

Translanguaging in Agricultural ESP: Conceptual Boundaries and Linguodidactic Relevance

Sobirova Mukhlisa Sadriddin qizi

Doctorate student of Navoiy state university

muxlisa.sobirova95@icloud.com

Abstract: *This article examines the theoretical and linguodidactic relevance of translanguaging in profession-oriented English language teaching, with particular attention to agricultural English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The study treats translanguaging not as unrestricted use of the first language, a synonym for code-switching, or a renewed form of the Grammar-Translation Method, but as a theoretical perspective on how multilingual learners mobilise linguistic, semiotic and disciplinary resources for meaning-making. A conceptual-comparative analysis of key works on translanguaging, multilingual pedagogy, language transfer, ESP and the CEFR Companion Volume is used to distinguish pedagogical translanguaging from spontaneous multilingual practices and from adjacent concepts. The analysis shows that its relevance to agricultural ESP lies particularly in the asymmetry between students' existing subject knowledge and their still-developing ability to express that knowledge through English terminology and professional discourse. Rather than proposing a competence model or a set of classroom procedures, the article clarifies the conceptual scope, potential and limitations of translanguaging for agricultural ESP. It argues that multilingual resources may support the activation of prior disciplinary knowledge, cross-linguistic awareness and the mediation of specialised meaning, while English remains the target language for increasingly independent professional communication. The article also identifies conceptual limitations, including the risk of reducing target-language exposure and the continuing debate over unitary versus differentiated linguistic repertoires.*

Keywords: *translanguaging, pedagogical translanguaging, agricultural ESP, multilingual repertoire, cross-linguistic influence, professional discourse, English for Specific Purposes.*

1. Introduction

In non-philological higher education, English is increasingly expected to function not merely as a general academic subject but as a means of accessing professional knowledge, interpreting specialised information and participating in discipline-related communication. This requirement is especially visible in agricultural education, where students work with scientific texts, technical descriptions, instructions, tables, diagrams, professional presentations and problem-solving discussions. In such contexts, the learner does not approach English with an empty cognitive system: subject knowledge, concepts and terminology may already be available through Uzbek, Russian or other familiar languages, while the corresponding English lexical and discursive resources are still developing. The resulting gap between professional knowledge and target-language expression creates a specific linguodidactic problem that cannot be fully explained by a monolingual model of language learning.[1]

The CEFR Companion Volume broadens the traditional view of language use by foregrounding mediation, interaction and plurilingual/pluricultural repertoires, while describing the learner as a social agent who mobilises available resources to accomplish communicative tasks. Translanguaging theory intersects with this perspective, although the two should not be treated as identical. CEFR provides a descriptive framework for communicative activities and competences; translanguaging offers a theoretical lens for understanding how multilingual users draw on an integrated repertoire

when constructing meaning. For agricultural ESP, this distinction is important because it allows the researcher to examine how previously acquired professional concepts and multilingual resources may support the comprehension and expression of specialised content without turning the language classroom into unrestricted first-language use.[2]

The concept of translanguaging originated in Welsh bilingual education and initially described planned classroom practices in which information received through one language was processed and reformulated through another. Later theoretical development, particularly in the work of Ofelia García and Li Wei, expanded the concept beyond alternation between two named languages toward a dynamic view of the multilingual speaker's overall communicative repertoire. This broader understanding has stimulated productive debate but has also created terminological ambiguity: translanguaging is often conflated with code-switching, translation, multilingual support, or any classroom use of the first language. A theoretically rigorous application to ESP therefore requires clear conceptual boundaries.[3]

The purpose of this article is to systematise the theoretical foundations of translanguaging relevant to agricultural ESP, distinguish it from adjacent concepts, explain its relevance to the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and English-language expression, and specify the limitations that should be considered before the concept is transferred into methodology and classroom design. The article deliberately remains at the theoretical level: it addresses what translanguaging explains and why it may be relevant to agricultural ESP, rather than proposing a competence framework or prescribing concrete strategies, tasks or lesson procedures.

