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# L2 CHINESE-TO-SPANISH PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION IN CHINA: A STUDY BASED ON JOB ADVERT AND SURVEY ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

L2 translation has a long history in China. Following economic reforms in the late 1970s, the country's government encouraged translation into foreign languages in specialized fields. Nonetheless, there are very few studies of L2 translation in China, and fewer still of specialized L2 translation. This article presents a descriptive study of L2 professional translation in China's translation market, based on data from two sources: (1) job adverts for Chinese-to-Spanish translators; and (2) a survey of translation companies that work with Spanish in China. The results show that there is a large volume of L2 Chinese-to-Spanish translation, encompassing a wide variety of areas of specialization, a key one of which is scientific and technical translation.

**Keywords:** *L2 translation; scientific and technical translation; professional translation; Chinese-to-Spanish translation; survey-based study.*

## INTRODUCTION

Against a backdrop of economic globalization and growing demand for international communication, the global translation industry has experienced sustained growth in recent years. According to Common Sense Advisory Research (2021), the industry's production value reached between US\$51.6 billion and US\$52.9 billion by 2021, with forecasts predicting further expansion to figures between approximately US\$54.8 billion and US\$57.7 billion in 2022.

China has mirrored this trend. According to the Translators Association of China (TAC), the total value of the production of the country's translation industry in 2015 was CN¥28.22 billion (equivalent to US\$3.975 billion) in 2015 (TAC 2016). Since then, however, China's entire language services industry has experienced rapid, continuous development. Its production value was reported as CN¥55.448 billion (approximately US\$7.799 billion) in 2021 (TAC 2022), exceeding CN¥50 billion in a single year for the first time, and went on to reach CN¥70.86 billion (equivalent to US\$9.98 billion) in 2023 (TAC 2024). As an important part of the language services industry, the translation sector is growing fast in China.

The increase in the production value of China's translation industry is related to the demand in the translation market, which has also grown substantially. In 2011, there were 29,372 translation companies in the country; in 2012 alone, 18,778 new ones were launched (TAC 2012). By 2019, according to TAC (2019), there were a total of 369,935 companies offering language and translation services. TAC's survey of companies offering translation services at that time found that 41% offered translations from Chinese to foreign languages, 43% from foreign languages to Chinese, and 16% between two foreign languages; the most translated languages were English, French, Japanese, German and Russian. By 2021, as TAC (2022) later reported, the number of companies offering language services had risen to 423,547, an increase of 14.5% compared to 2019. Those companies were mainly concentrated in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong, and the languages they translated most frequently in 2021 were Arabic, Russian, German, English, Belarusian and French. TAC (2022) also reported a shift in the most in-demand sectors, from the legal, chemical energy and mechanical engineering sectors in 2015 to those of education and training (41.1%),

information technology (40.8%) and certain areas of legal practice (38.8%) in 2021.

With the expansion of the Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative, by 2019 China was cooperating with 136 countries, involving more than 100 languages. Between 2018 and 2019, 84.7% of the Chinese language services industry companies surveyed by TAC (2019) had business relationships with some of those 136 countries. In its 2022 report, TAC observed that the number of companies had continued to rise and that the most used languages were English, French, Japanese, German, Russian and Spanish. Despite not being the most translated language, Spanish has gained ground in China's translation market, along with other non-English languages (TAC 2023). The 2023 TAC report shows that translation to Chinese and L2 translation from Chinese to foreign languages are both key services in the Chinese language services industry. Although L2 translation is a common practice in China, there are few studies of the market for Chinese-to-Spanish translation, other than those of Huang (2013) and Miao (2024).

In this article, our aim is to analyse L2 Chinese-to-Spanish professional translation. We will begin by reviewing studies of L2 translation as a concept and as a professional practice. We will then focus on the Chinese market for Chinese-to-Spanish translation by analysing data obtained from Chinese-Spanish translation job adverts and a survey of translation companies that work with Spanish in China.

## **1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1.1 L2 translation**

In translation, 'directionality' (or 'direction of translation') refers to the direction in which translators work: into their mother tongue (or language of habitual use) from a foreign language (L1 or direct translation), or vice versa (L2 or inverse translation). According to the Dictionary of Translation Studies (Shuttleworth and Cowie 90), L2 translation can be defined as "[a] term used to describe a translation, either written or spoken, which is done from the translator's native language."

Despite there being evidence of L2 translation having existed for centuries, "[it] has long been in the periphery in modern translation studies" (Shi

Jiasheng 15). Martin Luther (1483-1546) may have been the first to suggest that translators could only translate satisfactorily into their mother tongue (Kelly 110). That opinion was shared by Herder (1744-1803), since whose time “it has been axiomatic that one will work towards one’s own language” (Kelly 111). According to one of Luther’s most important followers, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), each language, as the spirit of its nation, has its own forms of expression that are inaccessible to non-native translators of that language, owing to its “hidden essence” (Pokorn 62).

As recently as the 20th century, Newmark stated that translators could not translate into foreign languages because their output would be unnatural and always contain linguistically “unacceptable or improbable collocations” (quoted in Pokorn 63). The view expressed is that L1 translation is “the only way you can translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness” (Newmark 3).

Waley considers it almost always better for translators to write in their mother tongue, given that “it is in the highest degree improbable that a writer will command all the resources of a foreign language, even as regards vocabulary, and when it comes to rhythm, he is almost certain to be completely floored” (193). Venuti (1995) opposes translators translating into foreign languages too. As noted by Pokorn (115), there is a school of thought that says good translations are those that can be read easily and translators should be invisible in texts. Stewart complains that “L2 translators’ reduced proficiency in the foreign language jeopardizes the validity of the final product” (206), and De la Cruz Trainor remarks that L2 translation has so far always been considered an academic exercise, of secondary importance, and discouraged as a professional activity. Few theories admit L2 translation, a state of affairs to which translation theory textbooks have devoted little attention. De la Cruz Trainor asserts that L2 translation can only be applied to pragmatic texts, for which a translation that falls short of stylistic perfection is acceptable (60). Beeby laments L2 translation having been a “Cinderella of translating” for western translation theorists (5-6); she states that “translation theorists would do well to recognize this fact and build up a body of documentation which would help the inverse translator” (67).

