing divorces (Rao and Rao; Batabyal and Beladi; Lakshmi).

However, in sociocultural contexts mediation activities are not only performed to solve disputes, but to establish communication too. The Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) states that “mediating language activities – (re)processing an existing text – occupy an important place in the normal linguistic functioning of our societies” (14). Because of its growing importance, mediation already exists as a skilled professional activity in several European countries such as Italy and Belgium (Schuster, 2005). Mediators generally tend to work with different social organizations like hospitals, schools, universities, churches as well as public and

private institutions for helping foreigners to integrate in a completely new social and ethnic context (Ulrey and Amason; Baraldi). CEFR: CV highlights that “in mediation, the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language [...] and sometimes from one language to another” (90). In the same direction, Dendronios affirms that mediation as a form of purposeful social practice is very essential in today’s globalized world. A mediator interprets, negotiates and facilitates the meaning of the text and speech of the first person for the second person or vice versa when they do not understand the text or speech either partially or completely due to linguistic or cultural differences (12). CEFR also mentions that “in both the receptive and productive mode, the written and/or oral activities of mediation make communication possible between persons who are unable, for whatever reason, to communicate with each other directly” (14). As mediation process includes all other three modes of communication such as reception, production and interaction, it evolves as one of the most complex modes of communication (see fig. 1).

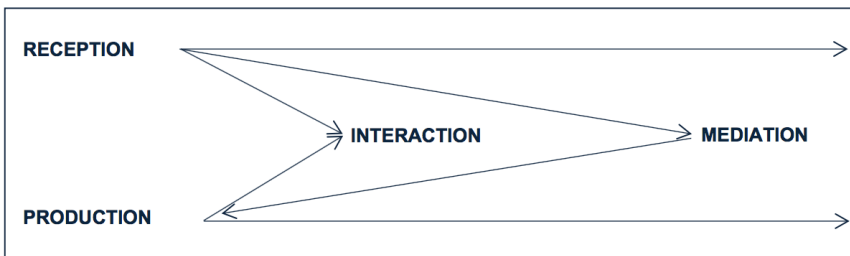


Figure 1. The Relationship between Reception, Production, Interaction and Mediation. CEFR: CV (p. 34), Council of Europe, 2020, figure 2.

This is why the work of an interlinguistic mediator includes different aspects of communication going far beyond that of a translator and interpreter, given that translation and interpretation are just two different aspects of mediation (Garcés). González and Baker also clarify that “translation and interpreting are forms of linguistic mediation that involve rendering written or oral text from one language to another” (39). Salvador adds that mediating is not limited to translating words, rather, it integrates several aspects of non-verbal communication (smell, gesture, body language, silence, etc.) that are culturally significant (17-18). Laghrich, who has been working as a professional mediator in Spain since years, mentions that mediators mediate verbal as well as non-verbal language. In order to do

that, they need to be well versed with cultural as well as linguistic components of both the worlds (6). Cantero Serena and Arriba Garcia hold that a mediator performs a number of micro-skills while mediating viz. interpreting, translating, intermediating, summarizing, paraphrasing, adding, adapting and quoting (16-17). It is thus evident that knowing two or more languages does not necessarily qualify one as a mediator; one needs a number of skills in order to mediate between two languages and cultures. According to Taft (53) and Corsellis (71) a mediator should have a good knowledge of languages, body gestures, signs and symbols, customs, norms, taboos, history, tradition, dressing, ethnicity and technology. They also emphasize that a mediator should maintain privacy, not take anyone's favor, transmit the original and appropriate message, be honest with their capacity, ability and expertise at the time of accepting an assignment.

The requirement of knowledge from different spheres of language, society, culture, tradition and history as well as several other skills mentioned above make interlinguistic mediation quite a challenging task. However, in order to avoid linguistic, cultural and religious shocks, the requirement of a professional interlinguistic mediator is continuously growing in our societies. Therefore, although mediation is comparatively a new term in the world of language teaching, it is being integrated widely into language curriculum of several European countries viz. Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Greece and Spain (CEFR:CV 91). Moreover, it is incorporated with the purpose of developing plurilingual and pluricultural competences of the learners to promote a multiculturally and multilingually more sustainable society. Howell mentions that "cross-language mediation is an ability which is tested in high-stakes school-leaving tests in Germany and Greece as it is deemed as a competency necessary for a multilingual global society" (148).

