

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRANSLATION IN THE LSP CLASSROOM AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Mladen Marinac¹, Iva Barić²

¹Polytechnic of Rijeka, Business Department, Rijeka, Croatia

²Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Rijeka, Croatia

¹mladen1403@gmail.com

²ivabaricib@gmail.com

Abstract: *From the era of Grammar-Translation Method to the onset of Communicative Language Teaching, the role of translation in language learning has completely changed. Nowadays, the use of translation activities in the language learning classroom remains a contentious issue, namely, there are arguments for and against their use. Given that attitudes are one of the factors that affect the way students learn and the level of proficiency they achieve, the aim of this quantitative study is to find out what the attitudes of higher education students in Croatia are towards the use of translation in learning languages for specific purposes. The responses were collected via a questionnaire, which was completed by 618 students who were enrolled in eight different LSP courses, i.e. medical, maritime, business, agriculture, tourism, safety, IT and transport. The participants come from five institutions of higher education in two Croatian towns (Zagreb and Rijeka). The majority of the respondents (86.4%) claim they use translation in their LSP classroom, but the frequency in using translation varies greatly. On the other hand, translation is used in assessment less frequently, 37.4% of the participants state they have encountered translation in tests. While they believe that other more communicative methods are more beneficial for their language learning, and they only partially enjoy doing translation activities, most of them are sure that translating both from their L1 into L2 and L2 into L1 is very useful for their language learning, especially when it comes to learning new vocabulary. A statistical difference occurred between genders; namely, male students seem to be more positive towards translation. Also, statistical differences were confirmed among students of different study programs in relation to their attitudes towards enjoyment, usefulness and demand of translation activities. Future research should focus on investigating how translation activities are implemented and account for gender and study program differences.*

Keywords: language for specific purposes; English for specific purposes; students' attitudes; tertiary education; translation in language teaching

1. Introduction

The use and role of translation in language teaching (TILT) has been changing depending on the predominant language teaching method or approach of a certain period. Translation was at its prime in the middle of the nineteenth century in the era of the notorious grammar translation method. However, at the end of the nineteenth century and onwards, with the emergence of naturalistic methods,

structuralists methods and the communicative approach, translation activities have long been avoided in the language classroom. Nevertheless, the 1990s witnessed the use of translation in more communicative and less traditional ways, especially in higher education (Byram and Hu, 2012). Given the constant changes, practitioners still seem unsure whether and how to implement translation activities in their teaching (Macaro, 2005). Today, despite the popularity of plurilingualism and multilingualism and the inclusion of various methods in language teaching, there is still no agreement on how to approach TILT (Tekin, 2010; Almoayidi, 2018).

There are several arguments why translation is not desirable in language teaching. Firstly, students do not use the target language and it influences production and understanding. Namely, the use of students' mother tongue diminishes the amount of time spent practising the language students want to learn. Secondly, it is not one of the four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing) and it hinders the communicative use of the foreign language in the classroom (Gündoğdu and Büyüknisan, 2005). Furthermore, some believe it is demotivating and too demanding for the language learner, that it is artificial (focus is on form rather than meaning), and that it puts accuracy over fluency. Malmkjaer (1998) also mentions that translation might be misleading (expressions in two languages do not correspond one-to-one), that it produces interferences and that it is not a good test of language skills and that it is appropriate only for translator training.

Nevertheless, there are also strong arguments why translation should be used in the language classroom. Cook (2007, 2010) claims that we live in multilingual societies where translation occurs between languages in everyday life and, thus, these skills should be taught in the language classroom as well. Teaching a real-life skill should motivate learners and teachers to whom, if they know both languages, translation might come naturally. Similarly, Carreres (2014) believes that translation is a skill needed in everyday life, and in the context of LSP, translation activities could engage learners in independent work which would help them to grow professionally (Tenieshvili, 2023). Butzkamm (2003, 2011) says that foreign language structures should be taught through the comparison between the first and second language. He believes that mother tongue is the first thing language teachers should resort to in their classrooms, not something that should be avoided. The majority of arguments state that translation raises awareness about the differences between the languages (Tekin, 2010; Leonardi, 2010, Gündoğdu, Büyüknisan 2005) and helps prevent interference errors (Tekin, 2010). Namely, translation activities in the LSP context: enhance communication with the teacher and their peers, make students feel more confident, ensure better understanding of the given word, boost creativity given the different versions of possible translations, provide new information from the field students study (Čarapić, 2022).