2. Methodology

The study is theoretical and analytical in design. Its source base consists of the works used to substantiate the translanguaging section of the broader dissertation research: studies on the historical development of translanguaging, dynamic multilingual repertoires, pedagogical translanguaging, code-switching, translation, language transfer, monolingual instructional assumptions, ESP and the CEFR Companion Volume. The analytical corpus includes Lewis, Jones and Baker; García; García and Li Wei; Li Wei; MacSwan; Cenoz and Gorter; Poplack; Baynham and Lee; Richards and Rodgers; Odlin; Cummins; Hutchinson and Waters; Dudley-Evans and St John; and the Council of Europe.[4]

Three complementary procedures were applied. First, conceptual analysis was used to identify how translanguaging is defined across theoretical traditions and to separate its pedagogical and spontaneous forms. Second, comparative analysis was employed to distinguish translanguaging from code-switching, translation, the Grammar-Translation Method and English-only or monolingual instructional principles. Third, interpretive synthesis was used to relate the theoretical properties of translanguaging to agricultural ESP, particularly to the asymmetry between existing professional knowledge and emerging English-language terminology and discourse. The analysis did not assume the superiority of translanguaging over other methods; instead, it examined the conditions under which the concept has explanatory value and the theoretical risks associated with its overextension.

A further analytical criterion concerned the relationship between named languages and the learner's repertoire. Strong versions of a unitary-repertoire account were not adopted uncritically. Following the reservations raised in multilingual scholarship, the study distinguishes the social and educational reality of named languages from the functional mobilisation of resources by individual speakers. This distinction makes it possible to recognise integrated multilingual meaning-making while still acknowledging the pedagogical importance of English as the target language in ESP.[5]

3. Results

The analysis first confirms that translanguaging has undergone a substantial conceptual expansion. Its early pedagogical use was associated with deliberately coordinated bilingual classroom activity, whereas later scholarship reoriented attention toward the multilingual speaker and the flexible mobilisation of an entire repertoire. García and Li Wei interpret multilingual language use as dynamic meaning-making rather than simple movement between sealed linguistic systems, and Li Wei further develops translanguaging as a practical theory of language centred on communicative action. The analytical focus therefore shifts from the question “Which language was used?” toward “Which linguistic and semiotic resources were mobilised to construct meaning?”[6]

At the same time, the analysis shows that pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging should not be collapsed into one phenomenon. Cenoz and Gorter distinguish spontaneous multilingual practices, which emerge naturally from communicative needs, from pedagogical translanguaging, which is deliberately connected to learning goals and cross-linguistic awareness. This distinction is crucial for ESP. A student’s casual switch to a familiar language, a teacher’s rapid translation of a difficult word, and a deliberately designed multilingual meaning-making process do not have the same theoretical status. Treating all first-language use as translanguaging would weaken conceptual precision.

The second result concerns differentiation from adjacent concepts. Translanguaging and code-switching may describe overlapping empirical events, but their analytical centres differ. Classical code-switching research examines alternation between languages or codes and the structural or sociolinguistic conditions of that alternation. Translanguaging, by contrast, foregrounds the multilingual communicator and the functional deployment of repertoire resources. MacSwan’s critique is relevant here: code-switching research should not be dismissed as theoretically obsolete, and claims that named languages are merely ideological constructs should be separated from claims about the grammatical organisation of multilingual speakers. Thus, the two concepts are better viewed as different analytical lenses than as mutually exclusive theories.[7]

Translation also differs from translanguaging. Translation normally presupposes a source text or message and its reformulation in another language with functional or semantic correspondence. Translanguaging may include translation as one resource, but it is not limited to source-target equivalence. A learner may connect an English agricultural term with a familiar-language concept, a diagram, prior agronomic knowledge and contextual cues before reformulating the meaning for a new communicative purpose. In this sense, translation can be part of a wider meaning-making process rather than its defining structure.