Mediation should not only be included in language curriculum because the modern world needs linguistic mediators, but also because mediation activities play an important role in developing a more productive, entertaining and meaningful language class facilitating the process of teaching and learning (Trovato 170). Castro claims in his studies that mediation activities are quite relevant in modern classroom as they help in developing multilingualism and multiculturalism in a foreign language classroom. In the same direction, National Education Policy 2020* (NEP 2020) of India encourages teachers to use bilingual approach in teaching and to follow bilingual teaching-learning materials in order to develop the knowledge of more than one language in their students (13). The citizens of current

*See:https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

global societies not only require the knowledge of Indian languages but also of important foreign languages because frequently they are relating with people from the globe academically, professionally and socially. The integration of interlinguistic mediation in foreign language teaching can not only promote bilingual approach in teaching but also prepare professionals who would help others to establish communications globally.

Even though the need for preparing skilled and professional mediators started from western world or developed economies, now it is also highly important in developing economies like India. This is so because the inflow of people is a world-wide phenomenon not limited to developed economies. India, currently being the sixth largest economy of the world^{**}, is experiencing a major boost in foreign direct investment and betterment of its international relations. At the same time, it projects to be the third largest economy of the world by 2028^{***}. Hence, the demand for skilled language professionals, especially of interlinguistic mediators, will experience a spike because in establishing any kind of transborder relations language plays a crucial role. In order to cater to the growing demand of language professionals, NEP 2020 also stresses on the urgent establishment of Indian Institute of Translation and Interpretation (IITI) and collaboration with other HEIs (55). Hence, the idea of integrating interlinguistic mediation coincides with the objectives of NEP 2020 of preparing skilled language professionals to cater the growing need of an emergent developing India.

Objectives

The principal objectives of the current study are, firstly to locate the existence of mediation activities in Indian classroom of foreign language as well as in professional field, and secondly, to study the growing need and importance of integrating mediation activities in order to develop interlinguistic mediation skills in Indian students of foreign languages.

Research Methodology

In order to achieve the above mentioned objectives, we have analysed quantitative and qualitative data collected through our fieldwork. The study is limited to academic and professional areas of Spanish language in India. However, the results of this study can be used to integrate inter-

** See: <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>

*** See: <https://www.ibef.org/news/india-to-become-world-s-third-largest-economy-by-fy28-says-imf#:~:text=In%20that%20year%2C%20it%20would,surpassing%20Japan's%20US%24%205.17%20trillion.>

linguistic mediation activities in teaching and learning of other foreign languages too. In order to get the data for our study, we collected Spanish curriculum of Indian universities of intermediate level (B.A. in Spanish, 5th and 6th semesters) from six major Indian universities namely Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), University of Delhi (DU), The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Doon University (Doon) and Amity University (AU). We carried out a questionnaire based survey through three different *Google Forms* amongst Indian students, teachers and experts of Spanish language. 48 students from 5th and 6th semester of B.A. in Spanish from JNU, DU, EFLU, AMU, Doon and AU, and 22 teachers of Spanish language from JNU, DU, EFLU, AMU, Doon, AU, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) and Mahatma Gandhi Antar-rashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya (MGAHV) undertook the survey.

A total number of 14 Indian experts (translators, interpreters, mediators and language professionals) of Spanish language also participated in the survey. These three questionnaires consist of three types of questions viz. open-ended questions, closed-ended questions and semi-closed-open questions. Our target study group of students were from 5th and 6th semester of B.A. in Spanish because by then they would have covered a major part of their subjects, and after finishing the course they might be getting ready to start their career in language based job market. After the collection of projected data from the proposed group, we used *Microsoft Excel* for organised, easy and accurate calculation of quantitative data as well as for creating the statistical graph, however, in some cases we also used *IBM SPSS software* to analyse complex data.