Researchers (Artar, 2017, Carreres, 2014; Cook, 2007) stress the importance of conducting studies into the usefulness of TILT but also investigating the student's perspective on the use of translation in classroom from different perspectives, taking into account classroom interaction, motivation, eye-tracking. What is more,

learners' attitudes are crucial for foreign language learning, therefore, learners might not benefit from an activity which they consider futile (Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon, 2013). For instance, Artar (2017) confirms the positive effects of translation activities on students' writing skills. Furthermore, various studies into attitudes towards TILT from different educational contexts (Artar, 2017, Čarapić, 2022; Gajšt, 2019; Jubran and Arabiat, 2021; Olivia, 2018, Payne and Contreras, 2019) corroborate LSP students' positive attitudes towards the use of TILT. Some studies examined the impact of different factors on attitudes, that is, the influence of age, proficiency and the study programme. Thus, Artar (2017) investigated three groups (learners, student-teachers, teachers) and concluded the younger the participant the more positive their attitudes towards TILT. She attributed this to a more multilingual environment in which the young live. In terms of proficiency, Payne and Contreras (2019) discovered that lower-level adult language learners seem to be more inclined to use TILT than higher-level learners. Lastly, Janulevičienė and Kavaliauskienė (2015) looked into attitudes of students of five study programs at one Lithuanian university and found that students of Social Work, Sociocultural Education and Law and Customs Activities relied more on translation than students of Psychology and Internet and Communication Management. The students who needed translation more scored lower on Oxford Placement Test than the other group.

1.1. Translation in Language Teaching in Croatia

Translation activities are present in teaching foreign languages in Croatia at all levels, more frequently in primary schools and in higher education (Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon, 2013). Namely, the majority of teachers in higher education use translation (92.5%) and they do it primarily to teach vocabulary (Marinac, Barić, 2018). The communicative approach and task-based learning are the most dominant methodologies, but there is "greater awareness of the role of L1 in teaching foreign languages" (Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon, 2013: 44). However, the use of translation in combination with newer technologies (e.g. subtitles, videos) appears to be quite rare. Thus, it seems that teachers in Croatia use translation in a traditional manner, mostly to check on grammar and vocabulary (Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon, 2013). In terms of students' attitudes towards translation in Croatia, students of Teacher Education (future primary school teachers and English teachers) have a positive attitude towards translation and they would use it moderately in their teaching (Šarić, 2020). Positive attitudes towards translation were confirmed by Zergollen-Miletić (2014) whose respondents' answers reflect generally supportive attitudes towards translation, the influence of translation on language acquisition, responsibility towards their future calling, and the possibility of pursuing translation as their career. Other information about attitudes towards translation can be found in research which primarily focuses on the use of L1 in foreign language teaching. Thus, for example, more than a half of university students in Pula said that Croatian is useful to "practice the use of some phrases and expressions (e.g.) doing translation exercises" (Dujmović 2007: 6). Namely, explaining complex grammar points was number one reason for using Croatian, which is followed by defining new vocabulary items. Similarly, Kovačić and Kirinčić (2011) corroborated that around 35% of students (and teachers) believed that L1 should be used "in written tests (translation tasks)".

2. Research methodology

The present study investigated students' attitudes towards translation in the LSP classroom at institutions of higher education in Croatia, that is, how frequently and in what way these students used translation. Hence, it provides a unique perspective on what LSP students in Croatia think of TILT.

The research questions which guided this study are as follows:

RQ1: Is translation used in the LSP classroom and how?

RQ2: Is translation used in assessment in the LSP classroom and how?

2.1. Participants and context

The sample consists of LSP students from five institutions of higher education, four universities and one Polytechnic. Four of them are situated in Rijeka, and one in Zagreb. A total of 618 students completed the questionnaire (male=48.5%, female=51.5%). In relation to the study programme, almost 40 percent of the respondents study Medical English (39.5%), which is followed by Maritime English (20.7%), Business English (15.2%), English for Agriculture (8.1%), English for Tourism (7%), Occupational Safety English (5.2%), IT English (3.7%), and English for Transport (0.6%).