Over the last few decades, there has been an increase in the attention paid to directionality. Some theorists, such as Campbell and Rogers, have questioned the mother tongue principle. They deem it more important for

translators to be bilingual, and even bicultural, than to be native target-language speakers (quoted by Pokorn 29), although Campbell makes the point that “it is probably wise to assume at the outset that perfectly balanced bilinguals are so rarely found that virtually all human translation activity falls into one of the two categories—into or from the second language” (57). After analysing the situation of translation in Australia, Campbell embarked on the first exhaustive discussion of L2 translation in general, suggesting that “second language translation output be seen as a development system rather than a substandard version of some ideal target” (175). Rogers challenges the belief that L1 translation is a guarantee of quality, arguing that while non-native translators may produce “the worst translationese” (258), there is a tendency to overlook the fact that L1 translation “may also produce work of an unacceptable standard” (258).

The strongest rebuttal of the mother tongue principle has come from Pokorn’s methodologically sound comparative study of English translations, performed by native and non-native speakers of English or Slovene, of works of prose in Slovene by Ivan Cankar. Pokorn feels that if the conviction of the supremacy of L1 translation persists in western translation theory, it will only serve to “ethnocentrically defend the superiority of post-Romantic West-European concepts concerning translation and translational practice, and thus consequently the a priori superiority of the translators and translational practice of major language communities” (69). She has gone further in challenging Eurocentric bias against L2 translation, saying that

the quality of the translation, its fluency and acceptability in the target language environment depend primarily on the yet undetermined individual abilities of a particular translator, on his/her translation strategy, on his/her knowledge of the source and target cultures, and not on his/her mother tongue and the direction into which s/he is translating (xii).

According to Shi Jiasheng, discussions of L2 translation should take into account “the discrepancy between theory and practice and the gap between ideal and reality. Theoretically and ideally speaking direct translation may be desirable, but in the real world inverse translation is sometimes indispensable” (6). Gallego Hernández notes that while the view of L1 translation as the only professional option is particularly prevalent in mainly English-speaking countries and other countries with widely spoken languages, many people

acknowledge the need for L2 translation, especially in countries where English is not the mother tongue. According to McAlester, in the case of translation from minority to majority languages, translators who are mother-tongue speakers of the latter and fully proficient in the former tend to be in short supply, and such translation is important “in terms of both national cultural identity and economic survival” (292). Shuttleworth and Cowie confirm that, with English having continued to expand as an international language in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, translators in non-English-speaking countries turn to L2 translation more often because of the huge quantity of translations into English waiting to be performed (90). Kelly et al. point out that, according to studies by Vienne, Dollerup, Robinson and MacKenzie, L2 translation is a necessity in Nordic countries due to the lack of native target-language speakers proficient in Nordic languages (25). In Denmark, for example, “consideration is even being given to introducing training in translation between two foreign languages” (Lorenzo 97, our translation). In the Netherlands, as a rule, translation companies prefer to employ native speakers of English to translate from Dutch to English, but, in extreme circumstances, will also “agree to using non-native speakers of English to translate into their non-native language” (Thelen 250). As for the German market, Silbermann and Hänseroth, Erdmann, Fuhrmann and Müller, Schmitt, Zimmermann and Wimmer all provide evidence of considerable demand for L2 translation. Rodríguez-Inés remarks that the need for L2 translation “is often associated with translating from languages with relatively few speakers into lingua francas (such as Afrikaans, English, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Spanish or Swahili).”

Chinese does not even have a generally accepted term for L2 translation. Different terms have been used over the years, the most widely preferred option in recent times being *nixiang fanyi* (逆向翻译). Wang Baorong says the absence of a specific term could stem from two factors: first, “the Chinese take inverse translation—a common practice in Chinese history of translation—for granted so much that they tend to overlook the issue of direction of translation”; second, “the mother tongue principle is not imposed upon professional translators in China” (4). For example, TAC’s code of ethics does not specify the direction in which translation should be performed, and the reality is that Chinese translators are often asked to translate into their second language rather than solely into Chinese. Particularly after China’s economic reform in the late 1970s,

the country's government encouraged L2 translation in specialized fields, such as economics, business, science and technology, due both to the Chinese economy's urgent demand for development and to growth in trade with the rest of the world. Just as it does in the west, where it is a necessary practice that is becoming increasingly important in areas in which it is difficult or impossible to find native translators (De la Cruz Trainor), L2 translation has a long history in China: in the second century, the first translations of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese were carried out not by native Chinese speakers but by foreign missionaries (Baker 85; Chu Chiyu 43-53). This, however, is at odds with the scant attention paid to research on L2 translation to date.

## **1.2 L2 translation in professional practice**

Professional translators do carry out L2 translation, which can be considered a functional activity. It is, in other words, an actual practice, as documented in various publications. Roiss conducted a statistical survey on professional L2 translation in Spain. She sent a questionnaire to 230 professional translators from the Spanish Professional Association of Translators and Interpreters (APETI), 50 students from the University of Salamanca's Faculty of Translation, Interpreting and Documentation, and 50 translation agencies from Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. The analysis of the survey data revealed that 84.44% of the respondent translators based in Spain performed L2 translation as part of their professional activity. Ten years later, Lozano followed up on Roiss's 2001 study and obtained a very similar result: the vast (albeit slightly smaller, at 75%) majority of the translators participating in the survey reported carrying out L2 translation in the Spanish market. Also in 2011, the Spanish Network of Public Administration Translators and Interpreters (RITAP) undertook research on institutional translation and interpreting in Spain. It received completed questionnaires from 136 professionals working for institutions such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Office of the President, and the Government of the Basque Country. Given the total number of respondents, the data suggest that a majority (106) engage in both L1 and L2 translation. In 2014, a survey organized by the International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI) was answered by 780 professional translators from 73 countries, including seven from China. Analysis showed that 446 (57.2%) of the

respondents translated from their mother tongue to other languages. With a view to exploring current L2 translation practice in Spain, Horcas-Rufián surveyed over 200 native Spanish-speaking translators about their professional activity and their attitudes towards directionality. According to the results, more than 75% of the respondents performed L2 translation and more than half were in favour of L2 translation being taught in universities. Even more recently, Atkinson conducted an online survey to gauge the prevalence of L2 translation to English in Brazil. A total of 522 valid replies were obtained from professionals living in (95%) or outside (5%) Brazil. The results showed that 78% of the respondents translated from Portuguese to other languages, with 53% working into English only and 11% into English plus another language. Other findings included a high level of social media use as an external support resource in the L2 translation process, and some interest in short courses in L2 translation.

