

# Translanguaging as an Aspect of ESP Acquisition in Non-Linguistic Universities

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**Abstract.** This article seeks to develop Translanguaging as a theory and an efficient ESP classroom practice. We consider Translanguaging at linguistic and linguodidactic (spontaneous, or preplanned) levels. Our findings may be of certain practical value for ESP teachers, hesitant about acceptance of Translanguaging for building rapport with students, creating a positive learning environment and aiding their acquisition of target language. We contextualize Translanguaging in the ESP classroom realities of the State University of Economics and Technology (Ukraine), National University of Tashkent, Bukhara State University (Uzbekistan) and Samara State Technical University (the Russian Federation). The study was based upon the online survey of teachers' attitude towards Translanguaging and their practice of translanguaging in ESP classrooms. In order to obtain reliable information and to explore the topic rigorously we applied a combined-method design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The paper provides empirical results on the role of translanguaging in ESP classrooms, the expediency of using the translanguaging strategy in ESP classes and its "legitimization" in the methodology of teaching, the extent of using Translanguaging by university teachers and students, evaluations of Translanguaging shortcomings and benefits. Studies have shown that translanguaging is both an efficient learning tool and a useful teaching method if pedagogical activities are designed thoroughly.

## 1 Introduction

Globalization, intensification of migration processes, including in the world network space, created both possibility and necessity to study two or more foreign languages, aroused interest in different ethno cultures, their specifics, points of contact, features of interaction. In this regard, modern linguodidactics actualizes the problems of studying the contacts of languages and cultures, the patterns of formation of bi- and polylingual personality, the specifics of simultaneous and consistent development of different linguistic cultures. A new aspect of the study of this issue is fixed in the concept of "translanguaging", which has relatively recently entered scientific circulation in various fields of humanities.

Effective study of the essence of translanguaging in foreign science began in the 1990s, and at the turn of the century this phenomenon attracted the attention of linguists, culturologists, teachers, methodologists.

The translanguaging (TL) related concepts such as "translingualism", "translingual skills", "translingual personality" are studied in the most effective way in linguistics, sociolinguistics, literary studies, advertising theory, translation studies, culturology, theory and practice of foreign language teaching. In spite of growing number of research regarding necessity of understanding these concepts in order to face epoch of globalization, only a few studies explain ways to apply them in the foreign language education [1].

Therefore, the study of translanguaging in the methodology of teaching foreign languages is of paramount theoretical and practical significance nowadays. This research direction is today eagerly supported in foreign linguodidactics [2-8] but has hardly been studied thoroughly in domestic scientific works. In order to fill the gap our study is aimed at examining the implementation of translanguaging in ESP context with all the challenges, criticism and creativity.

## 2 Background to the study

While translanguaging has grown in global popularity recently, turning out to be more diverse, dynamic and democratic than "monolingual" competence, numerous educators consider it to be a threat, capable of destroying the instructional "English only" space and discouraging the use of target language (L2) by students. Others see translanguaging as a primitive crutch which is used to facilitate meaning making among students and teachers.

Being neither blessing nor curse, translanguaging is a method of teaching and communicative practice, which has got both following advantages (facilitating understanding and learning, effective exploiting similarities and differences between home and target language structures, capitalizing on the students' existing knowledge and language awareness) and disadvantages such as preventing students from acquiring communicative competences, which are considered to be

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“treasured icon” of ESP, hindering thinking in English, encouraging off-task behavior.

There are numerous studies examining FL teachers' attitudes towards using translanguaging. The corresponding surveys cover different geographic areas and nationalities: García & Leiva, (Spain) [9], Jeff MacSwan (America) [10], Hornberger & Link (Australia) [7], Noella Charbonneau and Michiko Weinmann (France) [11], Rasman (Indonesia) [12], Jiajia Eve Liu, Yuen Yi Lo, Angel M.Y. Lin, (China) [13]; Flores & Rosa, (Latin America) [14] amongst others.

However, studies are very few investigating EFL teachers' from former socialist republics attitudes towards translanguaging practice. It might be due to the fact that monolingual immersion approach had been proclaimed as incontestable and having irrefutable value in ESP teaching for most post-Soviet universities. Therefore, present study is to be of certain practical value for ESP teachers, hesitant about acceptance of translanguaging for building rapport with students, creating a positive learning environment and aiding their acquisition of target language.

