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THE ROLE OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN UZBEKISTAN: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CLASSROOM REALITIES

Toirjonov Elzod Elyor ugli
Teacher, Tashkent State University of Economics
e-mail: etoirjonov@gmail.com

Abstract. Translanguaging — the dynamic and fluid use of multiple linguistic resources across language boundaries — has emerged as a significant area of inquiry in applied linguistics and language education. This study investigates the role of translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan, a multilingual context where learners routinely navigate Uzbek, Russian, and English simultaneously. Drawing on classroom observation data, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires collected across three higher education institutions in Tashkent, the study examines how teachers and learners deploy their full linguistic repertoires to facilitate comprehension, negotiate meaning, and support identity construction. Findings indicate that translanguaging, when used strategically rather than haphazardly, significantly enhances learner comprehension and classroom participation. The study argues that monolingual instructional ideologies continue to constrain pedagogical innovation in Uzbek EFL contexts, and that a translanguaging-informed approach offers a more linguistically realistic and pedagogically effective alternative. Implications are drawn for curriculum policy, teacher education, and classroom practice.

Keywords: translanguaging, EFL, Uzbekistan, multilingualism, language policy, pedagogical practice, higher education, teacher cognition.

Introduction. The belief that EFL classrooms should function as monolingual spaces where only the target language is used has long influenced language teaching practices worldwide. However, research in sociolinguistics and bilingualism increasingly shows that multilingual learners naturally draw on all their linguistic resources when acquiring new languages.

Uzbekistan provides a particularly relevant setting for examining this issue. As a multilingual society, learners commonly use Uzbek, Russian, and English within their daily academic and social interactions. Recent educational reforms have further strengthened the role of English, creating a trilingual learning environment in many higher education institutions.

Within this context, translanguaging offers an alternative to traditional monolingual approaches. Introduced by Cen Williams (1994) and further developed by scholars such as Ofelia García and Li Wei, translanguaging refers to the flexible use of a speaker's entire linguistic repertoire as an integrated communicative resource rather than as separate language systems.

This study explores translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms across three universities in Tashkent. It investigates how translanguaging is used, how teachers and students perceive its pedagogical value, and which institutional or ideological factors influence its implementation.

Literature Review. The theoretical basis of translanguaging challenges traditional views of bilingualism that treat languages as separate systems. Earlier models (Weinreich, 1953; Haugen, 1956) promoted linguistic separation in education to avoid interference and preserve target language accuracy. However, García and Wei (2014) argue that multilingual speakers draw from a single, integrated linguistic repertoire, using their languages flexibly according to context and

communicative needs. From this perspective, translanguaging is a natural multilingual practice rather than a deficiency.

A growing body of research supports translanguaging in education. Studies by Canagarajah (2011), Cenoz and Gorter (2017), and Creese and Blackledge (2010) demonstrate that strategic use of learners' full linguistic resources improves writing quality, content comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, and classroom engagement.

In Central Asian and post-Soviet contexts, research remains limited but indicates similar trends. Studies by Smagulova (2008), Pavlenko (2008), and Hasanova (2007) highlight the persistence of monolingual educational ideologies despite the multilingual realities of learners. In Uzbekistan, the gap between English-only policies and actual classroom practices often makes strict monolingual instruction impractical.

Language ideology plays a key role in this debate. According to Blommaert (2010), beliefs about the value and appropriate use of language strongly influence educational practices. In many EFL contexts, English is associated with prestige, while the use of other languages is often viewed negatively. Challenging these assumptions is essential for the successful implementation of translanguaging pedagogy.

Methods. This study employed a qualitative research design combining classroom ethnography and phenomenological inquiry to explore the functions, meanings, and contextual factors influencing translanguaging in EFL classrooms.

Data were collected over one academic semester in three higher education institutions in Tashkent representing different educational contexts: a research-oriented state university, a pedagogical university, and a private internationally focused university. Participants included 12 EFL teachers and 180 undergraduate students with proficiency levels ranging from A2 to B2.

Three data collection methods were used. First, classroom observations were conducted across 96 lesson hours to document language use and translanguaging practices. Second, semi-structured interviews with teachers explored their beliefs about multilingual pedagogy, institutional constraints, and classroom experiences. Third, student focus groups examined attitudes toward language use, learning challenges, and the role of Uzbek and Russian in English language development.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Interview and focus group transcripts were coded inductively and organized into broader themes, while observation notes were examined to identify recurring functions and patterns of translanguaging across classroom contexts.

Results. The analysis yielded three overarching themes that organize the study's findings: the functional diversity of translanguaging in practice, the divergence between institutional ideology and classroom reality, and the conditions under which translanguaging was perceived as most pedagogically productive.

