

# HOW TO ASSIST FOREIGN STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND THE CONTENT (IN RUSSIAN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT)?

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## Abstract

This paper aims to discuss and demonstrate how translanguaging can be a way to enhance computer literacy in polylingual CLIL course at Kazan Federal University (KFU).

Computer literacy is an essential skill for students in our modern world. Computer literacy gives students the opportunity to expand their horizons to learn skills they would not have the opportunity to acquire in the traditional classroom. That is why almost all educational programs contains computer literacy courses. Thus, students enrolled in the program "Russian as a foreign language" have to study "Computer Science" course for professional purposes. It is rather difficult to acquire the content in Russian language for foreign students as they think in mother tongue and their background knowledge have formulated in native language. Thus, the question arises: "What is the best way to help students to comprehend the content in Russian language?"

As a solution, many researchers suggest to use Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), where translanguaging plays important role to engage students to use their emerging academic language and bilingual repertoires. According to recent studies, translanguaging offers many benefits to language learners, in particular is to deepen understanding of the content. In CLIL context translanguaging is concerned as sort of catalyst for shifting from language-oriented to content-oriented CLIL model. In other words, the principle of translanguaging assume that the use of mother tongue can serve as a resource to comprehend the content.

In this article we describe educational techniques based on the principle of translanguaging which can assist the foreign students to understand the content of "Computer Science" course such as: to discuss content in small groups using two languages; to brainstorm during class activities; to respond to a teacher's question in mother tongue; to provide assistance to peers during activities; to enable participation by lower proficiency students.

The survey among students was conducted to assess the effectiveness of translanguaging educational techniques. Thirty-two master students from the Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of Kazan Federal University participated in this survey. The results of the survey showed that the implementation of translanguaging educational techniques for teaching "Computer Science" course received positive feedback, which was a prerequisite for further development in this area.

Keywords: Translanguaging, CLIL, computer literacy, foreign students.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Kazan Federal University (KFU) is situated in Kazan - the capital of Tatarstan, which is one of the republics of Russia. Currently many students from all over the world especially from Asia and the former Soviet Union republics come to Kazan to participate in different international educational programs for several reasons. Firstly, because of the long-standing traditional interest in Russia and its culture, secondly, Russia and Asia are implementing many joint projects in a variety of fields. Therefore, specialists who speak Russian are in demand. Therefore, the Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of KFU offers many of bachelor, master and postgraduate programs in the areas of "Philology", "Pedagogical Education", "Linguistics", which focuses on the study of Russian as a foreign language.

While the number of Russian language learners in classrooms at the university continues to increase annually, teachers have been working diligently to study the best methods to support foreign students to understand the content of different academic disciplines. As a solution, many researchers suggest to use Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), where translanguaging plays important role to engage students to use their emerging academic language and bilingual repertoires.

In recent years the International educational landscape has been profoundly influenced by translanguaging which establishes soft and fluid boundaries between native and second or foreign languages instead of isolating them to avoid interference.

In this paper, we describe the implementation of “Computer Science” course based on the idea of translanguaging addressed to master students from the Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of KFU. Typically, the students of the master degree program are non-native speakers of Russian; they are L1 speakers of many languages from Chinese till Arab. The language of instruction at the University “Computer Science” course is Russian. There is a considerable individual variation between students’ Russian language proficiency, but they fall mostly into the range of B1-B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

This paper aims to discuss and demonstrate how translanguaging can be a way to enhance computer literacy in polylingual CLIL course at Kazan Federal University (KFU).

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

CLIL is widespread European educational technology used in bilingual education. It assumes that academic content and an additional language are taught at the same time.

There is no specific CLIL pedagogy and prescriptive model for planning CLIL modules and lessons, but there are pedagogical principles underlying CLIL - several tools to help ensure that some of the shared principles are observed despite CLIL’s inherent flexibility. Therefore, the basic principles of any CLIL model developed by Do Coyle are Cognition, Community, Content, and Communication [3].

Nowadays, almost all CLIL scholars discuss the context when teachers and students share the same L1 language [8], [6], [2], and there is a little number of researches dedicated to multilingual environment when teachers and students share different native languages and cultures but they are to interact in one educational context in one language of instruction. The deeper understanding of the “CLIL” concept leads to use of translanguaging as an important principle in CLIL methodology.

“Translanguaging has been increasingly used to refer to “both the complex a fluid language practices of bilinguals, as well as the pedagogical approaches that leverage those practices” [7]. In other words, translanguaging is when a bilingual person uses all his languages to ask questions, understand, learn, explain and communicate in a social (often educational) setting. Students are allowed and they are encouraged to use their mother tongue while learning in a classroom. Sri-Lankan linguist S. Canagarajah defines translanguaging as ‘the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system’ [9].

Multilingual speakers use their resources when they translanguaging spontaneously but pedagogical translanguaging has great potential because it can provide a deeper understanding of the content and can also be useful as scaffolding across languages [5].

The main idea of translanguaging principle in CLIL is to use the L1 as a resource when the L2 is used as the medium of instruction. It is important to develop and apply translanguaging techniques to assist students in acquiring content knowledge.