### 3 Literature Review

Since the end of the 19th century a monolingual approach to language teaching, such as the direct method, communicative language teaching, and immersion method have been adopted as the most effective English teaching methods. The monolingual approach either banned or minimized the use of L1 in the classroom, encouraging use of the target language. Therefore, using students' native language (L1) was eagerly criticized in ESP classes.

Until recently, the monolingual approach has been rarely challenged. However, there is a wide range of classes currently in which monolingual exclusiveness lost its appeal. Moreover, some researchers began to find fault with target-language-only theories and highlighted that there could be positive reasons for translanguaging in the classroom [4, 7, 8].

The term "translanguaging", or TL for short, was introduced in the 1980s by Cen Williams to denote the planned and systematic use of two languages during the class. However, both the term itself and the related concept gained popularity decades later, in part, due to published research by Canagarajah and Ofelia García among others. Translanguaging is understood by Canagarajah as a "smooth synergistic transition from one linguistic culture to another, resulting in some merging, without complete assimilation and linguistic-cultural identity of language users" [1].

Since then the term "translanguaging" has been used in various ways by different scholars. A researcher in Applied Linguistics Li (2018) offers educators and researchers a conceptual definition of translanguaging practice and its relevance to language teaching [6]. Li points out that Williams made it clear from the beginning that unlike code-switching, translanguaging is not simply a set of linguistic structures. It is a dynamic practice that involves different named languages and language

varieties but more importantly, a process of knowledge construction that makes use of, but goes beyond, individual languages. It concerns effective communication, function rather than form, cognitive activity, and language production.

R. Tsokalidou and E. Skourtou propose to use the term "translanguaging" to denote a process where one language is used to strengthen knowledge of another language and increase students' proficiency in two languages. The researchers also note that through the use of translanguaging there is a balanced development of students' speech skills in two languages [15]. The conceptual basis of the translanguaging technology is the student-centered organization of the educational process and its arranging on a multilingual basis. The main principles of the organization of ESP educational process using the technology of translanguaging are the principle of reflexive orientation of the educational process, the principle of connection of learning with life, the principle of consciousness and freedom.

Garcia, O., Ibarra Johnson et al [3] contributed to the field of bilingual and second language education by highlighting the key understandings and approaches to translanguaging practice in educational context and emphasizing the role of translanguaging as a tool for teaching complex content. They argue that "When we make space for students to use all the linguistic resources they have developed to maneuver and navigate their way through complex content, a myriad of learning opportunities open up. Rather than watering down our instruction, which risks oversimplification and robs students of opportunities to engage in productive grappling with texts and content, translanguaging better enables us to teach complex content, which in turn helps students learn more successfully"

Semiante (2016) [4] discusses how bi / multilingual speakers draw upon their complex linguistic repertoire for communicative purposes in different contexts arguing that "translanguaging recognizes speakers" hybrid use of language in alignment with a variety of social purposes and communicative settings and acknowledges their ability to adapt to these diverse sociolinguistic situations.

Thus, the review of the literature on translanguaging reveals numerous benefits of using translanguaging as pedagogy.

### 4 Translanguaging in the ESP classroom

The issue of translanguaging in the foreign language classroom is becoming trendy. In terms of foreign language learning TL functions at two "levels":

- Linguistic - involves combining elements from different languages both in oral and written speech.
- Linguodidactic - involves alternating between a native language/s (L1) and a foreign language (L2) in different parts of a cognitive task.

In the cultural context of Ukrainian non-linguistic Universities these languages are Ukrainian/ Russian (Russian only on the part of Russian speaking students) and a foreign language. Both levels of TL coexist in the ESP classroom. Let's look at typical examples of using

TL at the linguistic level in “Teacher→Student/s” and “Student↔Student/s” modes.

Linguistic level: English- Ukrainian (transliteration in bold) translanguaging.

- **A teacher:** while explaining grammar:

*Present Simple (a ne Present Continuous) zazvychay*

*vykorystovuyetsya z diyedlovamy stanu: agree, believe, enjoy, hate, know, like, love, mean, prefer, remember, seem, think, understand, and want.*

*Napryklad: I do not agree with you. (A ne I'm not agreeing with you.) Dogs do not like cats. (A ne Dogs are not liking cats. '?') They want to stay at home. (A ne They're wanting to stay at home.)*

- **Students:** when discussing and assigning roles for a simulation based on a job/professional problem.