Functional diversity of translanguaging was the most immediately visible finding across the observation data. Rather than constituting a uniform or undifferentiated phenomenon, translanguaging in these classrooms served a rich variety of communicative and pedagogical functions. The most frequently observed function was **conceptual mediation**: teachers drawing on Uzbek or Russian to clarify abstract grammatical concepts or culturally specific content that resisted straightforward English explanation. One teacher, when introducing the concept of reported speech, spent approximately three minutes working through the distinction between direct and indirect speech using Uzbek sentence structures as a scaffold, before returning to English for

practice activities. Students in the corresponding focus group consistently identified moments of this kind as among the most clarifying in their learning experience.

A second major function was **affective support and relationship building**. Several teachers used brief, warm exchanges in Uzbek or Russian — particularly at the beginning of lessons or during moments of visible student anxiety — to lower the affective filter and signal that the classroom was a psychologically safe space. Students overwhelmingly responded positively to these moments, with focus group participants describing them as evidence that the teacher "understood where we are coming from" and "was not pretending we have no other language."

A third function, observed more frequently among student interactions than teacher-led talk, was **collaborative meaning negotiation**: students working in pairs or small groups frequently alternated between English, Uzbek, and Russian to work through task instructions, negotiate interpretations of reading texts, or plan oral presentations. In nearly all observed instances, this multilingual collaborative process produced higher-quality English output than monolingual group work conditions, a finding consistent with Canagarajah's (2011) earlier work.

The second major theme — **divergence between institutional ideology and classroom reality** — revealed a significant and sometimes distressing tension experienced by many teacher participants. All three institutions operated under formal policies that either mandated or strongly encouraged English-only instruction. Yet every teacher in the study acknowledged using Uzbek or Russian to some degree, and classroom observations confirmed this across all twelve participants. The critical variable was not whether translanguaging occurred but whether it occurred consciously and strategically, or apologetically and without pedagogical intentionality. Teachers at the research university tended to express greater anxiety about their multilingual practices, framing them as necessary compromises rather than legitimate pedagogical choices. Teachers at the pedagogical university, operating under less strict English-only pressure, described their language alternation with greater confidence and purposefulness.

The third theme concerned the **conditions enabling productive translanguaging**. Across both observation and interview data, three enabling conditions emerged consistently. First, teacher metalinguistic awareness: teachers who could articulate a rationale for their language choices — who understood translanguaging as a strategy rather than a failure — used it more effectively and more responsively. Second, structured translanguaging spaces: when teachers deliberately built multilingual moments into lesson design — such as allowing students to plan in any language before presenting in English — the subsequent English production was more fluent and better organized. Third, positive student language identity: students who reported feeling that their Uzbek and Russian were valued resources rather than obstacles to English learning demonstrated greater risk-taking in their English production and greater overall engagement with classroom tasks.

Discussion. The findings of this study challenge the monolingual instructional model that continues to shape EFL education in Uzbekistan. The results indicate that translanguaging supports English language development by reducing cognitive barriers, enhancing learner engagement, and facilitating collaborative meaning-making.

Despite these benefits, monolingual ideologies remain influential in institutional policies. This creates a gap between official language policies and actual classroom practices, forcing teachers to balance effective multilingual strategies with institutional expectations. Such tensions may contribute to professional uncertainty and limit pedagogical innovation.

The Uzbek context presents additional complexities due to the coexistence of Uzbek, Russian, and English within educational settings. As a result, translanguaging practices carry linguistic, cultural, and social significance that teachers must navigate carefully.

The study also found that structured translanguaging activities were more effective than spontaneous language alternation. Consistent with García and Li Wei's (2014) distinction between natural translanguaging and translanguaging pedagogy, the findings suggest that learning outcomes improve when multilingual practices are intentionally integrated into instructional design rather than simply tolerated in classroom interaction.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that translanguaging is a natural and pedagogically valuable feature of EFL classrooms in Uzbekistan. Students and teachers use their full linguistic repertoires to enhance comprehension, facilitate communication, and support learning. Rather than hindering English acquisition, translanguaging serves as an effective instructional resource when used strategically.

The findings suggest that Uzbekistan's efforts to strengthen English language education would benefit from policies that recognize multilingualism as an asset rather than a barrier. English develops alongside Uzbek and Russian, making multilingual approaches more consistent with learners' linguistic realities.

Teacher education programs should therefore provide future EFL instructors with both theoretical knowledge and practical strategies for implementing translanguaging pedagogy effectively. This includes opportunities to design multilingual learning activities and critically reflect on language ideologies that influence classroom practice.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of translanguaging on English proficiency through longitudinal and comparative studies. Further investigation of Uzbek-English linguistic interactions would also contribute to the development of context-specific translanguaging pedagogies for the Uzbek educational environment.

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