2.2. Research methods

In order to get a better insight into students' attitudes, a paper-and-pencil questionnaire was administered to LSP students of different study programs. One part of the questionnaire was adapted from Whyatt (2009b) and Laviosa (2014). The questionnaire comprised three sections: general data, attitudes about translation, and viewpoint on translation in assessment. The first part investigated general data about the participants and their experience in learning foreign languages. More precisely, students had to report on their gender, year of study, foreign languages they had studied, number of years they had been studying these languages.

The next part enquired into students' perceptions of translation in the LSP classroom. Specifically, the respondents were asked whether they translate during LSP lessons, how frequently they do it and to what purpose. They, also, had to consider whether they make faster progress by using other methods than translation and answer the open-ended question on methods they consider more efficient than translation. Two open-ended questions asked the respondents what they thought were advantages, that is disadvantages of using translation in the classroom, and the other two explored why they liked or did not like translation activities. Also, four multiple-choice questions elicited about the direction of translation (from mother tongue to a foreign language, vice versa or both), mode of translation (written, oral or both), what they translated (words, phrases, sentences or texts) and the way translation activities were conducted (individually, pairs, groups, whole class). Sixteen Likert-type statements investigated whether they enjoy translation, whether they thought translation was useful, more challenging than other skills, whether they are more aware of cultural, semantic and grammatical similarities or differences. Also, they were asked whether they examine their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary by using translation, whether

they use dictionary more often due to translation and whether they have a clear sense of achievement when they finish translating. The responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree.

The third part looked into the use of translation in assessment, that is, whether students translated in tests, the length of their translations in tests, and the direction of translation they were tested on (from a foreign language to Croatian, from Croatian to a foreign language or both).

3. Results and discussion

This section provides findings divided into four subsections: the use of translation in the LSP classroom, the use of translation in assessment, gender and study programme differences.

3. 1. Teaching and translation activities

In terms of the use of translation, the findings suggested that the overwhelming majority of students (86.4%) translated in the LSP classroom. This corroborates the results by Marinac and Barić (2018) where 92.5% of teachers claimed they used TILT. Almost a third of the respondents (30.7%) who translated in class do it only once in a semester and 14.1% twice per semester. On the other hand, more than a fifth of students (20.3%) do it during every lesson and almost twenty percent (19.3%) of them translate every two lessons. Only 11.9% of LSP students claimed they never use translation in their classrooms.

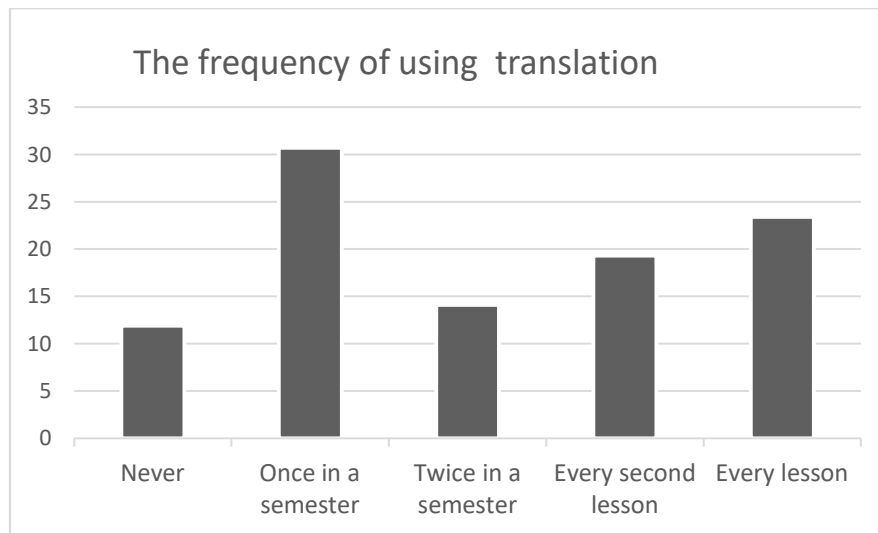


Figure 1: Students' preceptions of the frequency of translation use

Source: Authors' research

When compared to teachers' perceived use of TILT (Marinac, Barić, 2018), the most common answers were "every second lesson" and "every lesson", thus, Croatian students' and teachers' views on frequency of translation were similar.