Colin Baker pointed out four potential educational advantages of using translanguaging [3]:

- 1 It may promote a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter.
- 2 It may help the development of the weaker language.
- 3 It may facilitate home-school links and cooperation.
- 4 It may help the integration of fluent speakers with early learners.

As a result, translanguaging has a big pedagogical potential for assisting foreign students to comprehend the academic courses content.

## **3 METHODS AND RESULTS**

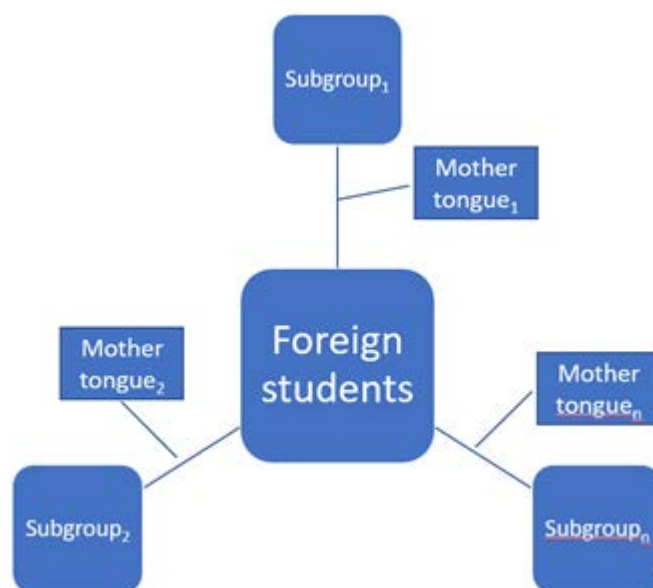
The main aim of the study is to develop educational tools to help Russian language learners to study at the Russian university. CLIL is suggested as the main educational tool and different translanguaging techniques are implemented to help them to overcome cognitive barriers. [4], [2], [1].

The first group of translanguageing techniques encompasses of such that correspond to discussing content in class:

- 1 to discuss content or activities in small groups;
- 2 to brainstorm during class activities;
- 3 to respond to a teacher's question.

Let's consider each of them separately and give the example for the "Computer Science" course.

The first one (to discuss content or activities in small groups) means to divide the foreign students into subgroups on the basis of their mother tongue; to appoint the main speaker of the group which knows the dominant language the best; then engage them in short informal discussions in their native language where they can share the ideas, discuss any difficulties in understanding the content, answer a prepared question, define or give examples of key concepts; to report the results by the group with the help of main speaker.



*Fig 1. Translanguageing technique: discussing content or activities in small groups*

For example, the "Computer Science" course taught for the students enrolled in the magister program "Russian as a foreign language" includes 12 labs on Microsoft Office. Each of them can be done in small groups according to the represented scheme.

The second translanguageing educational technique (to brainstorm during class activities) denotes that students can generate the ideas in relaxed and informal environment not only in language of instruction but in mother tongue.

Within the "Computer Science" course, students can brainstorm when teacher begin to explain new topic, for example, "What difference between input and output devices?". The students can write down their answers on the blackboard in preferred languages. Then teacher and the students by joint effort have to translate their ideas into the language of instruction.

The last place from this group of translanguageing educational techniques is allowing students to respond to a teacher's question in mother tongue at least at the start of learning the course. It works under condition where only two languages are used in classroom and the teacher knows both of them.

The second group of uses of translanguageing involve student participation. The uses of translanguageing that fit into this group are:

- to provide assistance to peers during activities in native language;
- to enable participation by lower proficiency students.

When the language of instruction is differ from the mother tongue, it can be an effective way to comprehend the content is using the support from more capable peers. It has been proved that peer support plays an important role for acquiring new knowledge in the second language. Johnson refers

to this practice as “peerlingual education,” he notes that “Peerlingual education refers to all instances where language-minority students rely on bilingual peers to translate and/or teach classroom material – either at the request of an educator or as an individual call for assistance,” [4].

So the teachers of “Computer Science” have to encourage their capable students to help their lower proficiency peers by handing over the lesson to a student for 5-10 minutes per lesson in their native language; marking the quiz or another test work together with the students; teaching students about the different types of feedback and great motivational sayings to hand out to their peers. For example, teachers can provide students with such semi-fixed expressions and set phrases like:

- 1 Compliments:
  - Тобой была проделана большая работа! (You did a really great job!)
  - Великолепно сделано (Magnificently done!)
  - У тебя великолепно получается! (You do great!)
  - Как здорово получилось! Ты большой молодец! (That was so great! You're doing a great job!)
- 2 Suggestions:
  - Что ты думаешь по поводу того, чтобы добавить...(How do you feel about adding...)
  - Может быть, мы сможем придумать лучший способ... (Maybe we can come up with a better way to a ...)
- 3 Corrections:
  - Сейчас подходящее время для исправления ... (This is a good time to correct...)