In work on directionality, many researchers have focused on specialized L2 translation, as a result of the high level of market demand for it. In a survey-based study of 50 translation agencies, 50 former students and over 200 professional translators, Roiss and Weatherby found that 84.4% of respondents had been tasked with performing specialized L2 translation, such as the translation of legal and business documents, usage instructions or product descriptions. Based on their own experience and that of their graduates, Kelly et al. confirm that there is demand for professional L2 translation in Spain in many specialized market sectors (science, tourism, the exportation of Spanish products, etc.). Yuste, who translates from Spanish to French as a second language, reports that the L2 translations clients request most frequently are of business documents, technical texts, etc. In short, most of the L2 translations commissioned are specialized translations. Rodríguez-Inés undertook a small qualitative study in which she surveyed 35 English-Spanish translators whose mother tongue was not English. Every single one of the respondents had been asked to carry out L2 translation at some point in their career, and only five had turned down such requests or referred them to native translators. Most of the texts involved were specialized, corresponding to areas such as business translation, technical translation, scientific translation, and translation for the tourism industry. Gallego Hernández drew on data from 326 Spanish professional translators to conclude that L2 translation exists in the Spanish market but is not performed by all translators, and that those who do translate

from Spanish to foreign languages, such as French, English or German, find themselves working in different areas of specialization, most commonly legal translation. He also remarks that translators appear to accept more L2 translation work as the years go by, possibly because they have built up a client base or feel more confident in certain specialized areas (Gallego Hernández).

As mentioned previously, after China's economic reform, the country's government encouraged L2 translation, in specialized and non-specialized areas alike. While Li Xiangdong's analysis of Chinese translation job advertisements reveals the employers' prioritization of practical experience over formal qualifications in the broader market, there remains a paucity of research specifically addressing specialized L2 translation dynamics (Miao). In this context, we present the results of our own study of L2 Chinese-to-Spanish translation in professional practice in China.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

To learn more about L2 Chinese-Spanish translation in China, we adopted a mixed-methods approach. We obtained quantitative data by analysing job adverts published in China. Specifically, we reviewed all the job adverts published on three major platforms for seeking work in China, namely *51job*, *Zhilian Zhaopin* (智联招聘) and *Liepinwang* (猎聘网), and compiled those involving Chinese-Spanish translation. Over the course of November 2021, we recorded all the data from the compiled adverts (company name, direction of translation, specialization, academic requirements, required level of Spanish, etc.) in an Excel file.

Additionally, we conducted a quantitative and qualitative study based on a 10-question questionnaire for translation companies (see Appendix I). The questionnaire, which featured single-answer and multiple-answer questions, was designed to obtain information on: each company's total annual volume of translation, volume of Chinese-to-Spanish translation, and volume of Chinese-to-Spanish scientific and technical translation; Chinese-to-Spanish translators; types of Chinese-to-Spanish translation by area of specialization; the revision of Chinese-to-Spanish translation projects; and the evolution, in terms of project quantity and translator quality, of the market for translation with Spanish as a working language. The questionnaire's potential respondents were companies

belonging to Etogether, an association of translators and translation agencies in China. To guarantee the comprehensibility and validity of the questionnaire before approaching those companies, we piloted it with a trusted translation company in November 2021. Following the pilot test, we altered the wording of certain questions to make them easier to understand. We then distributed the questionnaire to 102 companies in China between December 2021 and January 2022, via email, telephone, and Wechat and QQ (two of the most widely used social media applications in China). In all, we received 21 responses (response rate: 20.6%).

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Study of job adverts: market demand for Chinese-Spanish translators in China

By entering search terms such as *Xibanyayu fanyi* (西班牙语翻译) — ‘Spanish translation’ — and *Xibanyayu yizhe* (西班牙语译者) — ‘Spanish translator’ — in three employment platforms, we found a total of 947 adverts seeking translators with Spanish as a working language. Of those adverts, 88.5% were for translation between Chinese and Spanish in both directions, showing the importance of translators being able to translate not only into but also from their mother tongue. A small percentage of the adverts were for translators to work in one direction only: 8% for L2 Chinese-to-Spanish translation and 3% L1 Spanish-to-Chinese translation.

As mentioned previously, 16% of Chinese translation companies offer translation from one foreign language to another, and we also found five adverts for translators to work between Spanish and English. Table 1 shows the number of adverts we found for the different language pairs and directions, along with the corresponding percentages.

Table 1. Job adverts for translation in different directions

Direction of translation	Number of adverts analysed	Percentage
ZH>ES and ES>ZH	838	88.5%
ZH>ES only	76	8.0%
ES>ZH only	28	3.0%

Direction of translation	Number of adverts analysed	Percentage
EN>ES and ES>EN	1	0.1%
EN>ES only	4	0.4%
Total	947	100%

In the 947 adverts, we observed demand for translators in various translation specializations. To classify those specializations, we used Hurtado Albir's (2001) categorization of areas of professional specialization, to which we added translation on education and training, video game translation, and sports translation. More than half of the adverts we found were for financial translation. Scientific and technical translation was in second place, with 181 companies seeking translators to work with Spanish in this area. In third place was translation on education and training, with only 68 adverts (far fewer than scientific and technical translation), despite TAC (2022) identifying it as one of the Chinese translation industry's most in-demand sectors. We found just 33 adverts for journalistic translation, behind which were the areas of literature, video games, law, sports, and religion, each with 12 adverts or fewer. Additionally, there were 18 adverts that did not mention a particular area of specialization. Table 2 shows a breakdown of the number of translation job adverts for each specialization and the corresponding percentages.