Furthermore, students were asked to share their general attitudes towards translation, that is, translation activities in class, in particular. It seems they neither agreed nor disagreed with the items *I enjoy translation* ($M=2.96$, $SD=1.236$), that is, *I enjoy translation activities in class* ($M=2.75$, $SD=1.326$). The students seem to be neutral towards translation, which is in accordance with almost 40% of teachers who believed that students do not have a strong opinion on translation (Marinac, Barić 2018). Similarly, they were not sure *if translation is an intellectually challenging activity* ($M=3.34$, $SD=1.236$) and that they had a clear sense of achievement when they finished translating a text ($M=3.40$, $SD=1.316$). On the other hand, Olivia (2018) discovered that a vast majority of students thought translation activities were useful and enjoyable.

In relation to the reasons for using translation, the majority of the participants (58.5%) stated translation was used for *teaching/practicing vocabulary*. Vocabulary was followed by *checking understanding* (36.7%), that is, *help with understanding* (38.3%). Almost thirty percent (29.8%) said it was used to teach them translation skills. The fewest number of students opted for translation used for *practicing reading* (18.2%), *practicing writing* (14.2%) and *teaching/practising grammatical structures* (17.2%). According to Artar (2017), translation activities improve students' writing skills, hence, there is a need to use translation more frequently with the aim of honing students' writing. In reference to the impact of translation on other skills or aspects of language learning, the participants agreed with the statements that connect translation to vocabulary, namely, they agreed they tested their knowledge of vocabulary ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.214$) and that they were becoming more sensitive to nuances in the meaning of words ($M=3.82$, $SD=1.167$), and they used it to determine the meaning of certain words ($M=3.76$, $SD=1.306$). Also, the participants agreed with the item *Translation is a good way to improve your language skills (writing, speaking, reading, listening)* ($M=3.76$, $SD=1.298$). Research corroborated learners' positive attitudes towards TILT, which is in line with other studies conducted in different contexts (Artar 2018; Payne and Contreras 2019; Jubran and Arabiat, 2021; Olivia, 2018).

Interestingly, the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that *Due to translation, I am more sensitive to cultural differences in both languages* ($M=3.44$, $SD=1.304$). Also, the participants were not sure whether they used dictionaries more often when they translated ($M=3.08$, $SD=1.422$). Students' neutral attitudes towards the statements might be attributed to the unfamiliarity with the topic (e.g. cultural differences) and less experience in translation. With regard to when translation was perceived most helpful, a large majority (86.7%) of the respondents found translation most helpful when studying vocabulary. By contrast, only 21.4% of them believed that translation was most helpful when studying grammar. Similarly, other studies (Čarapić, 2022; Gajšt, 2019, Olivia 2018) corroborated positive students' attitudes towards using translation when teaching/learning specialized terminology. Namely, Olivia (2018) revealed that a vast majority of learners thought that translation activities helped them with both grammar and vocabulary. Conversely, only 4% of the participants in her study believed it helped them only when studying grammar.

In reference to the direction of translation, almost a half of the respondents (48.7%) used translation from the mother tongue and vice versa. Interestingly, the other half translated primarily from a foreign language to Croatian, whereas translation from Croatian (mother tongue) to a foreign language was used rarely, only by 3.6% of the respondents. Namely, there is no reason why pedagogical translation should not be bidirectional, however, in practice, we usually talk about translating into a foreign language (Stewart, 2008). In addition, when asked to rate statements about the direction of translation and its usefulness, both statements were rated similarly. Namely the item *Translation from your mother tongue to a foreign language is a useful way of teaching* (4.01) was rated slightly higher than the item *Translation from a foreign language to mother tongue is a useful way of teaching* (3.96). On the other hand, Kavaliauskienė (2009) who discovered that her students regarded translating from their mother tongue into a foreign language more important than vice versa. In terms of the content of translation, the majority claimed that they translated only words (73.8%). Almost a half of them (45.8%) translated phrases and 39.3% of them said they translated sentences in their classroom activities. The texts were the least used, only 33.8% of the participants claimed they translated entire texts. The findings are in line with other studies where Croatian teachers showed preference for translating individual sentences to translating longer paragraphs (Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon 2013).

In relation to instructional methods in which translation activities were used, a large majority of students (70.4%) said they used translation activities individually. Individual work was followed by group work (32.2%) and pair work (25.4%). Whole-class translation seems to be the least popular instructional method, namely, only 14.6% of the respondents claimed to use this method in the LSP classroom.

In terms of the usefulness of different methods in teaching LSP, a vast majority (81.7%) believed that other methods ensured faster progress. Only a minority of students (4.2%) reckoned that translation activities were the best in term of making progress in relation to language learning. Almost 15% of the respondents were not sure what the best method was to improve one's language skills.