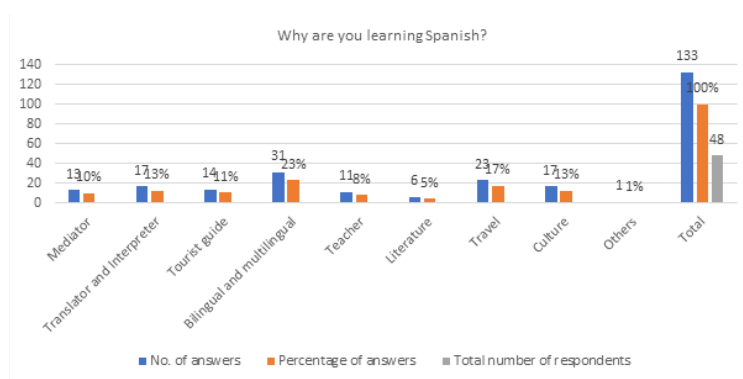


Chart 1. : Different Reasons Assigned by Students for Learning Spanish as a Foreign Language

The result confirms that 65% of the students are learning Spanish language to explore a professional career as a mediator, translator/interpreter, tourist guide, teacher as well as bilingual and multilingual professional. Only 5% of the students are learning it because of their interest in literature.

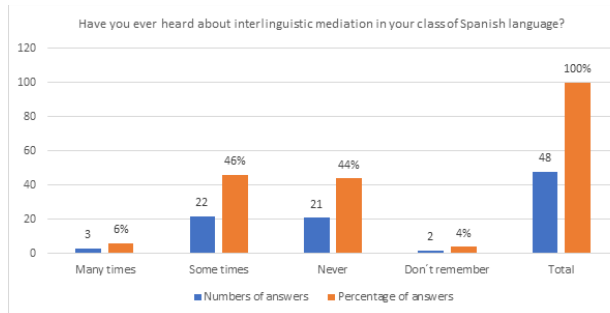


Chart 2.: Students' Awareness about Interlinguistic Mediation

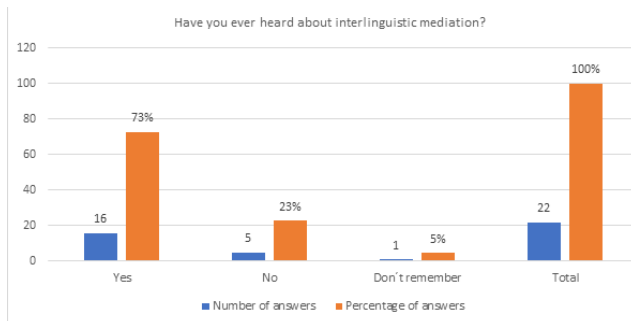


Chart 3.: Teachers' Awareness about Interlinguistic Mediation

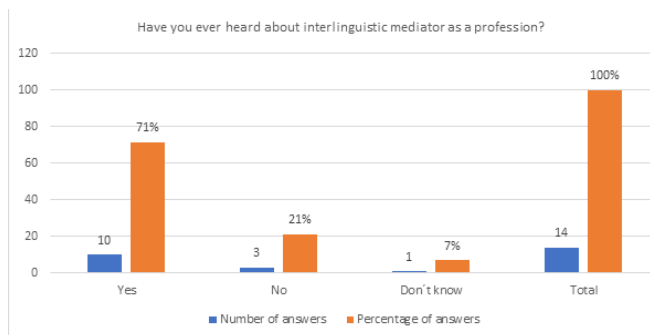


Chart 4.: Experts' Awareness about Interlinguistic Mediator

Table 1. : Existence of Interlinguistic Mediation as forming part, in any way, of the Curriculum of B.A. in Spanish of Indian Universities

Universities from where Spanish curriculum were collected	Existence of mediation in the curriculum
Jawaharlal Nehru University	No
University of Delhi	No
The English and Foreign Languages University	No
Aligarh Muslim University	No
Doon University	No
Amity University	No

The data of charts 3 and 4 shows that 73% of teachers and 71% of experts of Spanish language are aware of mediation either in academia or in professional field. Even though, it is quite popular among teachers and experts, chart 2 shows that only 6% of students have heard about mediation frequently, whereas, 44% of students are still not aware of its existence. The data of the table 1 also confirms that the non-existence of mediation in the curriculum of Spanish language at the Indian universities. Therefore, it is evident that interlinguistic mediation still does not form part of Spanish curriculum at the Indian universities nor it is being practiced formally in Spanish classrooms.

