

Sharing knowledge without borders: Collaboration between U.S. business and law students and Spanish translation students

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Abstract

Collaboration between technical and professional (TP) writers in English as a second language is important for successful communication. This is evident in legal documents in both English and Spanish, where accuracy and clarity are paramount. However, achieving this is challenging because law students often lack effective writing tools, and translation students may lack the required encyclopedic knowledge. The present paper describes a co-designed exchange project between U.S. students in business and law and students of legal translation at a university in Spain. This paper aims to determine potential improvements in students' encyclopedic and conceptual knowledge of this specialized language and their translation performance after the collaboration intervention. To evaluate these aspects, three textual items were targeted: terminological, nominal and, what we call, substitutional density. Our results indicate that peer collaboration helped Spanish students acquire encyclopedic knowledge in the field and avoid repetitive terms in their translations, leading to greater textual cohesion through the use of general language, synonyms and hypernyms. Other aspects of this peer collaboration as well as follow-up approaches to consolidate the observed effects are needed.

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1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, universities are facing multiple challenges to embrace new instructional models and ways of teaching to keep students engaged. “While many faculty prefer traditional face to face teaching methods others are customizing technologies to their individual pedagogic philosophies” (Commander et al., 2022, p. 2). In this sense, many faculty and teaching groups have embraced virtual exchange (VE) as a learning tool; VE is a pedagogic practice “offering young people ... to interact and collaborate with distant peers within structured educational programs in formal and non-formal contexts” (Helm & Beaven, 2020, p. 1). VE originated in the late 80s as foreign language teaching approach, when instructors saw the benefits of connecting peers for a more genuine experience of communication (O’Dowd, 2017). Nowadays, VE uses technology to facilitate online, collaborative work among students and their peers in other countries, creating an international experience for large groups of students (Commander et al., 2022). Thus, various models of VE have been created and implemented to engage students from different cultures and backgrounds and not only in a foreign language learning environment. The models vary from isolated tasks to an integrated collaborative curriculum; all the models seek to foster faculty and student interaction with peers abroad through co-taught multicultural online and blended learning environments, emphasizing experiential student collaboration.

One of the various VE models has been connecting students from different cultures, languages, and disciplines worldwide for several years now: the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project (TAPP). Within the TAPP framework, a group of European and U.S. university students of different disciplines collaborate to produce efficient communication under their instructor’s guidance and support.

TAPP bridges the gap between professional communication and scientific translators. In our digitally-driven era, international professionals are increasingly faced with challenges of communicating with non-native languages in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Whether they work with professional translators or generate their own communication, such multilingual engagement demands international professionals the linguistic and rhetorical knowledge to communicate effectively. In this sense, Maylath et al. (2015) claim that “more research and dialogue between

professionals and translators are needed to fully grasp the implications and commonalities in all areas of multilingual professional communication” (p. 4).

Professional translators and TP writers search for tools to help them carry out their tasks successfully. Commercially available tools and aids are not as popular or widely used as one might expect. One contributing factor is that users perceive these tools as not sufficiently addressing their needs (Rabadán Álvarez, 2008), leading to feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. Consequently, professional translators and writers often resort to crafting their own research protocols, tailored strategies, and solutions to meet market requirements (Moreno-Pérez & López-Arroyo, 2021). Among the solutions to avoid this feeling of isolation and offer successful communication, the collaboration between professionals and language mediators in English as a second language seems to be a promising option.

Language mediators need to know the accurate meaning of concepts, their use, and their function and, on the other hand, professionals need to master the strategies to communicate effectively (Maylath, 2018). This is the case of legal documents in English and Spanish, where the need to be accurate and unambiguous must prevail; however, this task is not easy to achieve since students of law sometimes lack the tools for writing effectively, while translation students lack the necessary encyclopedic knowledge. However, despite the increased globalization of relationships and business and the need for language mediation, there have not been many attempts to build bridges; there are and have been many publications and conferences claiming to build bridges among the disciplines as well as collaborative networks, but nothing has been institutionalized yet (St. Amant, 2019). The present paper describes a VE collaborative project between U.S. students in business and law and students of legal and business translation at a University in Spain. This paper is focused on Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) translation, especially in the improvement of legal translation students show when participating in VE activities. The paper tries to identify potential improvements in students’ encyclopedic knowledge and translation performance after the collaborative task with technical students; to do that, three textual items were targeted for evaluation: terminological, nominal, and substitutional density. The fact that the legal language is pervaded by specialized terms, nominalizations, and complex noun groups justifies the choice of these items as indicators of translation performance, even though, by no means, are they exclusive of other possible aspects of translation assessment.