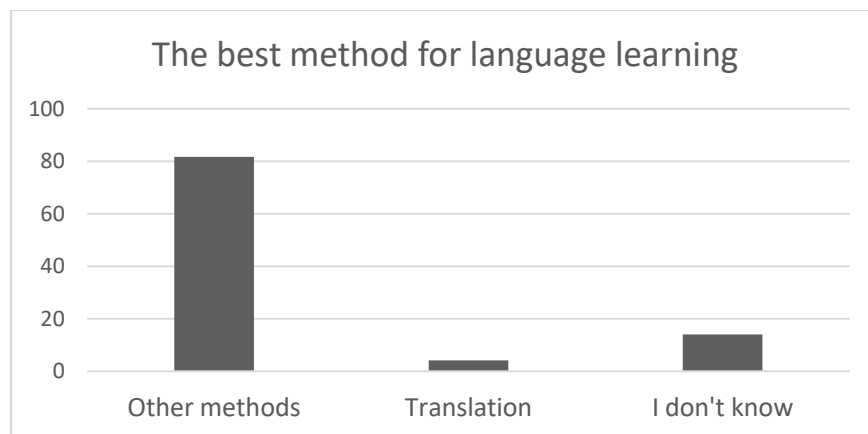


Figure 2: Students' perception of the best methods for language learning
Source: Authors' research

Conversely, Olivia (2018) determined that a large majority of the respondents liked translation activities and thought they were useful in comparison to other methods. Only a minority did not like them or had nothing against them. When asked to compare whether translation was more challenging than writing or speaking, the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with these statements. The participants rated slightly higher the statement that *translation is more challenging than speaking in a foreign language* (M=2.90, SD=1.393) than *translation is more challenging than writing in a foreign language* (M=2.78, SD=1.335). A neutral stance towards the items could indicate lack of practice in one of these skills and, hence, the inability to compare the two.

3.2. Translation and assessment

With regard to using translation in assessment (Table 13), almost a half of the respondents (49.2%) claimed they did not face translation in assessment activities. More than a third of the students (37.4%) stated they translated in tests, whereas 10.4% of the participants were not sure about whether they used translation in assessment. These results are not in line with Marinac and Barić (2018) where 75% of teachers claimed to use translation in assessment.

When asked about what they translated when assessed (Table 14), words (26.4%) and sentences (24.8%) were the most frequently opted for options. These were followed by phrases (12.9%) and texts (12.3%). According to teachers (Marinac, Barić 2018), shorter forms were preferred as well.

In terms of the directionality of translation in assessment (Table 15), more than twenty percent of the respondents (21.5%) held they translated both into a foreign language and vice versa. Thirteen percent of students asserted they translated from a foreign language into Croatian and 12.1% said they translated from Croatian to a foreign language.

3.3. Gender differences

The findings in relation to gender differences indicate that the mean scores of male respondents ranged from 2.82 to 4.03, whereas female respondents rated statements from 2.62 to 3.99. Both groups rated with the lowest score the item *I enjoy translation in class*, while the highest score was given to the item *Translation from your mother tongue to a foreign language is a useful way of teaching*. The t-test results indicated 14 out of 16 higher scores in the male sample. The item *Translation is an intellectually challenging activity* was rated the same by both groups. Only the item *I use translation in order to determine the meaning of certain words* was rated higher by female respondents. As noted in Table 1, a statistical difference was found between male and female students in relation to these four items. Namely, male students seem to be more positive towards translation in language learning. Similarly, Artar (2017) conducted research on students' beliefs towards TILT and discovered that the male learners also had higher mean scores than the female participants and concluded that due to cultural reasons male students could be more open to express their attitudes.

Table 1: The comparison of mean values and the results of the-test regarding gender

Items	Male students		Female students		t-test	p-value
	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)		
Translation from your mother tongue to a foreign language is a useful way of teaching	4.03	1.067	3.99	1.259	-.406	.043*
Translation is a good way to improve your language skills.	3.81	1.213	3.71	1.383	-1.005	.003**
I have a clear sense of achievement when I finish translating a text.	3.41	1.259	3.38	1.377	-.283	.032*
I enjoy translation activities in class.	2.82	1.261	2.62	1.389	-1.268	.008**

Note: values in parentheses are standard deviations; *p<0.05; **P<0.01

Source: Authors' research

3.4. Differences in relation to students' study programs

A one way ANOVA was conducted in order to compare attitudes of students of eight study programs (Tourism, Agriculture, Business, Maritime Studies, Medicine, IT, Occupational Safety, and Transport) towards translation. Namely, the differences in ESP students' need for the use of L1 were confirmed by Janulevičienė and Kavaliauskienė (2015) who also discovered that attitudes towards translation varied depending on the profession and classroom activities.