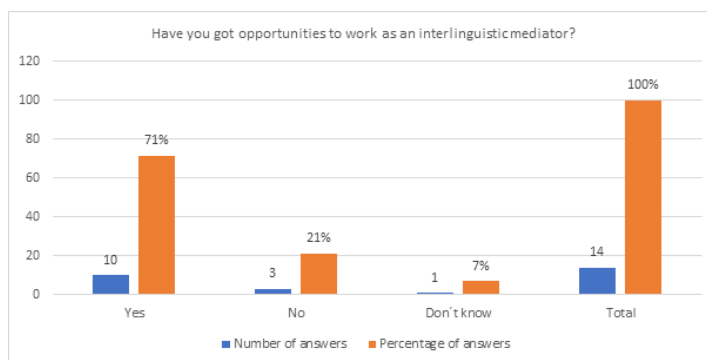


Chart 5. : Experience of Indian Experts of Spanish Language as Interlinguistic Mediators

71% of the experts in the chart 5 confirm that they are not only aware about mediation, but they have also worked as interlinguistic mediators.

Hence, it is obvious that interlinguistic mediator as a skilled professional figure does not only exist in western and developed economies but also in developing economies like India.

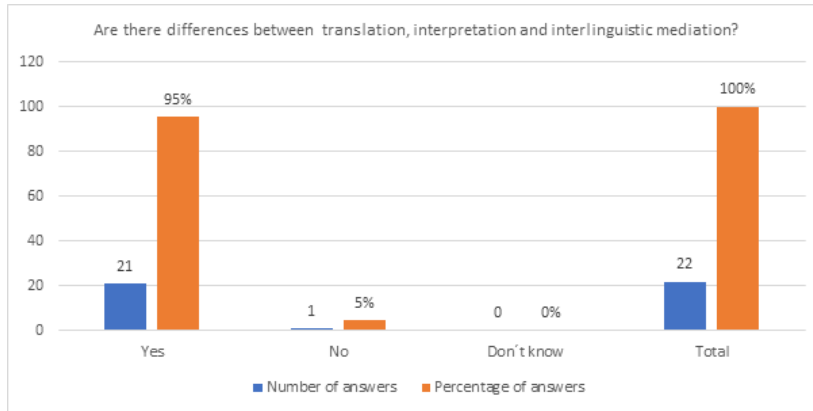


Chart 6. : Teachers’ Opinion about the Differences between Translation, Interpretation and Interlinguistic Mediation

95% of the teachers accept that translation, interpretation and interlinguistic mediation are three different activities. Though, translation and interpretation are there in university curriculum of foreign languages, they do not contribute sufficiently in preparing interlinguistic mediators because translation and interpretation are just two different aspects of interlinguistic mediation.

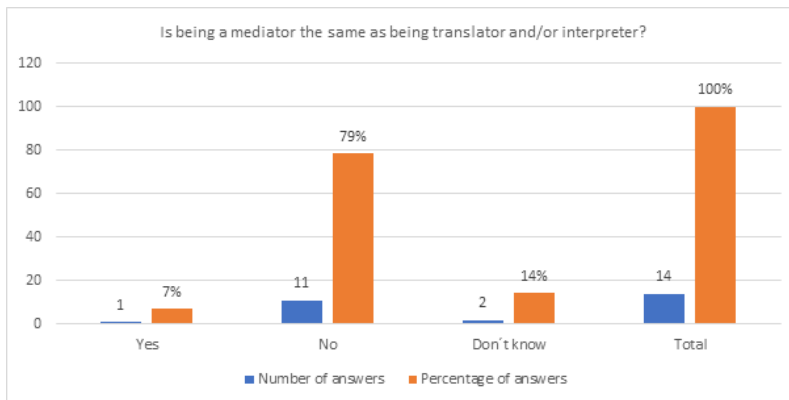


Chart 7. : Experts’ Opinion about the Differences between the Figure of Translator, Interpreter and Interlinguistic Mediator

79% of the experts of Spanish language, who have been working as interlinguistic mediators, confirm that the figure of a mediator is different from that of a translator and interpreter. A mediator carries out many more tasks beyond only translating and interpreting.