**Table 2.** Translation job adverts by area of specialization

Area of specialization	Number of adverts	Percentage
Financial translation	615	64.9%
Scientific and technical translation	181	19.1%
Translation on education and training	68	7.2%
Journalistic translation	33	3.5%
Unspecified	18	1.9%
Literary translation	12	1.3%
Video game translation	9	1.0%
Legal translation	8	0.8%
Sports translation	2	0.2%

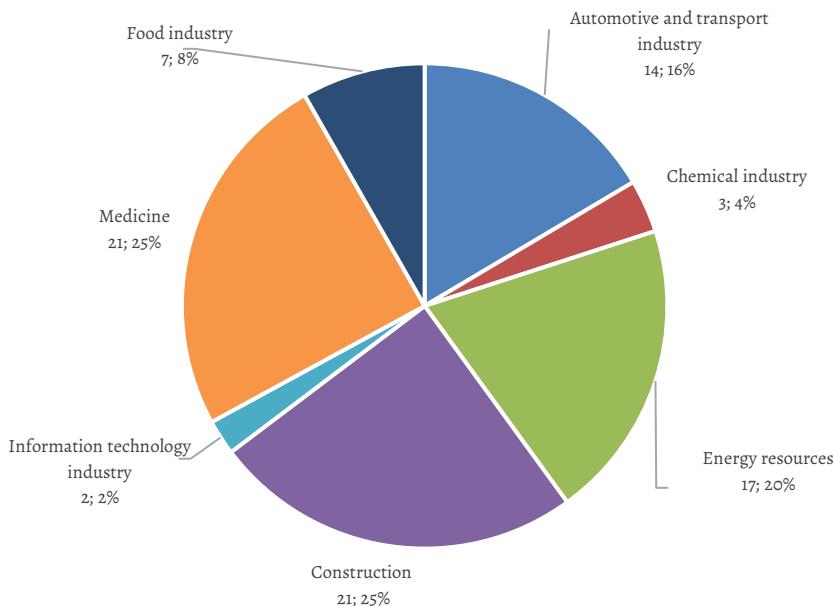
Religious translation	1	0.1%
Total	947	100%

As far as L2 scientific and technical translation is concerned, we decided to analyse the 181 adverts corresponding to this specialization in greater detail. Our findings (see Table 3) were similar to those for the adverts across all specializations: 68.5% of the scientific and technical translation job adverts involved translation in both directions, 25.5% Chinese-to-Spanish translation, and only 5% Spanish-to-Chinese translation. Additionally, there were two scientific and technical translation job adverts involving English as a working language.

**Table 3.** Scientific and technical translation job adverts

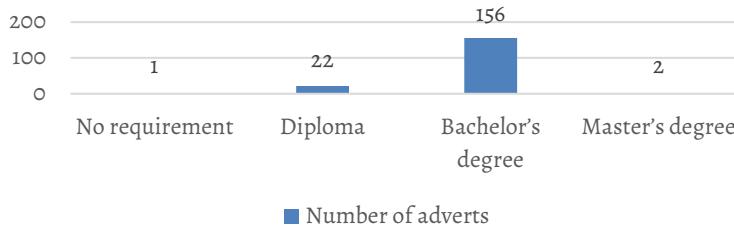
Direction of translation	Number of adverts	Percentage
ZH>ES and ES>ZH	124	68.5%
ZH>ES only	46	25.5%
ES>ZH only	9	5.0%
EN>ES and ES>EN	1	0.5%
EN>ES only	1	0.5%
Total	181	100%

Our analysis revealed that 85 of the scientific and technical translation job adverts mentioned more specific fields, which we classified according to the categorization proposed by Sevilla Muñoz and Sevilla Muñoz (26) and the industrial classification of the United Nations (49). Of the 85 adverts, 21 involved translation related to medicine, 21 construction, and 17 energy resources. Next came the automotive and transport and the food industries, with the chemical and the information technology industries being the least quantitatively significant. It is worth mentioning that, although TAC (2019) listed information technology as one of the Chinese translation industry's most in-demand sectors, only two adverts for translators to work with Spanish in this area were published in November 2021, possibly due to English being the main language used in the sector. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the distribution of the 85 adverts.



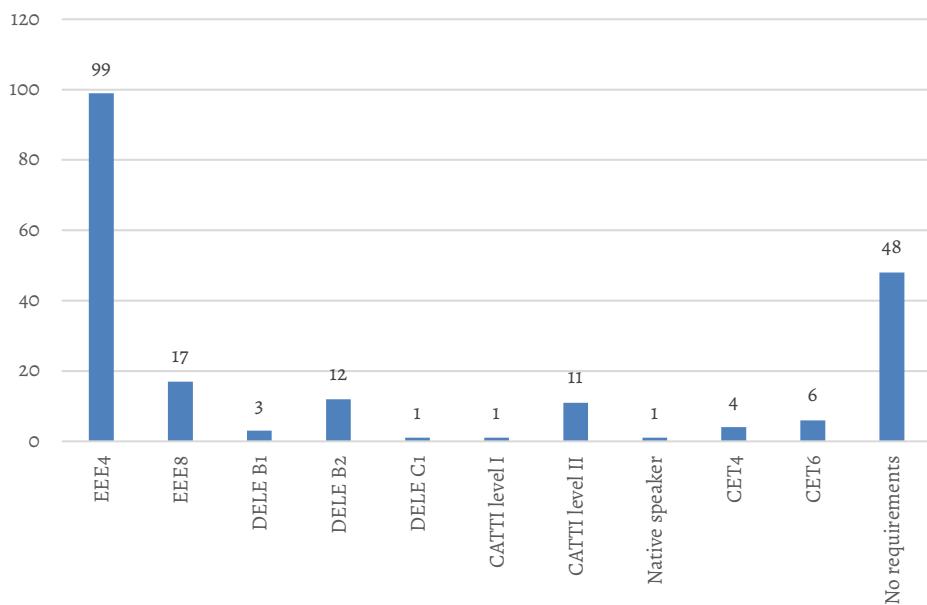
**Figure 1.** Distribution of scientific and technical translation job adverts by specific field

We also collected information on the academic requirements mentioned in the adverts that referred to scientific and technical translation between Chinese and Spanish. As can be seen in Figure 2, most of those adverts required translators to hold a bachelor's degree, while 22 called for a diploma and two for a higher level of qualification, such as a master's degree. Only one advert did not specify any academic requirements. Almost all the companies sought translators who had taken higher education courses, and most considered a university degree indispensable, although they did not stipulate what the degree should be in.