A similar distinction applies to the Grammar-Translation Method. Historically, that method prioritised explicit grammar explanation, memorisation of vocabulary, written translation and work with texts, while spontaneous oral communication occupied a secondary position. Translanguaging does not derive its rationale from translation practice as such; its theoretical focus is the multilingual learner’s repertoire and the use of available resources to process knowledge and accomplish communicative activity. However, the Table 1. distinction is not guaranteed by terminology alone. If classroom practice labelled “translanguaging” reduces English use and returns to constant word-for-word translation and grammar explanation, it may functionally approximate Grammar-Translation regardless of the label.[8]

Table 1. Theoretical distinction of translanguaging from adjacent concepts and approaches[9]

Concept / approach	Analytical focus	Primary purpose	Relation between languages
Translanguaging	The multilingual speaker's linguistic-semiotic repertoire	Meaning-making, knowledge processing and communicative activity	Resources are functionally interconnected in use
Code-switching	Alternation between named languages or codes	Explaining structural and sociolinguistic patterns of alternation	Language/code boundaries remain analytically salient
Translation	Relationship between a source message and a reformulated target message	Rendering meaning in another language	Source and target languages are usually differentiated
Grammar-Translation Method	Grammar, vocabulary and translation exercises	Learning rules and translating texts	The first language is a major explanatory and translation medium
English-only monolingual principle	Maximal and separate use of the target language	Increasing target-language input and practice	Other languages are strongly restricted

The third result concerns cross-linguistic influence. Earlier accounts often treated interference primarily as a negative effect of the first language on the target language. Contemporary work on language transfer recognises both facilitative and non-facilitative outcomes, including positive transfer, negative transfer, overuse and underuse. From this perspective, multilingual experience is not automatically a source of error. Cummins likewise questions strict monolingual instructional assumptions and emphasises the educational value of activating prior knowledge and cross-linguistic resources. Translanguaging therefore should not be presented as eliminating interference; rather, it provides a framework for interpreting cross-linguistic influence as a natural phenomenon that can be examined through conscious comparison and metalinguistic awareness.[10]

The fourth result is the specific relevance of translanguaging to agricultural ESP. ESP is organised around learners' academic and professional needs rather than around language as an autonomous object. Hutchinson and Waters define ESP through the learner's reason for learning, while Dudley-Evans and St John emphasise needs analysis, specialist discourse and context-specific communication. In agricultural education, the same student may understand soil fertility, crop rotation, irrigation, plant disease or post-harvest processes conceptually in a familiar language but lack the English terminology, collocations and discourse patterns needed to communicate that knowledge. The problem is therefore not always absence of professional knowledge; it may be asymmetry between conceptual knowledge and English-language realisation.

This asymmetry gives translanguaging an epistemic as well as communicative relevance. A multilingual repertoire can function not merely as a translation reservoir but as a cognitive resource through which previously acquired concepts are activated, new information is integrated into existing knowledge structures, and the accuracy of meaning is checked across linguistic forms. The theoretical contribution is especially important when a student can reason about an agronomic problem but cannot yet express the reasoning fully in English. Translanguaging makes it possible to analyse disciplinary knowledge and emerging English linguistic resources as developmentally related rather than mutually exclusive.[11]

A final result concerns the relationship between translanguaging and target-language independence. The theoretical recognition of an integrated repertoire does not imply that the pedagogical and social boundaries of named languages disappear, nor does it justify unlimited reliance on familiar languages. Pedagogical translanguaging can coexist with a strong orientation toward increasingly independent English use. In agricultural ESP, this means that multilingual resources may support comprehension, conceptual precision and mediation while English remains the expected

medium for the progressive development of professional terminology, discourse and communicative performance.