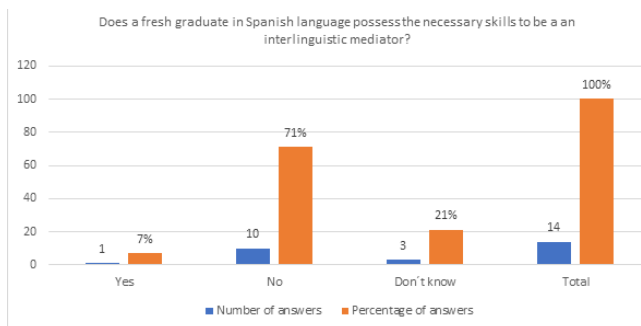


Chart 8. : Experts' Opinion about Fresh Graduates as Interlinguistic Mediators

71% of the experts of Spanish language, who have been working as interlinguistic mediators, confirm that fresh graduates in Spanish language do not possess the necessary skills which are required to work as interlinguistic mediators. Mere knowledge of languages, translation and interpretation cannot qualify one as an interlinguistic mediator.

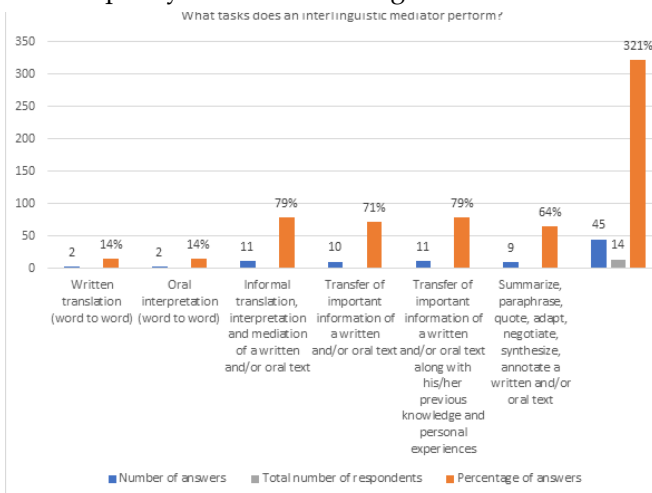


Chart 9. : Experts' Opinion about the Tasks Carried Out by Interlinguistic Mediators

More than 64% of the experts accept that mediators perform a variety of activities such as informal translation, interpretation and mediation of a written and/or oral text, transfer of important information of a written and/or oral text as well as transfer of important information of a written and/or oral text along with his/her previous knowledge and personal experiences. They also summarize, paraphrase, quote, adapt, negotiate, synthesize, annotate a written and/or oral text whenever and whatsoever is required.

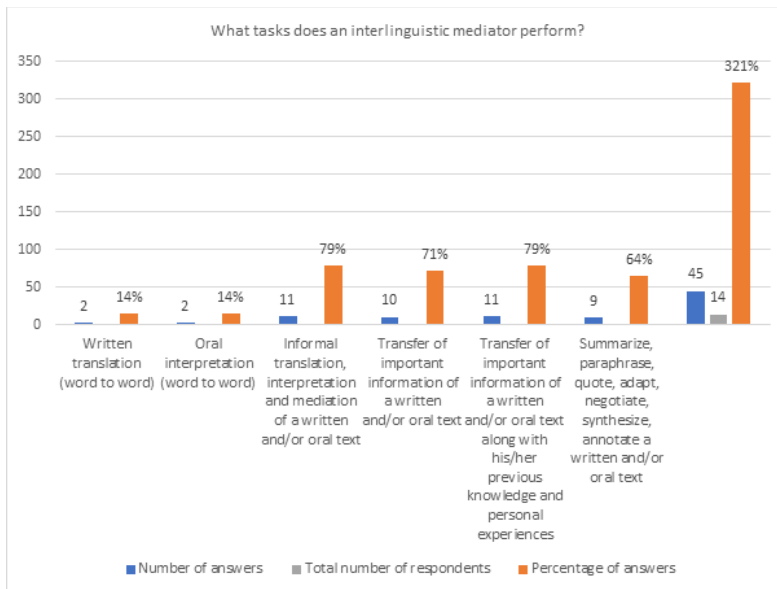


Chart 10. : Experts’ Opinion about the Competencies Required to be a Good Interlinguistic Mediator

Most of the experts accept that mere knowledge of languages, translation and interpretation is not sufficient to perform interlinguistic mediation activities. One also needs discursive, mediation, sociolinguistic/sociocultural, pragmatic and strategic competencies.