**Figure 2.** Academic requirements in scientific and technical translation job adverts

Furthermore, most of the companies required foreign language certification. Of the 181 companies offering scientific and technical translation work involving Spanish, 133 wanted translators with Spanish language certificates, and 10 even asked for English language certificates. As Figure 3 shows, the most widely sought certificates were those from Spain's national examination for students of Spanish Philology bachelor's degree programmes (EEE), with 99 companies requiring EEE4 certification (level 4, equivalent to CEFR level B2), and 17 requiring the higher EEE8 certification (level 8, equivalent to CEFR level C1). Some companies called for the more internationally recognized Diploma of Spanish as a Foreign Language (DELE): three wanted DELE B1, 12 DELE B2, and one DELE C1. There were 12 companies that required applicants to have passed the China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters (CATTI); of those 12, 11 were seeking level II and one level I (the highest level). One company, meanwhile, was specifically looking for a native Spanish speaker to work as a translator. In addition to requirements related to Spanish, 10 companies established requirements for English, with four asking for a College English Test Band 4 (CET4) certificate and six a College English Test Band 6 (CET6) certificate.



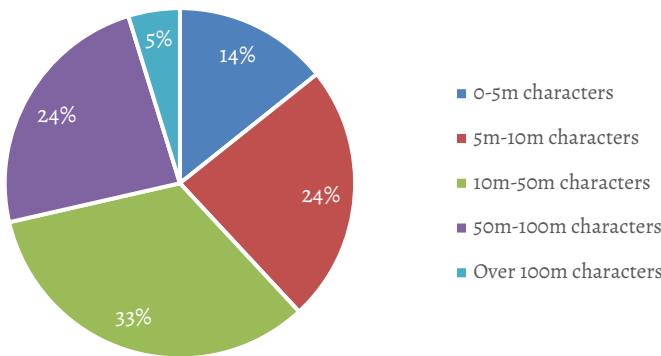
**Figure 3.** Language requirements in scientific and technical translation job adverts

In short, our analysis of data from job adverts for translators to work with Spanish in China confirmed that there is high demand for L2 Chinese-to-Spanish translation, and that a large percentage of such adverts involve the specialized area of scientific and technical translation.

To shed further light on this matter from another perspective, we now present our analysis of the data we obtained through the questionnaire we sent to translation companies working with Spanish in China.

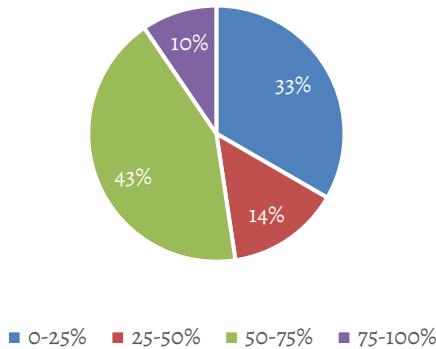
### 3.2 Survey of translation companies working with Spanish in China

Our questionnaire for translation companies working with Spanish in China (see Appendix I) provided more detailed data from real businesses. The first question was about the companies' volume of work. Of the 21 companies that answered the questionnaire, 81% have an annual volume of translation of between 5 million and 100 million characters, with five producing over 5 million but under 10 million characters, seven over 10 million but under 50 million, and five over 50 million but under 100 million. There is one company with a very large production volume, exceeding 100 million characters each year. At the other end of the scale, there are three companies with an annual volume of translation of under 5 million characters. These data can be seen in Figure 4.



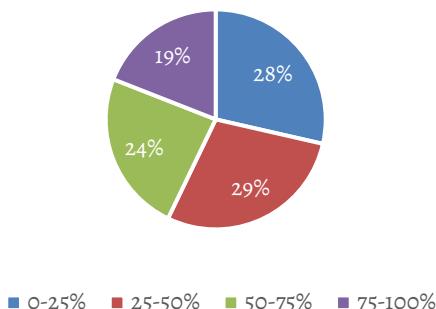
**Figure 4.** The companies' total annual volume of translation

The second question revealed a genuinely large volume of Chinese-to-Spanish translation. Eleven of the companies said such translation makes up more than half of their work involving Spanish. Specifically, 43% of the companies reported Chinese-to-Spanish translation representing 50-75% of their work involving Spanish, and 10% of the companies said it accounts for more than 75% (see Figure 5).



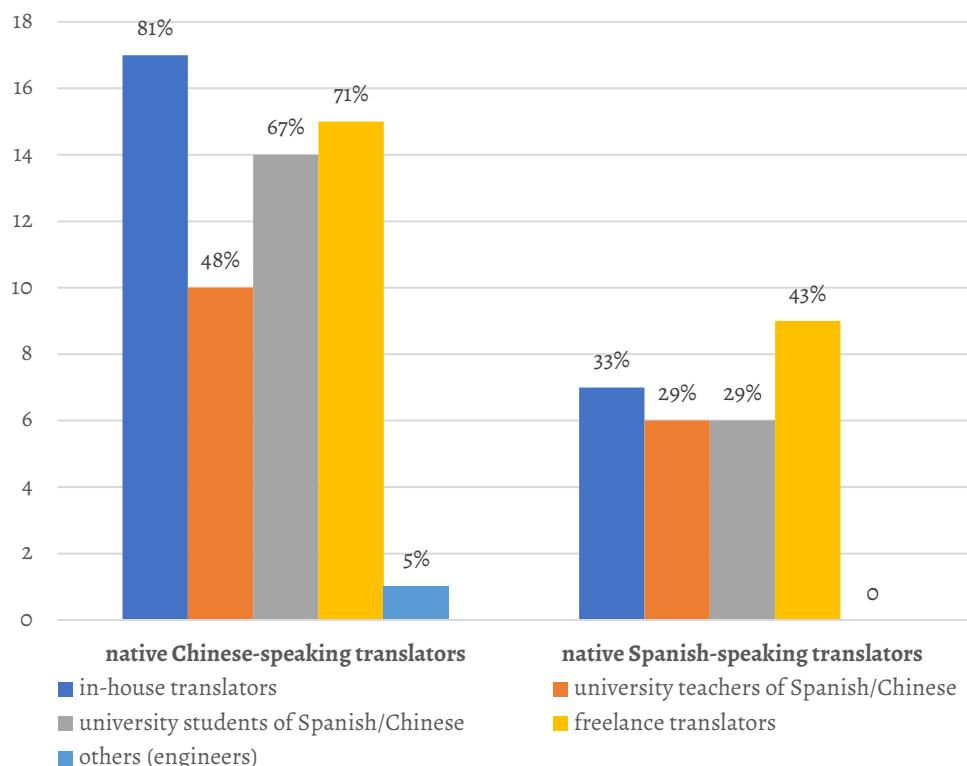
**Figure 5.** Volume of Chinese-to-Spanish translation

The volume of Chinese-to-Spanish scientific and technical translation is less substantial, however. As can be seen in Figure 6, the volume in question varies considerably among the 21 companies. Specifically, scientific and technical translation makes up less than half the Chinese-to-Spanish work of 12 companies and exceeds half in the case of nine. Of those nine, five reported it as under 75% and four as over 75%.