2. Aim and contextualization

2.1. Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project

Two main models of VE can be distinguished: “ready-made” or “co-designed” exchanges (Helm & Beaven, 2020, p. 3). The former is developed by institutions and integrated in the curricula and students may be awarded recognition for their participation; on the other hand, co-designed exchanges are designed collaboratively by instructors so that students in partner classes interact and collaborate with one another in order to meet learning objectives (Helm & Beaver, 2020). Both models enhance language skills and promote the development of intercultural communicative competence. In this line, Beecroft & Bauer (2022) point out that telecollaboration, among peers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, creates a space that is plurilingual and pluricultural and allows participants to collaborate on a common product, in this case, a translation project. In the same line, eTandem learning fosters virtual exchange experiences and prioritizes horizontal language learning through linguistic sharing, leading to the acquisition of a robust set of foreign language skills and cultural competencies (Postlewate & Roesler, 2002).

TAPP⁴ is the only network that we are aware of with a collaboration network on a regular basis. TAPP is a learning-by-doing network that started back in 1999 between Bruce Maylath, from the University of North Dakota, a professor in engineering technical writing and Sonia Vandepitte, a professor of translation in Belgium. In 2021, 41 universities in 19 different countries in five continents have joined this collaboration group and use this approach in their courses every year.

The network of partners participating in the Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project develops experimental and collaborative tasks engaging students in both synchronous and asynchronous activities in different countries fostering the exchange of knowledge, experience and perspectives. In doing so, students become aware of the diversity of the world community in which their documents travel. Peer collaboration allows students to share knowledge and organize the teamwork without the pressure of being questioned by the instructors; apart from that, and as reported by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (2019), anxiety, due to the student’s competence in the foreign language, is reduced as the instructor is not present.

4. <https://www.uhd.edu/academics/humanities/about/departments/english/the-trans-atlantic-and-pacific-project.aspx>

Humbley et al. (2005) report the following benefits of this collaboration: “For students learning TP Writing in an international context ... 1. They learn where their texts are opaque or ambiguous. 2. They become aware of cultural differences. 3. In some cases, they form international acquaintances and friendships” (p. 578). Participants in our study exchanged concepts, methods, and best practices to establish connections between business and legal professional writing and translation strategies. Business and legal writers learnt about translation strategies that can be used to render ideas and words that are rooted in the source culture. Similarly, translators learnt to appreciate the importance of accessibility, usability, user experience, encyclopedic knowledge, information design, and content management, just to mention some of the key responsibilities of technical writers.

The present TAPP project tried to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any improvement in students’ language and translation performance after the collaboration intervention?
2. Is there any improvement in legal and business encyclopedic and conceptual knowledge of translation students’ when collaborating with subject matter students?

2.2. Our project

We developed a co-designed exchange, also known as a grassroots project, since they are generally developed in collaboration by partnering educators around a specific theme, disciplinary area, or set of competencies (Hoskins & Reynolds, 2020). Seven students of legal and business translation in the English studies degree at a Spanish university and 13 U.S. students of TPW in business and law contracts, property, and torts participated in the study. Our TAPP/VE project was part of the course; TAPP activity was mandatory for all the students in the Spanish university enrolled in the course although that was not the case for the U.S. students. The TAPP activity was part of the final mark and it occurred asynchronously with trained educators implementing a single project-based learning task, peer-reviewed, to promote cooperative learning. Students engaged in sustained communication over weeks to build trust with each other and understanding of different cultures.

In our case, the U.S. students e-mailed or used some of the video conference software of their choice to give their instructions for translation to the mediation/translation students. These students tried their hand at translating a text, noted where they were confused about the meaning or accuracy, and then sent their questions to the U.S. students. With the U.S. students’ clarifications, the translation students completed their translations and emailed them back to the U.S. students, so they could see the final result. U.S. students had to define concepts accurately and Spanish students guided and

helped them with the entry writing; in this sense, Spanish students acquired encyclopedic knowledge in the field, while U.S. students learnt how to define concepts properly. All the process was carried out without the intervention of the instructors except for those cases in which the students were unable to resolve the problem.

The students at the Spanish university were not all native speakers of Spanish; there were people from different nationalities (French, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish) but majoring in English studies and enrolled in the Business and Law Specialized Translation Course. All U.S. students were native speakers of English and the most common majors among them were Business Administration and Global Business, Sport Management and Political Science.