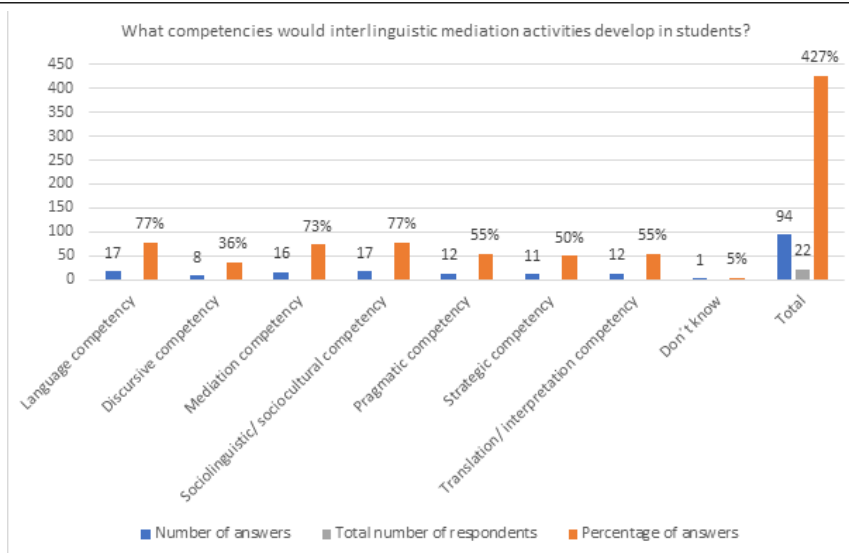


Chart 11. : Teachers’ Opinion about the Role of Interlinguistic Mediation Activities in Developing various Competencies in Students

Most of the teachers agree that the integration of interlinguistic mediation activities in the foreign languages curriculum would help in developing not only linguistic, translation and interpretation competencies but also discursive, mediation, sociolinguistic/sociocultural, pragmatic and strategic competencies.

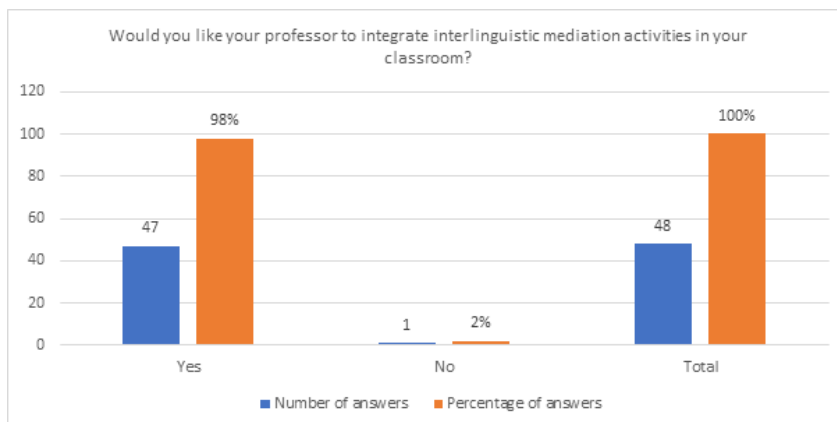


Chart 12. : Students’ Opinion about the Integration of Interlinguistic Mediation Activities

98% of the students consider that the interlinguistic mediation activities should be carried out in their classes of foreign languages because it will not only help them to develop their linguistic competencies but several others as well such as translating, interpreting, summarizing, paraphrasing, etc.