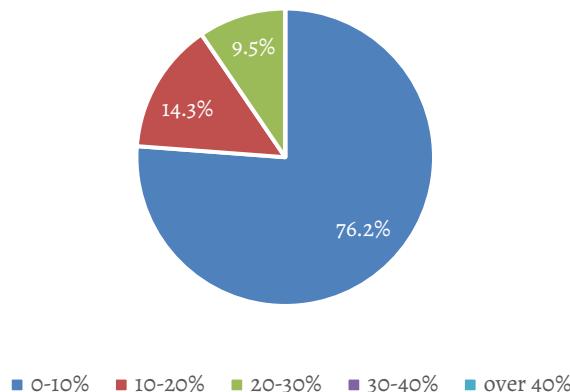
**Figure 6.** Volume of Chinese-to-Spanish scientific and technical translation

We used a multiple-answer question to learn more about the profile of the companies' Chinese-to-Spanish translators. As Figure 7 shows, we can conclude that Spanish translation in China is still largely carried out by native Chinese speakers, given that they make up the greatest percentage of the companies' Chinese-to-Spanish translators. However, despite the prevalence of L2 translation, some of the companies' Chinese-to-Spanish translators, especially their freelance translators, are native Spanish speakers, as mentioned by 43% of the companies. In the case of native Chinese speakers, 81% of the companies hire them as in-house translators and 71% as freelance translators, indicating that most of the companies work with both types of translators. Additionally, 14 companies employ students of Spanish, 10 employ teachers of Spanish, and one employs engineers as translators. Figure 7 provides a breakdown of the 21 companies' Chinese-to-Spanish translators.



**Figure 7.** Language profile and working relationship of the companies' Chinese-to-Spanish translators

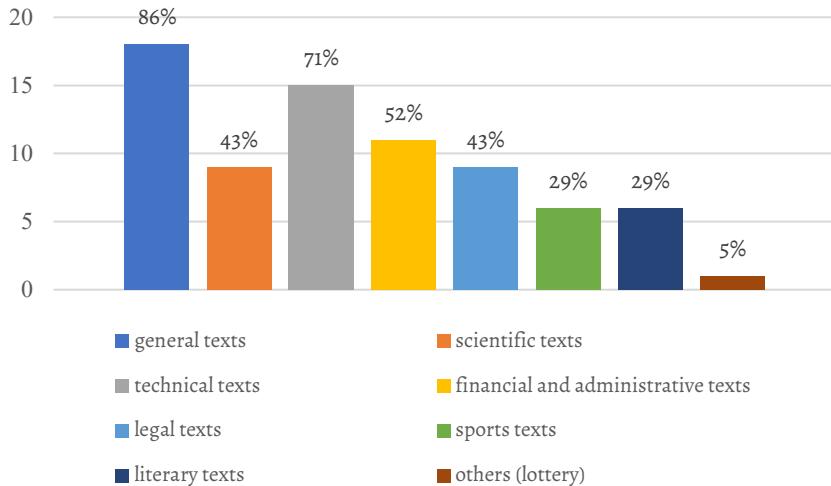
As Figure 8 below shows, native Spanish speakers make up no more than 30% of any company's translators. Two companies reported that 20-30% of their translators are native Spanish speakers, while three reported proportions of 10-20%. It can therefore be concluded that the vast majority of translators working for Chinese translation companies are native Chinese speakers, while native Spanish-speaking translators are scarce.



**Figure 8.** Percentage of native Spanish speakers among the companies' translators

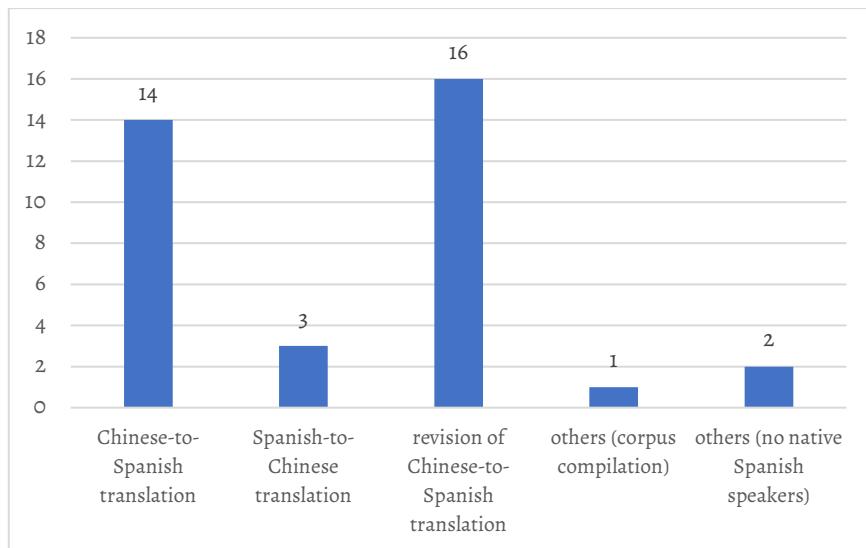
We previously saw that scientific and technical translation is an important component of the companies' Chinese-to-Spanish translation work. The aim of the fifth question (in Chinese-Spanish translation, which of the following responsibilities are typically undertaken by Chinese translators? multiple-answer question, including options such as literary, general and different types of specialized texts) was to find out more about the areas or subjects of the texts translated into Spanish by native Chinese speakers. With regard to how we define 'general texts', Kelly describes them as "non-specialized texts, i.e., without the characteristic features of specialized texts: use of specialized language, terminology, specialized subject matter, etc" (175). On that basis, we elected to present literary texts as a separate option among the question's answers. As can be seen in Figure 9, the highest share of translation activity corresponds to general texts, which account for 86% of total. As for specialized translation, the most frequently selected option among the five listed in the questionnaire was technical texts (71%), followed by financial and

administrative texts (52%), scientific texts (43%), legal texts (43%) and sports texts (29%). Only six companies reported performing literary translation, and one selected the 'Others' option, specifying that it also carries out lottery translation.