*Ty budesh a crane driver, a ya budu Head of the rolling mill.*

Such communication should not be perceived as something shameful, wrong, forbidden, because it helps to solve the learning task in the best possible way. Moreover, we believe that the linguistic level of TL can be used as a strategy for teaching a foreign language not only in speaking, but also in writing.

It is a well-known fact that the classical methodology, in which translation exercises played an important role, is a thing of the past. Instead it has been replaced by the communicative method, which focuses on the possibility to communicate and which emphasizes speaking and listening. But nevertheless, classical L1-to-L2 translation exercises have a significant impact on the development of students' foreign-language communicative competence, and they should not be abandoned altogether. There are a number of benefits of translation exercises:

- complex use of grammar and vocabulary;
- forming the ability to build sentences in a correct way;
- creating speaking and listening comprehension base.

However, students with a low level of L2 proficiency cannot cope with tasks for translation from L1 to L2 without using an electronic translator and receive poor marks for completing / not completing such work, which reduces the motivation to learn a foreign language and causes a feeling of their own inferiority.

Therefore, why not give such students an opportunity to do a translation exercise at the TL linguistic level and grade such work, even if it is at the lowest level. This would be translation at the level of foreign words in the context of a L1 sentence. Hopefully, as students' foreign-language competence increases, there will be more and more foreign words, their grammatical features will appear, for example, the plural, the possessive case of nouns, the degree of comparison of adjectives, the particle to before the infinitive, etc. Here are some examples to illustrate this strategy:

**Sentence in L1:** *Metal – shchil'ni materialy tomu, shcho mizh atomamy v metalakh mala vidstan.* (Ukrainian transliteration).

**Sentence in L2:** *Metals are dense materials because there is a small distance between atoms in metals.* (English).

**Linguistic level of written translanguaging.**

*Metal – shchil'ni materialy tomu, shcho mizh atom v metal mala vidstan.* [Ukrainian (transliteration in bold) - English].

*Metals – shchil'ni materialy tomu, shcho mizh atoms v metals small vidstan.* [Ukrainian (transliteration in bold) - English]

*Metals are shchil'ni materialy tomu, shcho mizh atoms v metals small vidstan.* [Ukrainian (transliteration in bold) - English].

*Metals are shchil'ni materialy because between atoms in metals small vidstan.* [Ukrainian (transliteration in bold) - English].

Translanguaging in ESP writing is not proposed here just as a self-regulating mechanism in which bilingual students can engage while planning, drafting or taking notes but as a strategy to be used in teaching L2 writing itself. The strategy helps students leverage their multiple linguistic resources to convey more information, express more ideas, while achieving a wider use of general and professional words.

There are two different types of linguodidactic translanguaging which can be defined in the corresponding studies [16, 17]. The first is spontaneous, or unplanned, translanguaging, occurring in classrooms where linguistic diversity is valued and seen as a resource for learning. It can take the form of students translating/explaining to each other and the teacher allowing L1 and L2 mix in communication, giving students with different English proficiency level opportunity to participate freely and fully in the class learning and socialisation.

The second type is planned translanguaging, where the teacher uses the approach purposefully and strategically, makes considered decisions about the learning objectives, taking into account many students having a good mastery of academic content and literacies in their L1, but having low English proficiency level. Planned translanguaging can be exemplified in three following activities:

1. Creating a rich experiential context by discussing and experiencing how to annotate and summarise articles on finance and banking/ international economics/ law or any other narrowly focused study, necessary for writing a degree project. Translanguaging, used for translating and elaborating key terms raises students' interest and encourages their involvement.
2. Reading, note-making analyzing and evaluating research articles to learn about their structure and moves, to be aware of the language features of each section of research articles. Translanguaging, used for translating, elaborating and exemplifying important/difficult terms or content for developing multilingual vocabulary and syntax inquiry to promote metalinguistic awareness.
3. Engaging students in textualizing the experience by writing a short essay to analyze and evaluate a research article. Translanguaging facilitates students' academic reading and writing.