It is evident that student’s participation in classroom interaction influence comprehension of the content and development of their communicative and thinking skills. In this regard it’s important to overcome the lower proficiency student’s problems such as the fear of making mistakes, being laughed at by peers, being negatively evaluated by the teacher. For this purpose, teachers can use translanguaging educational techniques to enable students to be more interactive during teaching and learning process. For example, teachers of “Computer Science” can allow lower proficiency students can do their lab works in mother tongue (even if the worksheet or graphic organizer is in Russian) but provide an explanation of their response in Russian, if possible. Besides lower proficiency students can do their lab works using books or Internet resources in mother tongue.

## 4 RESULTS

The survey among students was conducted to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of translanguaging educational techniques. In order to conduct this research, a focus group of students (52 master students) was chosen in the Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of Kazan Federal University. These students participated in lessons where specific translanguaging educational techniques were employed. Then they were interviewed using a questionnaire specially designed for this purpose, which includes the following questions:

- 1 What is your native language?
- 2 How do you think was it appropriate to discuss content or activities in small groups in mother tongue?
- 3 Did the brainstorming in mother tongue during class activities assist you to comprehend the content?
- 4 Do you understand more when you can talk to a friend in mother tongue you answer?
- 5 In your opinion, when you were doing the lab works in mother tongue and then provide an explanation of their response in Russian was it helpful?

Every question was evaluated by the 5-point scale (with 1-point step), where 1 point means that translanguaging technique is not useful for comprehension the content and 5 points – that the technique is essential.

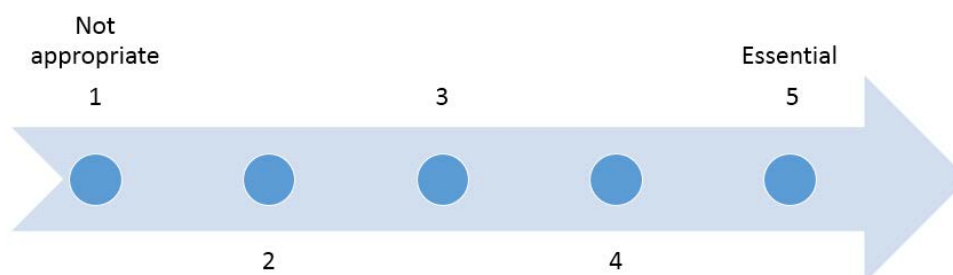


Figure 2. The scale of the usefulness of the translanguaging techniques

The results of the survey showed (see Fig.3) that the implementation of translanguaging educational techniques for teaching “Computer Science” course received positive feedback (answers are primary located in interval from 3 to 5).

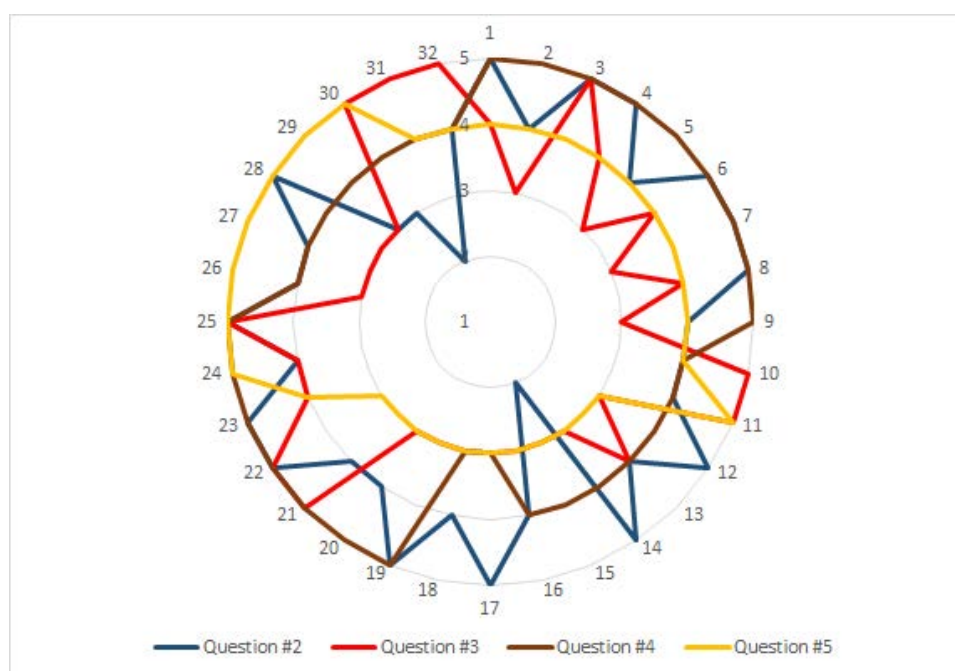


Figure 3. Diagram of results of survey

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

With the intent of finding answers to: “How to assist foreign students to understand the content of academic courses at Kazan Federal University?” We discussed and demonstrated the most typical translanguaging techniques, which were used in the multilingual groups studying “Computer Science” course in Russian. The results of the foreign master student survey confirmed our expectations about the appropriateness of applying translanguaging techniques in the educational process. The survey showed positive feedback given by respondents.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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