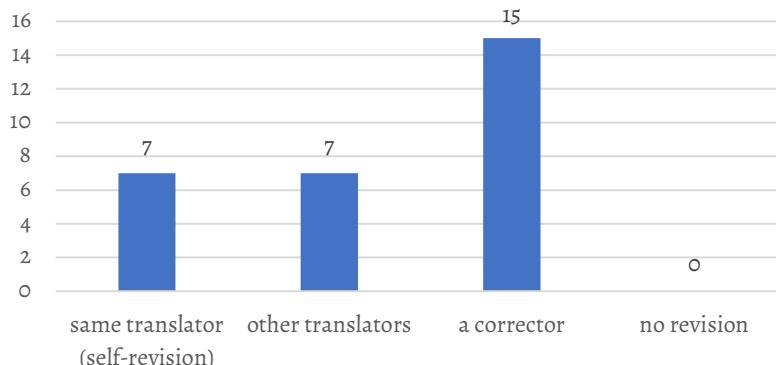
**Figure 9.** Types of texts translated into Spanish by native Chinese speakers

Most of the small percentage of native Spanish-speaking translators both perform and revise Chinese-to-Spanish translations. A total of 19 companies work with such translators, although, as we learned previously, they make up no more than 30% of any company's translators. Among those 19 companies, 16 said their native Spanish-speaking translators revise Chinese-to-Spanish translations, and 14 said they perform such translations. Notably, native Spanish-speaking translators also carry out L2 translation (from Spanish to Chinese) in three of the 19 companies, and are responsible for corpus compilation in one company (see Figure 10). Thus, the main tasks performed by the few native Spanish-speaking translators working for Chinese translation companies are translating into Spanish and revising translations into Spanish.



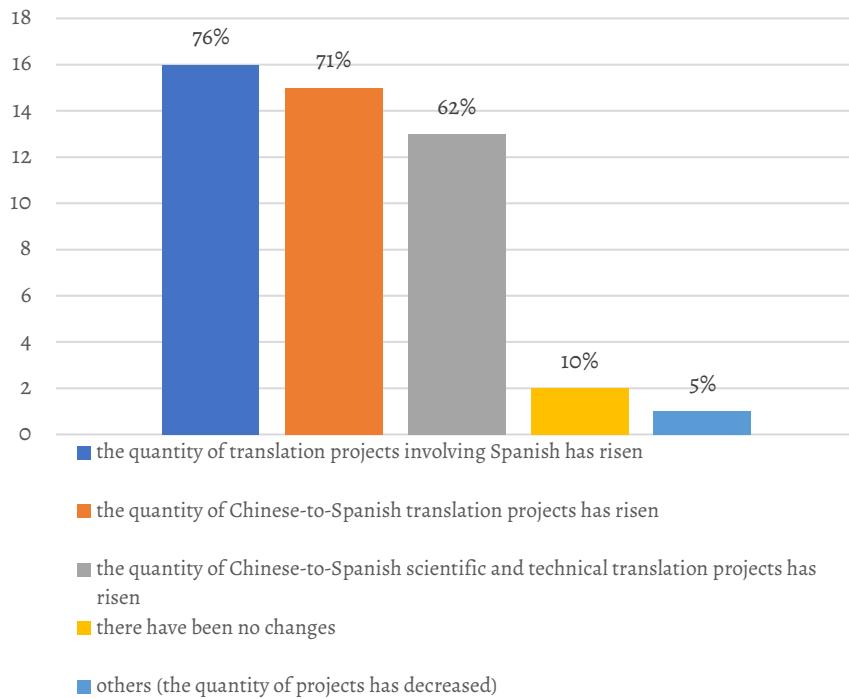
**Figure 10.** Tasks performed by native Spanish-speaking translators

We have seen that native Spanish-speaking translators revise Chinese-to-Spanish translations for many of the companies, and the eighth question sought further information about such revision work. All the companies said that each of their translations undergoes revision, which may be carried out by the same translator who performed the translation (self-revision), another translator, or a proofreader. As can be seen in Figure 11, revisions are performed by a proofreader in most of the companies, by another translator in seven companies, and through self-revision in seven companies.



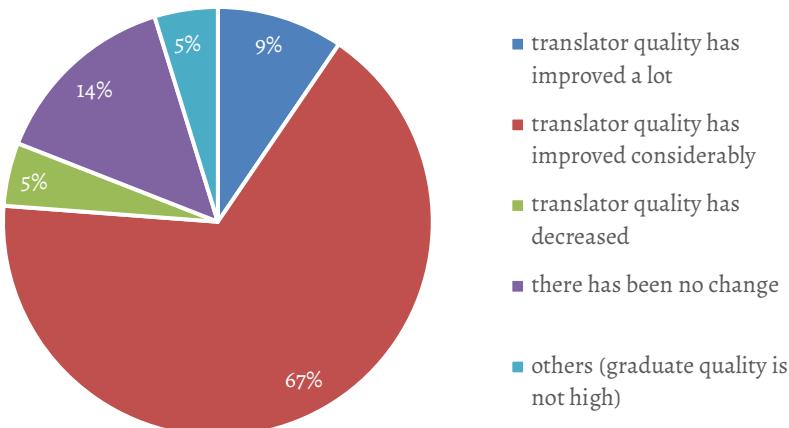
**Figure 11.** People who revise Chinese-to-Spanish translations

With the growth of translation in China, and as Figure 12 shows, most of the 21 companies had noticed an increase in the quantity of translation projects involving Spanish, the quantity of Chinese-to-Spanish translation projects, and the quantity of scientific and technical translation projects over the previous five years. There were three exceptions: two companies felt there had been no changes in quantity and one used the 'Others' option to state that the quantity of projects had decreased (see Figure 12).



**Figure 12.** Trends in translation project quantity

Most (76%) of the companies felt that the quality of the translators working with Spanish had improved considerably or a lot over the previous five years. However, three companies (14%) perceived no change in quality, one (5%) was of the opinion that quality had decreased, and another used the 'Others' option to state that the quality of recent graduates was not high (see Figure 13).