4. Discussion

The findings support a cautious interpretation of translanguaging as a theoretical-linguodidactic perspective rather than a universal method. Its value lies in explaining multilingual learners' real cognitive and communicative behaviour, particularly where subject knowledge has developed through one linguistic route and professional English is still emerging. This is directly relevant to agricultural ESP because disciplinary learning and language learning rarely progress at identical rates. A student may possess adequate agronomic reasoning but appear linguistically weak when the same reasoning must be expressed through specialised English. A strictly monolingual interpretation risks treating this mismatch as absence of knowledge rather than as a difference between conceptual and linguistic resources.[12]

The analysis also clarifies why translanguaging should not be positioned as a direct competitor to Communicative Language Teaching, task-based learning, CLIL or ESP. These approaches primarily address the organisation of teaching, learning tasks, content-language integration or needs-based course design. Translanguaging addresses a different question: how the multilingual learner's repertoire is conceptualised and how meaning may be constructed across resources. For this reason, it can theoretically coexist with communicative and task-oriented methodologies without replacing them. The boundary becomes especially important for the later methodological stage of the research, where concrete strategies and tasks must be justified separately rather than inferred automatically from translanguaging theory.[13]

A second discussion point concerns the risk of conceptual overextension. If every use of Uzbek, Russian or another familiar language is labelled translanguaging, the concept loses analytical value. Pedagogical translanguaging requires a connection to learning goals, awareness of cross-linguistic relations and a functional role in meaning-making. Similarly, translanguaging should not be used to legitimise reduced English exposure. The English-only principle has a legitimate strength: it can maximise target-language input and increase opportunities for automatised learning. A balanced theoretical position therefore recognises multilingual resources without turning them into a substitute for sustained English practice.

A third issue is the continuing theoretical debate around unitary repertoires and named languages. García and Li Wei's dynamic perspective provides a powerful account of flexible multilingual communication, but MacSwan's critique warns against conflating the sociopolitical status of named languages with claims about the grammatical systems available to multilingual individuals. The present synthesis therefore adopts a moderate position: resources may be functionally integrated in communication, while named languages retain pedagogical, social and analytical relevance. This position is particularly suitable for ESP, where the objective includes mastery of recognisable English professional conventions and genre expectations.[14]

The CEFR Companion Volume provides an additional point of convergence. Its emphasis on mediation and plurilingual repertoire does not make it a translanguaging framework, yet both perspectives reject the assumption that effective communication necessarily occurs inside a single sealed language system. In professional communication, mediation may involve selecting, reorganising, simplifying and relaying specialised information for another participant. Translanguaging theory helps explain how multilingual resources can contribute internally to such processes, whereas CEFR offers observable descriptors for communicative performance. Their conceptual relationship is therefore complementary rather than identical.

The main limitation of the present article is its theoretical-analytical character. The proposed interpretation does not by itself demonstrate that translanguaging improves agricultural ESP

outcomes. Its pedagogical value must be tested through empirical research that compares planned multilingual support with appropriate control conditions, monitors target-language exposure and output, and evaluates changes in learners' comprehension of specialised content, use of English terminology and ability to communicate professional meaning. The present analysis should therefore be read as a theoretical platform for subsequent methodological modelling and empirical validation, not as evidence of universal effectiveness.[15]

5. Conclusion

The study shows that translanguaging in agricultural ESP is most productively understood as a theoretical and linguodidactic perspective on multilingual meaning-making rather than as unrestricted first-language use, a synonym for code-switching, an extension of translation, or a modernised Grammar-Translation Method. Its conceptual development from Welsh bilingual pedagogy to broader theories of dynamic multilingual repertoires has expanded the analytical focus from language alternation to the multilingual learner's use of linguistic and semiotic resources in constructing meaning.

For agricultural ESP, the central theoretical contribution lies in explaining the mismatch that may arise between established professional knowledge and still-developing English terminology and discourse. Translanguaging makes it possible to view prior knowledge, familiar languages, English resources and professional meaning-making as functionally related elements of learning. At the same time, the approach requires conceptual restraint: named languages retain relevance, English input and output must remain sufficient, and claims of effectiveness require empirical verification.

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