The mean scores for the item *I enjoy translation* range from 2.71 to 3.38, that is, students of Medicine rated this item the lowest, whereas students of Safety rated this item the highest. However, a statistical difference occurred only between students of Medical English (2.71) and students of Maritime English (3.23). Also, the item *I enjoy translation activities in class* was rated similarly to the first item, namely, the lowest score was given by students of Medicine English (2.26) and the highest score was awarded by students of Safety (3.25). A statistical difference was found between students of Medicine (2.26) and students of Tourism (3.07), Agriculture (3.10), Business (2.87), Maritime (3.22), and Safety (3.25). The differences in attitudes toward TILT could be the result of different factors, such as proficiency and how translation activities are implemented in the classroom. Therefore, students of Medicine English might be more advanced and consider translation less necessary which is in line with Janulevičienė and Kavaliauskienė (2015) and Payne and Conteras (2019) or translation activities could be used in a more traditional manner, thus, students might see them as time-consuming and monotonous (Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon, 2013).

Furthermore, the mean scores for the item *Translation from mother tongue to a foreign language is a useful way of teaching* ranged from 3.48 (Business students)

to 4.5 (Transport students). A statistical difference occurred between students of Business (3.48) and the respondents who studied Tourism (4.35), Agriculture (4.35), Maritime Studies (4.15) and Medicine (4.04). Also, the item *Translation is a good way to improve your language skills (writing, speaking, reading, listening)* received mean scores from (Business) 3.27 to (Agriculture) 4.22. Here, a statistical difference occurred between students of Business (3.27) and Tourism students (4.16) and Business (3.27) and Maritime (4.02) students. Also, the findings indicated a statistically significant difference in relation to the items *When I translate, I test my knowledge of vocabulary* and *When I translate, I test my knowledge of grammar*. The former received the mean scores from 3.41 (Business) to 4.30 (Tourism), whereas the means for the latter ranged from 3.07 (Business) to 4 (Transport). In terms of the item in relation to testing vocabulary, a statistical difference occurred between students of Business (3.27) and Tourism (4.16). Furthermore, a statistically significant difference in relation to testing grammar occurred between Business (3.07) and Maritime students (3.77). It seems that students of Business are neutral and not sure about the usefulness of translating from mother tongue into a foreign language, that is, the impact translation has on the four skills, which might be due to lack of experience in translation or a negative experience in using TILT.

The item *Translation is more challenging than writing* was rated from 2.38 to 3.30. Namely, students of Safety rated this item the lowest, while Maritime English students rated this the highest. The results indicated a statistical difference between students of Business English (2.59) and students of Maritime English (3.30), that is, Maritime English students (3.30) and Medicine English (2.71). Similarly, the item *Translation is more challenging than speaking* was given the mean scores that range from 2.58 (Tourism students) to 3.48 (IT students). A one way ANOVA determined a statistical difference between students of Maritime English (3.31) and Medicine English (3.72). There are different ways how to account for these differences. Namely, it might depend on their classroom experience, but also proficiency, etc. For example, students of Medicine might have less experience in translation, hence, consider this activity more challenging than writing. On the other hand, students of Medicine might be more advanced in terms of language proficiency and, therefore, find writing in English easier than translation.

4. Conclusion

Translation seems to be an inevitable part of the LSP classroom in the Croatian setting. This study but also other research (Dujmović, 2007; Marinac and Barić, 2018; Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon, 2013) indicate that translation activities are used in Croatia, but in a rather traditional way (mostly written and without the use of technology), that is, students claim to translate mostly words and phrases individually. In accordance with Pym, Malmkjaer and Gutierrez-Colon (2013), there is a preference towards translating shorter forms in the Croatian educational system. Interestingly, the frequency of using translation appears to vary greatly, from using translation during every lesson to using no translation at all. This might indicate that translation still represents a contentious issue and teachers approach these activities according to their individual preferences.