One of the main differences with other TAPP partnerships is the nature of the courses involved. Legal language and law are culturally bound; in this sense, translating legal documents does not only imply translating the language but also acquiring encyclopedic knowledge of the source and target cultures which might vary tremendously. Another substantial difference is the fact that some students at the Spanish university came from different countries and had different backgrounds; that disparity made the writing and the acquisition of translation skills really challenging for both groups.

Once the professional and translation students were paired, they discussed the content and structure of the essays online by exchanging their texts and comments and finally submitted the modified final versions of their own texts.

3. Legal language features and its implication for translation purposes

Legal language shows certain features at lexical, grammatical, and syntactical levels that directly affect the translation process. According to [Alcaraz-Varó and Hughes \(2002\)](#), legal English main features are produced at a syntactical level. Among the main grammatical and syntactical features of legal English we can highlight:

- Lexical repetition, which contributes to the lexical cohesion of the discourse. Cohesion is a fundamental element in translation quality as it deals with discourse connection. [Halliday and Hasan's \(1976\)](#) seminal work describes the different types of cohesion, namely substitution, ellipsis, reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesion is achieved by means of word repetition and the above-mentioned sense relations, and it “refers to the links between content

words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) which are used in subsequent segments of discourse” (Renkema, 2004, p. 105).

- Nominal substitution is the grammatical relation in which one item is replaced by another in terms of the wording (Halliday and Hasan, 1976).
- Nominalizations consist of the formation of a noun from a verb or an adjective. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) describe nominalization more generally as any element or group that can function as a noun or a noun group in the clause. Nominalizations make terminological density higher, contribute to the formal and impersonal register of legal texts and are helpful in preventing ambiguity. They contribute to the attenuation of the personal element, emphasizing the action or concept itself rather than the individual performing it. This depersonalization is achieved using nominalized subjects, which replace personal pronouns or specific agents, thereby enhancing the objectivity and formality of the discourse.

These features occur both in legal English and Spanish; however, their distribution and use might be slightly different. For instance, although repetition occurs in both languages, due to its idiosyncrasy, the Spanish legal language uses more frequently the cohesive device of substitution by pronouns or synonyms rather than repetition.

At a lexical or terminological level, legal language, as every LSP, has certain new concepts that need to be formalized. This representation is done by three different means: terms, symbols, and appellations (ISO 704 and 1087-1); terms are defined as the verbal designations of a general concept in a special language (ISO 704, 2009). Terms and concepts present different kinds of relations, being the terminological ones those “between terms viewed as lexical units and the meaning they convey” (L’Homme, 2020, p. 155). Term relations are essential to achieve cohesion and more specifically lexical cohesion.

There is a clear and direct relationship between conceptual density and terminological density in a text: a high number of terms in a text denotes a high number of concepts, and vice versa; the understanding of concepts and their most frequent designations (terms) are key elements not only in the translation process but also in assessing translation quality. Most terms belong to the grammatical category of nouns; therefore, the terminological density of a text is also directly related to the nominal density: the higher the terminological density, the higher the nominal density as terms contain a minimum of one gram. It must be pointed out that a high nominal density does not necessarily imply a high terminological density as there are words that do not represent a general concept in a special language or subject field.

Specifically, one of the most problematic aspects in the management of concepts and terms is phraseology. The phraseology of specialized languages is culturally bound and may vary from one language to another. That is why not only understanding concepts but also mastering their usage is one of the main problems students of translation and LSP face. This is especially relevant because the use of phraseology in context is essential to produce technically appropriate texts in the source as well as in the target language. In this sense, collaboration among peers is essential to overcome these issues. The concepts and their use are explained by TP writing students to translation and LSP students; once the concepts have been understood, the translation and LSP students show how to produce acceptable texts in terms of language.

Despite the unquestionable importance of linguistic features, it should be stated that translation is not just a process of language equivalents, but of functional equivalents; it is not just a linguistic but a communicative process. [Román-Mínguez \(2009\)](#) states that every translator and student of translation, prior to translating the text, must understand the source text and have acquired textual, documental, terminological, thematic, and translation competence as well as the ability to write in the target language, producing the same communicative function. However, as stated above, translation students lack the encyclopedic knowledge in the field that professionals acquire in their training. In this sense, thematic competence or encyclopedic knowledge and translation are interwoven in legal translation since the text to be translated needs some documental searches of the unknown concepts; through these searches, not only encyclopedic but terminological and stylistic knowledge is acquired and rendered in the target text. Consequently, every time a text is translated, global knowledge of the content of the text increases. This acquisition can be carried out in different ways, by reading, asking professionals, searching for information and by collaborating with other professionals and/or students of technical fields, which is the strategy explored in this study.