**Figure 13.** Perceived changes in translator quality

Overall, the survey data depict a Chinese–Spanish translation market in China that is both sizeable and clearly structured. Chinese-to-Spanish translation constitutes a substantial share of the companies' workload and is predominantly carried out as L2 translation by native Chinese-speaking translators, who form the core workforce across companies. While native Spanish-speaking translators are present, they remain a limited resource and are mainly involved in translation into Spanish and, in particular, revision tasks, rather than constituting a numerically significant production force. The findings also indicate that Chinese-to-Spanish translation is far from being confined to general texts, as scientific, technical, financial and legal texts account for a considerable proportion of the work undertaken by Chinese translators. This highlights the central role of L2 translators in handling specialized translation in the Chinese market. Finally, the companies' perceptions of growth in both project volume and translator quality over the past five years suggest a dynamic and expanding market. Despite the relatively small sample size, the survey offers rare empirical insight into a market segment for which systematic data have so far been limited, and provides an empirical basis

for further discussion of training profiles and professional practices in Chinese-Spanish translation.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

By reviewing studies on L2 translation, we observed that the practice is not only common among professional translators but also of growing interest to academia. Existing quantitative studies based on questionnaires sent to translation companies or professional translators have helped confirm that in China there is a high market demand for L2 translation of both general and specialized texts. Although Chinese and Spanish are two of the world's most widely spoken languages, and the market for translation involving Spanish has received academic attention, there is still a research gap in the case of the Chinese-Spanish combination. This article provides a descriptive study of demand for Chinese-Spanish translators and the practice of L2 scientific and technical translation in China's translation market. We obtained information on the demand for Chinese-Spanish translators in China through an analysis of Chinese-Spanish translation job adverts published on three employment platforms over a month. We also obtained first-hand data via a survey of companies working with the combination in question in China.

Based on the data from the two sources mentioned above, we have reached the following conclusions:

- (1) in the translation market in China, translators who work with Spanish are in high demand L2 Chinese-to-Spanish translation projects make up a significant percentage of the work of the sector's companies;
- (2) Chinese-to-Spanish translation is mainly carried out by native Chinese-speaking translators, although there are companies that have some native Spanish-speaking translators, whose work primarily consists of performing and revising translations from Chinese to their mother tongue;
- (3) translation companies carry out a large volume of L2 Chinese-to-Spanish translation, and they do so in a variety of fields, a key one of which is scientific and technical translation;
- (4) our analysis of adverts for jobs in China shows that demand for scientific and technical translators makes up a significant percentage (19.1%) of

the overall demand for translators able to perform L2 Chinese-to-Spanish translation;

(5) and our analysis of responses to our questionnaire confirms the importance of scientific and technical translation, as technical and scientific texts were among the most frequently reported types of specialized translation, with 71% and 43% of the surveyed companies indicating these text types as part of their Chinese-to-Spanish translation activity, respectively.

Additionally, the general perception among companies is that both the quantity and quality of translation projects involving Spanish increased over the five years prior to answering the questionnaire. Although it must be emphasized that our sample is only small, meaning that the data should be taken with caution and do not allow for generalization, our study reflects the reality of the market and provides highly valuable information regarding the situation of L2 translation involving Spanish in China.

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## Appendix I. Questionnaire for translation companies in China

The general objective of our research is to produce a proposal regarding the teaching of specialized L2 translation from Chinese to Spanish. This questionnaire has been designed for our research and has no commercial purposes. All data obtained will be treated confidentially and anonymized. The questionnaire will take approximately five minutes to complete. Thank you very much for your help.

### 1. What is your company's total annual volume of translation?

- a. 0 - 5 million characters
- b. 5 million - 10 million characters
- c. 10 million - 50 million characters
- d. 50 million - 100 million characters

e. Over 100 million characters

**2. What volume of all your company's translation work involving Spanish does translation from Chinese to Spanish represent?**

a. 0-25% b. 25-50% c. 50-75% d. 75-100%

**3. What volume of all your company's Chinese-to-Spanish translation work does the translation of scientific and technical texts represent?**

a. 0-25% b. 25-50% c. 50-75% d. 75-100%

**4. Who are your company's Chinese-to-Spanish translators? (You may select more than one option.)**

- a. Native Chinese speakers employed as in-house translators
- b. Native Spanish speakers employed as in-house translators
- c. Native Chinese speakers who teach Spanish in universities
- d. Native Spanish speakers who teach Spanish in universities
- e. Native Chinese speakers studying Spanish at university
- f. Native Spanish speakers studying Chinese at university
- g. Native Chinese speakers who are freelance translators
- h. Native Spanish speakers who are freelance translators
- i. Others (please specify):

**5. What percentage of your company's translators are native Spanish speakers?**

a. 0-10% b. 10-20% c. 20-30% d. 30-40% e. Over 40%

**6. What kinds of texts do your company's native Chinese-speaking translators translate from Chinese to Spanish? (You may select more than one option.)**

- a. General texts
- b. Specialized texts. Please specify the specialization(s):
  - Scientific
  - Technical
  - Financial and administrative
  - Legal
  - Sports
- c. Literary texts
- d. Others (please specify):

**7. What tasks do the native Spanish speakers who translate for your company perform? (You may select more than one option.)**

a. Translation from Chinese to Spanish

- b. Translation from Spanish to Chinese
- c. Revision of Chinese-to-Spanish translation
- d. Others (please specify):

**8. Who revises your company's Chinese-to-Spanish translation projects? (You may select more than one option.)**

- a. The same translator who performs the translation (self-revision)
- b. Other translators
- c. A proofreader
- d. We do not revise translation projects
- e. Others (please specify):

**9. Have you noticed any change in terms of quantity of work in the Chinese market for translation with Spanish as a working language in the last five years? (You may select more than one option.)**

- a. Yes, the quantity of translation projects involving Spanish has risen
- b. Yes, the quantity of Chinese-to-Spanish translation projects has risen
- c. Yes, the quantity of scientific and technical translation projects has risen
- d. No, there have been no changes
- e. Others (please specify):

**10. Have you noticed any change in terms of quality in the Chinese market for translation with Spanish as a working language in the last five years?**

- a. Yes, translator quality has improved a lot
- b. Yes, translator quality has improved considerably
- c. Yes, translator quality has decreased
- d. Yes, translator quality has decreased a lot
- e. No, there has been no change
- f. Others (please specify):

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