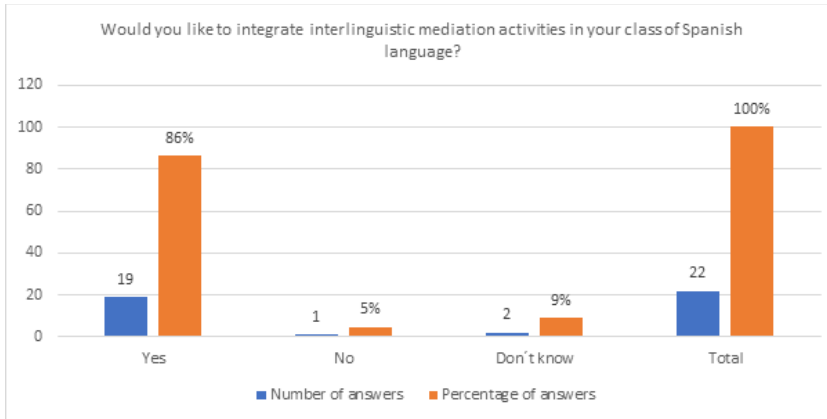


Chart 13. : Teachers' Opinion about the Integration of Interlinguistic Mediation Activities

86% of teachers consider that interlinguistic mediation activities should be incorporated in foreign languages classes because they would help in developing a number of important competencies that are required in interlinguistic mediation.

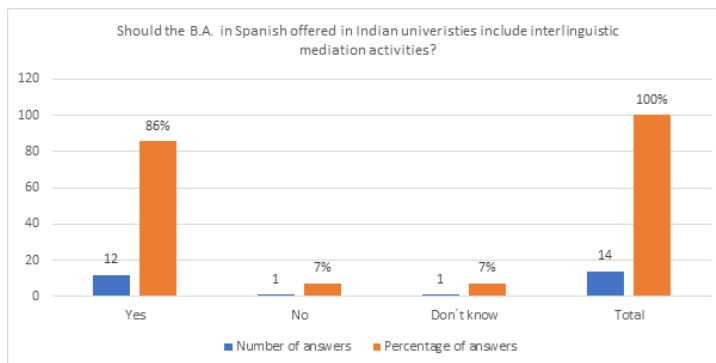


Chart 14. : Experts' Opinion about the Integration of Interlinguistic Mediation Activities

86% of the experts consider that interlinguistic mediation activities should be included in the curriculum of foreign languages (B.A. in Spanish) of Indian universities. It is important that the new generation of foreign language experts possesses the basic and necessary skills of interlinguistic mediators.

Although interlinguistic mediation seems to be a new topic of study in Indian academia, in one way or another, students as well as teachers have experienced it in their daily life and in the language classroom. Hence, they emphasize on integrating it in the curriculum of foreign languages accepting its growing importance and use in our professional, personal, social and academic life in the current globalized and technologically enabled world.

Conclusion

The study confirms that in the modern Indian classroom of Spanish, the inclusion of interlinguistic mediation activities is a growing need. An analysis of the data also helped us conclude that a major part of Spanish language learners does not have much interest in literature, they would rather pursue different professional careers such as mediator, translator/interpreter, tourist guide, bilingual and multilingual professional and teacher. All these professions, in one way or other, require several of the competencies which interlinguistic mediation activities help to develop. The study also reveals that interlinguistic mediation activities are still not popular among students, in fact, they are formally non-existent in Spanish language curriculum of Indian universities even though a majority of the teachers and experts are well versed with it.

The analysis confirms that the role of an interlinguistic mediator is not same as that of a translator/interpreter. Additionally, it shows that fresh Indian graduates in Spanish language do not possess the necessary skills to be able to work as an interlinguistic mediator. Interlinguistic mediation is a complex activity where a mediator performs various tasks such as informal translation, interpretation and mediation of a written and/or oral text, transfer of important information of a written/or oral text, transfer of important information of a written and/or oral text along with his/her previous knowledge and personal experiences, summarize, paraphrase, quote, adapt, negotiate, synthesize, annotate a written and/or oral text. In order to carry out these tasks, apart from the knowledge of two or more languages, one needs to develop numerous competences such as discursive, mediation, sociolinguistic/sociocultural, pragmatic, strate-

gic and translation/interpretation. These competencies can be developed gradually in the learners through the integration of interlinguistic mediation activities. It also points out to the fact that through the integration of interlinguistic mediation activities not only these competences can be developed gradually in the learners, they can also be trained to work as professional mediators.

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