**5 Benefits and challenges of incorporating translanguaging in**

## everyday teaching practice (empirical evidence)

The study was based upon survey conducted at the State University of Economics and Technology (Ukraine), National University of Tashkent, Bukhara State University (Uzbekistan) and Samara State Technical University (the Russian Federation).

The language policy of universities aims to improve the students' proficiency in both the state language and foreign languages, in particular English, as the international language of higher education and science. The universities have majors in which students learn two foreign languages at an advanced level. Students in most undergraduate majors study the discipline Foreign Language of Speciality (ESP) and Master's degree students study Professional Foreign Language (ESP), for which only 2-3 academic hours per week are allotted. This is a typical situation for non-linguistic universities in

Ukraine, Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation. The groups are heterogeneous; some students speak a foreign language at a level below average. University teachers of foreign languages are in active search of methods and approaches to increase the level of foreign language proficiency of their students.

In the case of "Only English" ESP class there is a paradoxical situation where you have to learn something unknown with the help of the unknown. ESP at a non-linguistic institution is very different from the Every Day English students learned in high school. ESP includes the study of professional content by means of a foreign language. Academic texts are written in a scientific style and contain complex grammatical phenomena and professional vocabulary whose semantization in a foreign language can take a long time and a foreign language teacher who is not a specialist in economics, law or metallurgy is not always able and obliged to do so.

Thus, there are contradictions in a non-language university, in particular:

**Table 1.** Questionnaire on the use of the home language (HL) within ESP foreign language class of non-linguistic universities

Questions	Always	Sometimes	Never
Do you use HL within a foreign language class? If so, when / for what:			
To manage the learning process;			
To explain grammar rules;			
To semantize vocabulary;			
To check reading comprehension;			
To consolidate the grasp of covered material when doing some vocabulary and grammar exercises (finding matches, filling gaps);			
To explain the purpose of educational activities;			
To resolve conflict situations;			
Other:			
Do you allow your students to communicate in their native language:			
To discuss creative assignments;			
To prepare for pair/team engagement activities (dialogues, debates, role playing, brainstorming);			
To make up a plan of monologue speech;			
Other:			
Name 3 – 4 advantages of using the native language within a foreign language class			
Name 3 – 4 disadvantages of using the native language within a foreign language class			

number of academic hours allocated for ESP study as well as the insufficient level of foreign language proficiency of a significant proportion of students versus the requirement of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialised Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan, The Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation to conduct classes in a foreign language exclusively.

- The complexity of the ESP discipline content versus insufficient level of foreign language proficiency.
- The large volume of learning material versus the limited time available for its study.
- The requirement to democratize learning versus the oppression of the natural human desire to communicate, express oneself and assimilate certain

content by all the known verbal means.

We believe that one of the strategies that can eliminate these contradictions is translanguaging strategy. We should emphasize, that in spite of this strategy having long been used in the practice of both higher and secondary school teachers (we prove it in the further presentation of the study results), most teachers are embarrassed and even ashamed of admitting this fact. They definitely had an interest regarding translanguaging in the classroom and responded to our survey on an entirely voluntary basis, but the most preferred to stay anonymous, since reference to the home language in a foreign language class is perceived as evidence of the teacher's professional incompetence and inability to communicate in a foreign language.

That is why our study and above given questionnaire aim to draw attention to the problem of expediency of using the translanguaging strategy in ESP classes and its "legitimization" in the methodology of teaching, provide empirical results about the role of translanguaging in ESP classrooms, add to our understanding of the extent of using translanguaging by university teachers/ students and the attitudes of practicing teachers towards translanguaging strategy.

The participants in this study comprised 50 teachers, each answered a questionnaire. As shown in Figure 1, the ESP teachers participating in this study represented three different nationalities, with the largest group (about 60 %) comprised of Ukrainians. The second highest percentage (25%) were Uzbekistan teachers from Tashkent and Buhara. About 15% of teachers represented the Russian Federation. Everyone, participating in the study possessed a foreign language-related postgraduate diploma, master's or PhD degree. The students' level in English varied substantially.