4. Project task

To find out if the benefits of the TAPP project were accomplished in the legal and business translation course, two tasks carried out by the same students were compared. The first one is a warm-up task and will be referred to as the ‘pre-intervention task’. It was carried out exclusively by students from the Spanish university. The task consisted of a translation of legal texts selected by the students, ranging from writs of summons to statements of claim, contracts of employment, syllabi, or letters of demand. Students used the resources and tools available to them within the course to translate these texts from English into Spanish. This task was a “control task” in the sense that it helped us

determine whether the TAPP or “experimental” task truly had a significant effect on the learning process of both types of students.

The second task will be referred to as the ‘TAPP intervention’. It was carried out by the same translation students but, in this case, they worked along with the U.S. students, who provided terminological and conceptual support for their translation from English into Spanish. In the TAPP intervention, source texts (ST) were chosen by students from a pre-established selection of fragments from a lawsuit. The TAPP intervention consisted of several activities; first, there were some lexical, grammatical, and semantic exercises related to the ST aimed at preparing students for the actual exchange with their U.S. peers: lexical exercises required students to find Latinisms and doublets, among others, in their selected source text and to find an equivalent for them. Then, to put their focus on the syntactic and grammatical peculiarities of legal language, they were also asked to find constructions that departed from standard English (see Appendix 1). Finally, some meaning-oriented exercises required students to assess their ability to comprehend the significance of those terms (such as *clean hands doctrine* or *summary judgment*) without reference tools, from the context, and to check if the legal concepts behind them existed in the Spanish legal system. If so, they sent these concepts to U.S. students who had to offer a dictionary definition. Spanish students guided their peers in the process and taught them how to define accurately.

This step for Spanish students aimed to reproduce the first stage of the translation process, i.e., the pre-writing stage, in which translators must analyze the text to check if they understood it properly, both at linguistic and conceptual levels, to find and classify any possible translation problem that should be managed during the writing stage (Moreno-Pérez, 2017). This analysis allows for evaluating the best tool to solve these issues, such as resorting to the most adequate documentation resource, inquiring about information from a student or an expert in the field; engaging experts, including linguistic experts, translation experts, and subject matter experts leads to enhanced translation quality and equivalence (Ninsiana, 2014; Sumathipala & Murray, 2000). This familiarization with the special characteristics of the source text is not only necessary for translators to produce an acceptable translation but also to make the process quicker and easier, thus more efficient.

To this end, once these exercises were completed, the collaboration exchange moved to reading comprehension exercises where both groups of students were asked to answer questions such as “Who filed the lawsuit and why?”, “Which party wins?” or “What is the legal standard of abuse of discretion?” (see Appendix 1 for the exercises students had to carry out).

After these warmup activities or exercises, students had to complete the translation task, the outcomes of which are the focus of this study. To begin with, U.S. students gave students in Spain some instructions and advice on how to interpret the text. Then, translation students tried to translate it, taking notes of any doubt they may have had during the process, and sent that annotated version to the U.S. students. U.S. students examined the preliminary target text (TT) and translation students' doubts and sent them the answers to their questions together with a simplified version of the source text (ST), which helped them better comprehend the text and the legal concepts involved. Finally, translation students made use of those explanations and the simplified ST to compose a negotiated TT, which they sent back to the U.S. students.

5. Methods

As stated above, the purpose of this intervention is to improve translation students' conceptual knowledge of the field of law and translation performance. Hence, to identify potential improvements in students' translation performance and in their encyclopedic knowledge of the discipline after the TAPP intervention, among the different ways to assess them, three textual items were targeted for evaluation: terminological, nominal, and substitutional density, due to the intrinsic relation of these aspects with the defining features of legal language. These three elements have the advantage that they are present in the STs and TTs of the pre-intervention and TAPP intervention tasks and can be objectively identified and quantified. Thus, students' focus was on the translation activities of the TAPP intervention task and not on other possible exercises that are commonly used to assess understanding of specialized knowledge such as quizzes, explaining the meaning of terms or providing synonyms or antonyms, which are widely used in the context of LSP and LSP translation.

The proportion of content words to the total number of words is the lexical density of a text (Johansson, 2009), and from this definition we can infer that nominal and terminological densities are the proportion of nouns and the proportion of terms to the total number of words respectively, ratios that we have used to assess translation performance of learners in their translation tasks. The methodology followed to determine terminological density was based on the extraction of candidate terms using the automatic term extractor *TermoStat* (Drouin, 2003). The software's output was manually examined to eliminate noise, i.e., words that the software mistakenly selected as terms, such as 'holiday', so that the output was cleaned of noise to obtain a list of legal terms.

Then, the terms per ST and TT of each student were quantified, and the data was made comparable using a normalization base of 100, as seen below.

$$\text{Terminological density} = \frac{\text{Total number of terms} \cdot 100}{\text{Total number of words}}$$

Then, nominal density was obtained by running the ST and TT through TagAnt (Anthony, 2015), an automatic POS tagger that allows tagging texts in different languages, including English and Spanish. Although the program tagged all the words contained in the texts, only the tags that belonged to nouns were selected. In the case of the English ST, the tag identifying nouns is 'NN', and, for the Spanish TT, 'NC'. Although the program is highly accurate in tagging, results were manually revised to avoid errors in the results.

Then, similarly to the terminological density, nominal density was calculated against the total number of words of both the ST and TT of each student, as seen below.

$$\text{Nominal density} = \frac{\text{Total number of nouns} \cdot 100}{\text{Total number of words}}$$

On the one hand, nominal and terminological density may be reduced when students use reference words (personal pronouns, demonstratives, and comparative constructions), nominal substitution (one, ones) or ellipsis to achieve cohesion. On the other hand, the inclusion of nominalizations could balance this reduction. This textual aspect was studied similarly as terminology and nouns: the instances of the substitutor items were identified and normalized on a base 100 to obtain a 'substitutional density'.

As previously stated, grammatical substitution was considered because its use could possibly decrease terminological and nominal density. Therefore, a set of forms that are susceptible to grammatical substitution were collected in both languages. On the one hand, in English, Borja Albi (2000) and Halliday and Hasan (1976) were examined to find out a list of potential elements used as referential devices in general and legal English. On the other hand, the *Nueva Gramática* (RAE) was studied to find a parallel list in Spanish. This resulted in the following set of targets to be queried in our texts (Table 1).

Table 1. Substitutional elements

Substitution targets (EN)		Substitution targets (ES)		
such	so	todo/a(s)	tanto/a(s)	eso/a(s)
said	this	alguno/a(s)	cualquier	aquello/a(s)
aforesaid	these	ninguno/a(s)	cualquiera	dicho/a(s)
aforementioned	that	ambos/as	cualesquiera	mencionado/a(s)
one	those	tal/es	esto/a(s)	referido/a(s)
ones	who			
same	whom			
do/does/did				

A search list in .txt format was made from each language set to systematize the search for grammatical substitution instances in the texts. Then, the lists were queried in both source and target texts using AntConc (Anthony, 2020), a software to manage a corpus of texts. Because AntConc allows for retrieval in the form of Key Words in Context (KWIC), we were able to efficiently discard those instances where the items above did not function as substitutes. For instance, *those* may function either as a head phrase or as determiner: “The Clines appeal from those judgments” vs. “depositions, documents, electronically stored information, affidavits or declarations, stipulations (including those made for purposes of the motion only)”. In this sense, only instances like the latter were of relevance for this study, so we were able to accurately identify substitutional uses of those items by manually revising the software’s output.

Once the number of grammatical substitution instances was determined according to the number of occurrences of items above, the rate of substitution per text was calculated similarly as the terminological and nominal densities.

$$\text{Substitutional density} = \frac{\text{Total number of substitutional items} \cdot 100}{\text{Total number of words}}$$

Terminological, nominal, and substitutional density were analyzed in both, the pre-intervention task and the TAPP intervention, to contrast the before and after of the students’ performance in the three items involved, both in respect of their improvements on translation performance and encyclopedic knowledge. The first two items could be considered pure linguistic characteristics of legal language; however, substitutional density is a specific drafting technique used in this field which entails a

deeper understanding of the context of the text and the outcome expected by the target discourse community. That being so, an increase in substitutional density coupled with a decrease in terminological and nominal density would suggest that students have improved their translation performance and encyclopedic knowledge, as they prove to understand the meaning of the specialized discourse and are able to mimic the writing techniques of the genre. On the contrary, reverse trends would not allow researchers to judge the improvement of their skills, as there was no possibility of finding out whether students decided to keep as close as possible to the ST on purpose, or they were just not able to choose a different drafting strategy. These results are shown and analyzed in the following section.