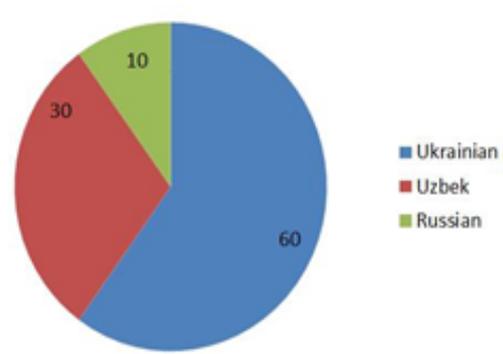


Fig. 1. Teachers' translinguaging (%).

The study applied a combined-method design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to obtain reliable information and to explore the topic rigorously. 50 participants completed a survey online during the fall of 2020. To ensure the questionnaire items content reliability and validity, it was piloted to five English teachers to check the wording and the clarity of its items. After piloting the participants' feedback was taken into account and some questionnaire items were modified to provide better understanding.

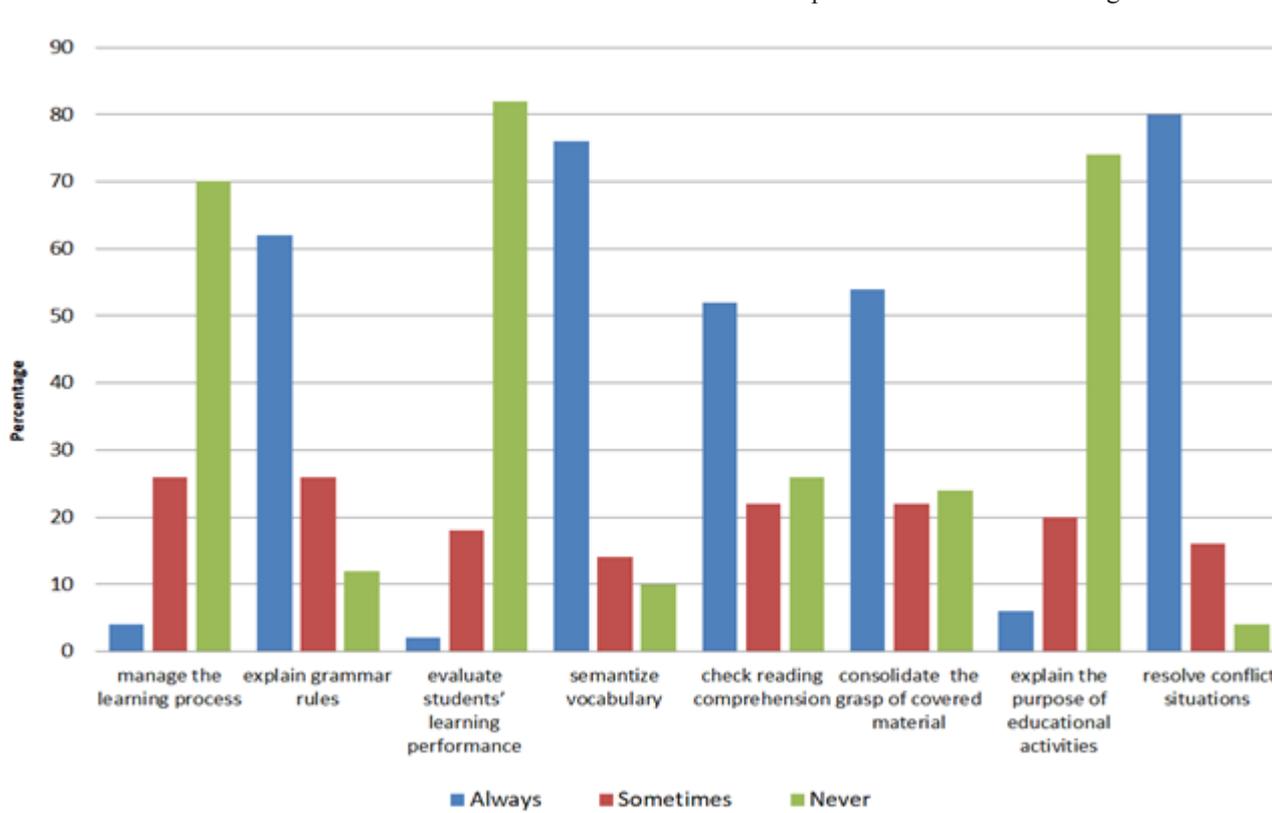


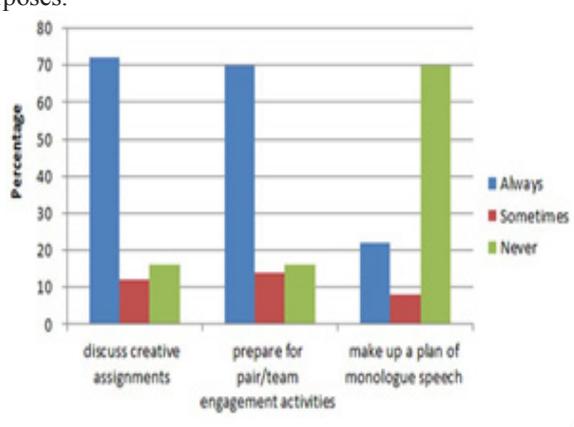
Fig. 2. Frequency of translinguaging by EFL teachers.

The final version of the questionnaire comprised ten multi-item Likert scale questions, including an open question, providing the participants the opportunity to add further comments, as well as ten short background questions. Finally, the participants were asked for their contact details, providing they were willing to participate in the follow-up interviews. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was about 20 minutes. The questionnaire explored teachers' attitudes towards

applying translanguaging approach in the professional context; therefore, it should be pointed out that the data represents reported practices, which can be far from actual ones. Concerning the follow-up interviews, the main target was to provide rigorous comprehension of participants' practices and attitudes towards translanguaging in the ESP classroom. Thus, Fig. 2 shows how often ESP teachers use TL regarding their educational aims and objectives.

In conformity with the questionnaire results presented in Figure 2, more than 82% of teachers reported that they never used translanguaging while evaluating their students, 74 % avoid translanguaging for explaining the purpose of educational activities and 70% under no circumstances apply it for managing the learning process correcting. When examining the results of “always” option, it turns out that the teachers tend to apply much translanguaging in their ESP classroom for resolving conflict situations (80%) and semantizing vocabulary (76%). However, for the “sometimes” option, as few as about 26% of teachers reported that they do not mind using TL to explain grammar and manage the learning process as well as to check reading comprehension and consolidate the grasp of covered material.