6. Results

The normalized data for the terminological, nominal, and substitutional density were compared from ST to TT; but most importantly, from the pre-intervention task to the TAPP intervention. [Table 2](#) shows the mean values for the seven Spanish translation students.

Table 2. Mean values of methodological elements analyzed

	Terminological density (%)		Nominal density (%)		Substitutional density (%)	
	Source	Target	Source	Target	Source	Target
Pre-intervention	5.01	5.46	20.68	22.67	0.077	0.023
TAPP intervention	10.05	9.30	21.85	24.14	0.048	0.169

The comparison of source text and target text results for pre-intervention and TAPP intervention is presented in [Table 2](#). The data suggests that the TAPP intervention task was more difficult than the pre-intervention task, at least from the terminological point of view. This is due to the fact that as students improve their translation skills, tasks become more complex. As the TAPP intervention task was scheduled at the end of the semester, it presented the highest level of difficulty. The interesting question is to compare the evolution of STs and TTs in the pre-intervention and TAPP intervention tasks regarding these three elements, rather than the differences between the two tasks. Pre-intervention TTs show higher terminological and nominal densities, while substitutional density was lower than their corresponding STs. After the TAPP collaborative intervention, nominal and substitutional densities increased in the TTs, but the terminological density decreased.

As stated above, our study aimed to investigate whether collaboration with subject matter students improves the language and translation performance of translation students and whether collaboration intervention can improve the legal and business encyclopedic and conceptual knowledge of translation students.

7. Discussion

7.1. Improvements on translation performance

As regards translation performance, results show that, while terminological density in students' TTs decreased with respect to the STs after the TAPP intervention, nominal density increased. At the same time, substitution was employed only slightly more in the TAPP intervention than before. The fact that students used fewer terms, but more nouns ruled out the possibility of terms having been substituted grammatically: in such cases, nominal density would have decreased or substitutional density would have increased accordingly to terminological density's decrease. These results could indicate that terms have been substituted by other nouns which were not terms, i.e., by general language words. In this case, it cannot be stated that students' translation performance has improved according to these specific indicators.

However, we must consider the higher difficulty of the TAPP intervention task concerning the pre-intervention task: while the pre-intervention task consisted of a translation assignment in which students should also contextualize the text and outline the main conceptual obstacles they found, the TAPP intervention translation task required them not only to translate an excerpt but also to complete a series of lexical and syntactic exercises, as well as a reading comprehension and an adaptation exercise. In addition, students were not completely free to choose their ST as in the pre-intervention task, and those pre-selected for them were of higher linguistic and conceptual complexity. In the case of the TAPP intervention task, translation students also needed to establish and maintain productive coordination with their U.S. counterparts in a time-consuming communication process without which they could not complete the task. This was further complicated by the different time zones in which U.S. and Spanish students live. Also, the four-week TAPP task required a proportionally greater weekly workload than the less demanding three-week pre-intervention task, and it was scheduled not at the beginning of the academic year, as the pre-intervention task, but at a more advanced point where students already had a heavier workload from their courses. Considering all these factors, it appears that there is a slight improvement in students' translation performance in the TAPP task after the telecollaboration exchange with U.S. students, compared to the pre-TAPP

translation task. This improvement was observed after measuring the impact on the quality of translations, the development of professional behavior, and the meaningful interactions during the translation task. These results are consistent with Postlewaite and Roesler's (2022) findings of improvement in linguistic competencies, although they worked with a different language pair and their task involved a less specialized genre than ours: a social science book review versus a lawsuit.

7.2. Improvements in encyclopedic knowledge

As regards encyclopedic knowledge, despite the limitations mentioned above, Table 2 shows an increase in nominal and substitutional densities and a decrease in terminological density in the translated texts after the TAPP intervention, which can also be indicative of a positive impact of the intervention: while an improvement in students' translation performance was sought in this project, so was an increase of their encyclopedic knowledge of the specialized field of law. In this sense, the fact that students were able to transmit a specialized-language message using general language seems to be proof of them understanding the obscure and ambiguous concepts that their counterparts from the United States help them comprehend. Particularly influential in this aspect may have been the adaptation task preceding the translation task, where U.S. students simplified a source text for Spanish translation students so that they could fully grasp the meaning and legal concepts involved, even though Spanish students were required to translate the original ST and not the U.S. students' simplified version, hence, they deal with the same text and legal genre. Thus, for example, U.S. students used simplified versions such as 'reply to the motion' and 'reply to the claim' instead of 'respond to the motion', which Spanish students translated as 'responder a la moción'.

Spanish translation students may have attributed more relevance to understandability than accuracy in their translations. Students were able to reproduce the message, only that they did not always use the conventional terminology of the field in the context of the task: instead of doing a legal translation, they adapted, simplified, or even explained some terms of the source text. For instance, the term 'genuine dispute' was translated as 'conflicto fundamentado', which is a brief explanation of the Spanish equivalent term 'controversia legítima'. It should be noted that Spanish students did not simplify other elements of the genre, such as rhetorical structure or syntax, although these elements are not the subject of the present study. Still, even though this is not what a law translator is expected to do, it is indicative of students having assimilated the legal concepts required to know in relation to the law disciplines. This means that students have understood the text and have acquired the thematic encyclopedic knowledge necessary to make an appropriate translation in terms of quality and acceptance by the target discourse community, as is shown in the following example where U.S. students explained to Spanish students the meaning and extent of U.S. codes and abbreviations

expressed in the source text and that made the communicative function prevail over the legal translation:

Young v. Weaver, 883 So. 2d 234, 236-37 (Ala. Civ. App. 2003) -> esta citación se puede encontrar en el volumen 883 de la segunda entrega del caso en cuestión en las páginas 234, 236-37 del Southern Reporter (caso resuelto por el Tribunal de Apelación de Alabama en 2003). [this citation can be found in volume 883 of the second series of the case in question on pages 234, 236-37 of the Southern Reporter (case resolved by the Alabama Court of Appeals in 2003)].

In this regard, we would like to point out that the ability to convey meaning by simplifying legalese is, in fact, a worldwide trend in legal writing nowadays, exemplified by the [Plain English Campaign](#) in the UK, the [Plain Language Action and Information Network](#) in the United States or the creation by the Spanish Government of a *Comisión para la Modernización del Lenguaje Jurídico*⁵ (Committee for the Modernization of Legal Language). As a consequence, this skill practiced by Spanish students in order to clarify meaning adds a much-valued asset to their professional abilities. This ability was developed through the VE collaborative task.

Thus, Spanish students were able to understand the meaning of the English terms which, according to [Maylath \(2018\)](#), is essential for language professionals such as translators. [Postlewaite and Roesler \(2022\)](#) also found that these virtual collaborative tasks develop the skills required for effective translation, including the transfer of meaning which involves, in our project, legal encyclopedic knowledge.

8. Conclusions

Our study aimed to determine whether VE collaboration with subject matter students can improve the language and translation performance of translation students, and whether the same virtual collaboration intervention can improve the legal and business encyclopedic and conceptual knowledge of translation students. The normalized data for the terminological, nominal, and substitutional density were compared from source to target texts but most importantly, from the pre-intervention

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task to the TAPP intervention. Pre-intervention target texts show higher terminological and nominal densities and lower substitutional densities than their corresponding source texts. After the TAPP collaborative intervention, nominal and substitutional densities increased in the target texts, but the terminological density decreased.

Our findings suggest that there was a general improvement in students' overall translation performance after the virtual collaboration exchange had taken place with U.S. students with respect to the pre-TAPP translation task, more remarkable considering that the second task was significantly more difficult. They are also indicative of a positive impact of the TAPP intervention in terms of translation students' encyclopedic knowledge of the specialized field of law. Participants in general not only acquired the expected competencies in their respective fields, but also other interdisciplinary competencies such as communication skills, teamwork and collaboration, adaptability when working with people from different backgrounds, cultural competence, and digital literacy, which perhaps they might not have the opportunity to acquire actively. The small number of participants in the study means that our results should be interpreted with caution.

VE collaboration among future professionals and language mediators or translators is not only an innovative, student-centered learning method, but has also proved to be a fruitful alliance in many aspects:

- It implies a new way of acquiring knowledge by doing and, at the same time, increases interdisciplinary teamwork and leadership;
- Participants need to work together and offer the rest of the team the knowledge they have acquired in their respective fields to be able to carry out the task successfully;
- Offering encyclopedic knowledge and receiving linguistic knowledge in different fields make participants acquire a broader picture of the field and, as a consequence, they feel more secure when developing the tasks they have to carry out;
- Teamwork needs a leader to organize and supervise the development of the task.