The next stage of research was to see how often students use TL in the ESP classroom and with what purposes.



**Fig. 3.** Frequency of translanguaging by EFL learners.

Definitely, ESP of university students is a conscious process, involving analytical thinking, previous language learning experience and awareness. Therefore, teachers reported that the majority of their students used translanguaging to some extent in the ESP classroom, with the main functions of discussing creative assignments and preparing for pair/team engagement activities such as dialogues, debates, role playing, brainstorming (72 % and 70 % respectively). It was also apparent that a large percentage of students (70%) are not inclined to applying TL for making up a plan of monologue speech.

Of paramount interest were the interviewees’ evaluations of translanguaging shortcomings and benefits. The data presented in Figure 4 show that most teachers are in agreement with three following points: (1) TL helps get rid of anxiety and frustration to create a

stress-free learning environment which is pure emotional response (the highest percentage at 84 (%); (2) translanguaging allows parallelizing, comparing target language knowledge on grammar/vocabulary structure to their existing home language knowledge and introducing the main differences in grammar and pronunciation, (levels 78 (%); (3) translanguaging encourages complete comprehension of grammar and vocabulary (76%), which relates to pure cognitive skill. The highest level of disagreement was found out for the point, which applies to using translanguaging for helping students work together (68%). The teachers were likely to come to a larger agreement about psychological and cognitive reasons for using translanguaging than about practical reasons for its use, such as saving time (62 % only). Five of the interviewed teachers highlighted a need to use translanguaging at certain points, such as “explaining the meaning of abstract words, introducing the main differences in grammar and pronunciation”, “using richer and more authentic texts, which mean more comprehensible input and faster acquisition” during class. One teacher referred to TL use as a “friendly asset people bring to the task of FL learning”. Teacher A stated that TL contributes to “all-newly-acquired FL items taking roots in our minds which are eventually deep enough to function independently of the HL”. Interviewee B focused on “TL techniques allowing teachers to use richer and more authentic texts, which means more comprehensible input and faster acquisition”.

It is obvious from Figure 5 that the majority of teachers (more than 76%) have strong belief that using translanguaging reduces the opportunities for proficient learners to speak and practice English, prevents creating effective foreign language environment, which may have a negative impact on whether they think in English. The highest disagreement level shown in the survey was for the last point, which relates to causing faulty parallelism (52% did not accept it). During the interviews, one teacher stated that their opposing the use of TL is based on her firm belief that “teacher and students fail to observe the distinctions between equivalence of form, semantic equivalence, and pragmatic features, and thus oversimplify to the point of using crude and inaccurate translation” (Teacher C).

The survey results initiated hot debates and gave opportunity to claim that the use of TL in ESP teaching and learning English is inevitable. Being skillfully applied, it fosters linguistic, cultural and intellectual vigor of students with different level of command of language.

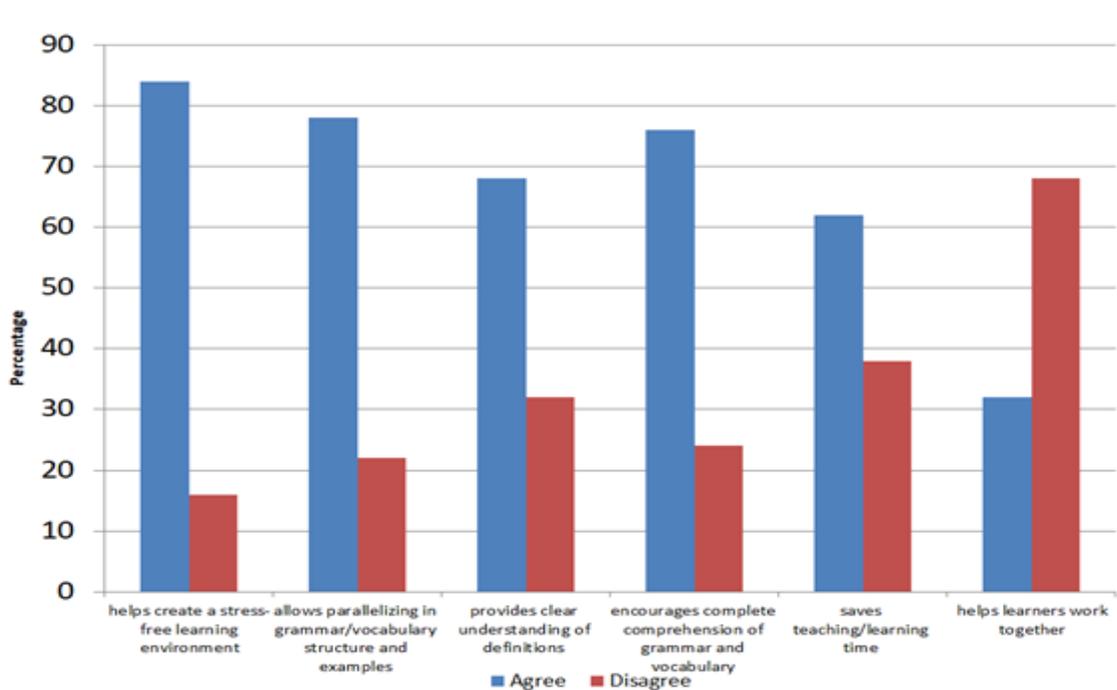


Fig. 4. Advantages of translanguageing.

Figure 5 shows teachers’ opinion about disadvantages of using TL techniques in the learning process.