In this sense, this type of collaborative initiative prepares students for their future careers and for the profile demanded by some companies since it is not only a task, but also a working method.

Based on our results, we can highlight how international collaboration can be used as a tool to improve translation outcomes at university level. By working together with subject matter experts, translation students can gain a deeper understanding of legal and business concepts which will help them to produce more accurate translations in the future. Thus, the internationalization of university

studies in general (curricula and courses) is essential to prepare students for a globalized world; this is especially important in translation studies due to their interdisciplinary nature that encompasses different languages and cultures. Participants also obtain a view of the diversity not only socially but also in the way of learning, as they are in touch with international peers who are exposed to other methods of learning and other ways of living.

Finally, our results show that some of the activities did not obtain the expected results and need to be redefined in future tasks. The quality in the translations did not increase as much as expected, either because of the design of the task or the methods it was measured with. In this sense, a follow-up on the students' acquisition of encyclopedic knowledge, and thematic and translation competencies need to be carried out. Future tasks using this type of methodology should include a higher number of participants and other methods of evaluation, as well as the inclusion of a control group to confirm or refute the findings.

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Appendix 1. Task

TAPP. US and Spanish University Exchange Experience

a. LEXICAL ACTIVITIES

1. Identify, at least, three Latinisms in the texts and give the English and Spanish equivalent
2. Identify, at least, three doublets or triplets in the text
3. Identify typical grammatical and syntactical English legal features

b. MEANING ACTIVITIES

1. Without the help of a dictionary, do you understand the following terms found in the text?
 - a. Clean hands doctrine
 - b. Injunctive relief
 - c. Equity
 - d. Real estate property
 - e. Execute
 - f. Moving/nonmoving party
 - g. Summary judgment
 - h. Harass
 - i. Circuit Court
2. Ask your NDU partner to explain them to you:
 - a. Do they exist in the Spanish legal system?
 - b. If so, where and how are they used?
3. Work with your NDU group to:
 - a. Understand the terms
 - b. Give a definition of the term
 - c. Set up a terminological record with the definition and examples of use, field and subfield and the Spanish equivalent
4. With the help of your NDU group define the doublets and triplets you found in the texts and set up the differences of the lexical units in meaning, if any. Do they have an equivalent in Spanish? If so, write it down, if not give a translation into Spanish for them

c. COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Text 1

- a. Who filed the lawsuit and why?
- b. What is a Motion for Summary Judgment?
- c. Which party wins?

Text 2

- a. What is an “injunctive relief”?
- b. What is “*ore tenus* evidence”?
- c. What is the legal standard of “abuse of discretion”?
- d. TRANSLATION ACTIVITIES
 - a. Translate a fragment of approximately 350 words of the original text (*Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 1986)
 - b. Ask you NDU partner to ease that fragment of the text and translate the “new” version
 - c. Are there any differences in meaning? (Only an example of the text is provided below)

Example

The party asking for summary judgment “always bears the initial responsibility of informing the district court of the basis for its motion,” relying on submissions “which it believes demonstrate the absence of a genuine issue of material fact.” *Id.* at 323. Once the moving party has met its burden, the nonmoving party must “go beyond the pleadings” and show that there is a genuine issue for trial. *Id.* at 324.

Both the party “asserting that a fact cannot be,” and [**3] a party asserting that a fact is genuinely disputed, must support their assertions by “citing to particular parts of materials in the record,” or by “showing that the materials cited do not establish the absence or presence of a genuine dispute, or that an adverse party cannot produce admissible evidence to support the fact.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c)(1)(A), (B). Acceptable materials under Rule 56(c)(1)(A) include “depositions, documents, electronically stored information, affidavits or declarations, stipulations (including those made for purposes of the motion only), admissions, interrogatory answers, or other materials.”

To avoid summary judgment, the nonmoving party “must do more than show that there is some metaphysical doubt as to the material facts.” *Matsushita Elec. Indus. Co. v. Zenith Radio Corp.*, 475 U.S. 574, 586, 106 S. Ct. 1348, 89 L. Ed. 2d 538 (1986). On the other hand, the evidence of the nonmovant must be believed and all justifiable inferences must be drawn in its favor. See *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby*, 477 U.S. 242, 255, 106 S. Ct. 2505, 91 L. Ed. 2d 202 (1986).

After the nonmoving party has responded to the motion for summary judgment, the court shall grant summary judgment if the movant shows that there is no genuine dispute as to any material [**4] fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(a).

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Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986). <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/477/317/>