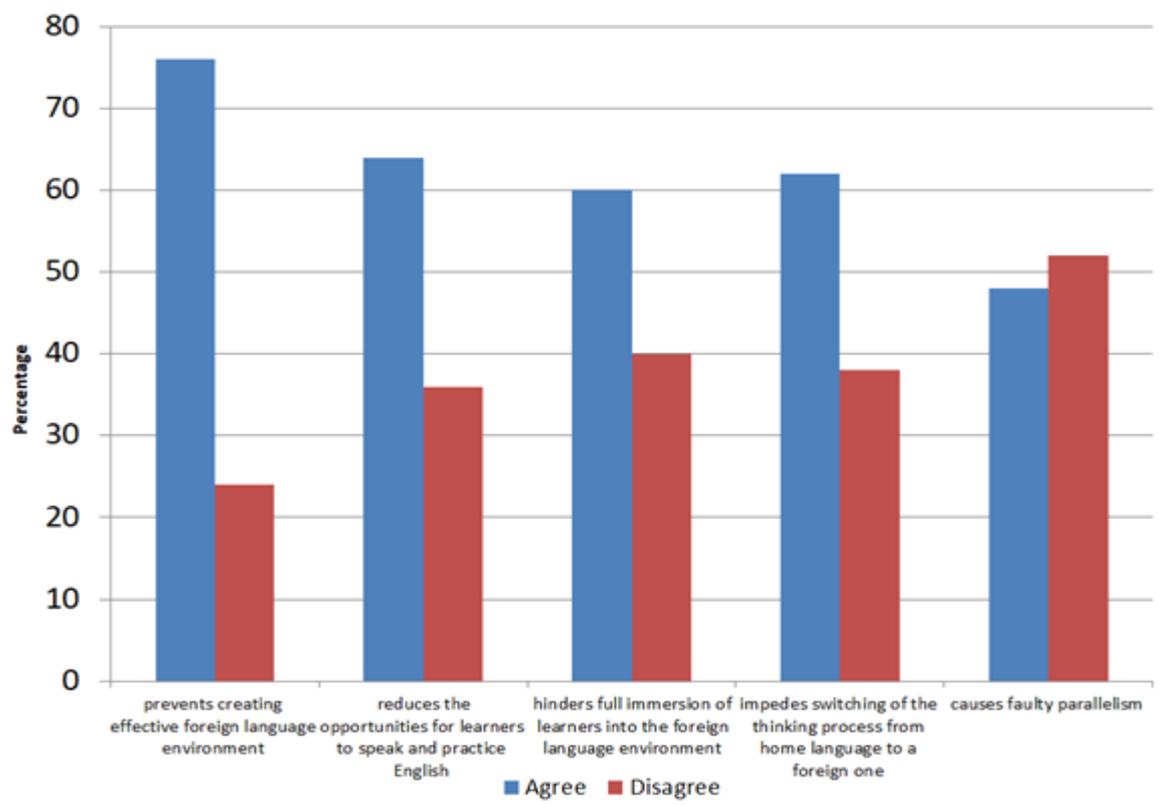


Fig. 5. Disadvantages of translanguageing.

The HL linguistic experience often becomes the foundation of their future learning. Thus, the teachers involve translanguageing judiciously and methodically in bilingual and multilingual classes with care and concern. The well-directed and appropriate use of lexical and syntactic balance between the HL and English promotes retention, understanding of linguistic affinity and

transition of one language knowledge and skills to another.

## 6 Conclusion

Implications from the study indicate multiple benefits from creating a learning environment where translanguaging is encouraged. The potentials of translanguaging appeared to be limitless. The use of translanguaging in ESP classrooms is justified as flexible strategy and essential tool for students' making meaning of text, getting guidelines for their activity through the assignment exploring and expanding content, facilitating acquisition of complex linguistic knowledge, making and maintaining dialogue, effective accomplishment of jigsaw tasks. It is worth emphasizing, that translanguaging should only be used to help establish knowledge in the target language, facilitate interpersonal interactions, and increase efficiency. In no way should translanguaging be granted the same status as a target language in the ESP classroom. None of the supporters endorse its unlimited use. On the contrary, it should be borne in mind that excessive translanguaging deprives students of appropriate significant amount of target language input.

Research studies revealed that translanguaging is both an efficient learning tool and a useful teaching method if pedagogical activities are designed thoroughly. Students use translanguaging to facilitate their process of comprehension and to reduce any stress and inhibitedness which may arise due to their limited language proficiency. Teachers use translanguaging to promote a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter, help the integration of fluent speakers with low proficiency learners, consolidate foreign language knowledge which students have acquired, such as vocabulary, sentence structures, and grammar aspects.

It should be pointed out that it is next to impossible to define appropriate universal volume of translanguaging used by teachers because it depends on students' proficiency levels and teaching purposes. Taking into consideration all pros and contras, identified in a survey, we can assert that translanguaging is an overwhelmingly effective instrument which should not be either abandoned or denied in ESP classrooms. Ignoring supportiveness of translanguaging is nothing but a crucial mistake, which no skilled foreign language teacher should make.

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