



## ТЕОРІЯ ТА МЕТОДИКА НАВЧАННЯ

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### The Role of Translation in Teaching English to Technical Students: Learner Perspectives and Methodological Implications

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**Abstract:** *The article examines the role of translation in teaching English to technical students and analyses learners' perspectives on translation as a supportive instructional tool. The relevance of the study is determined by contemporary discussions concerning the appropriateness of using bilingual support alongside communicative approaches in foreign language teaching. The aim of the study is to determine technical students' attitudes toward translation in the process of learning English and to evaluate its effectiveness as a learning tool. The study was conducted among students of the National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute.” Data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire administered via Google Forms, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions related to speaking difficulties, the use of mental translation, attitudes toward translation functions, and strategies for understanding English-language audiovisual content. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, while open-ended responses were examined through thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate that translation remains an important cognitive mechanism in the process of learning English. The main difficulties experienced by students involve*



*grammar and lexical retrieval, which leads to the use of mental translation as a compensatory strategy. Most respondents positively evaluate translation as a means of vocabulary acquisition, grammar explanation, and comprehension support. A considerable proportion of students also use subtitles while watching English-language content, indicating the continuing need for translation-based support in audiovisual comprehension. **The conclusions** emphasise that native-language mediation can function as an effective pedagogical resource when applied in a controlled and purposeful manner. The study confirms the importance of combining translation-based and communicative methods in teaching English to technical students.*

**Keywords:** *L1-assisted learning, ESP, higher technical education, learner perceptions, questionnaire-based study*

**Роль перекладу у навчанні англійської мови студентів технічних спеціальностей: студентські погляди та методичні аспекти**

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**Анотація:** *Статтю присвячено дослідженню ролі перекладу у навчанні англійської мови студентів технічних спеціальностей та аналізу студентських поглядів на використання перекладу як допоміжного навчального інструменту. **Актуальність** дослідження зумовлена сучасними дискусіями щодо доцільності використання перекладу у процесі викладання іноземних мов поряд із комунікативним підходом. **Метою** дослідження є визначення ставлення*



*студентів технічних спеціальностей до перекладу у процесі вивчення англійської мови та оцінка його ефективності як навчального засобу. Дослідження проведено серед студентів Національного технічного університету України «Київський політехнічний інститут імені Ігоря Сікорського». Для збору даних використано анонімне онлайн-опитування на платформі Google Forms, яке містило закриті та відкриті запитання щодо труднощів у говорінні, використання ментального перекладу, ставлення до перекладу та стратегій сприйняття англомовного контенту. Кількісні дані аналізувалися **методом** описового аналізу, а відкриті відповіді – тематичного аналізу. **Результати** дослідження показали, що переклад залишається важливим когнітивним механізмом у процесі вивчення англійської мови. Основними труднощами студентів є граматики та пошук необхідної лексики, що спричиняє використання ментального перекладу як компенсаторної стратегії. Більшість респондентів позитивно оцінюють переклад як засіб засвоєння лексики, пояснення граматичних структур і розуміння змісту. Значна частина студентів використовує субтитри під час перегляду англомовного контенту, що свідчить про потребу у перекладацькій підтримці. У **висновках** зазначено, що переклад може бути ефективним педагогічним ресурсом за умови його контрольованого та цілеспрямованого використання. Дослідження підтверджує доцільність поєднання перекладних і комунікативних методів у навчанні англійської мови студентів технічних спеціальностей.*

**Ключові слова:** *навчання з використанням рідної мови, англійська мова для спеціальних цілей, вища технічна освіта, сприйняття студентів, дослідження на основі анкетування.*

**The problem statement.** While contemporary Applied Linguistics is dominated by communicative approaches privileging target-language (L2) use and restricting reliance on the first language (L1) [1, pp. 258–303; 2, p. 5], this study challenges the



marginalisation of translation in foreign language pedagogy, particularly within higher education and technical training contexts.

Despite the theoretical emphasis on monolingual instruction and spontaneous communicative performance, empirical classroom realities suggest that translation remains an integral cognitive and mediational resource supporting comprehension, lexical development, and knowledge construction. Its continued presence, however, is framed ambivalently in the literature: while communicative methodology often associates translation with L1 dependency and potential interference, emerging research increasingly recognises it as a functional pedagogical tool rather than a methodological deficit.

This persistent divergence between pedagogical orthodoxy and instructional practice signals an unresolved methodological tension in Second Language Acquisition, particularly acute in the context of technical higher education, where discipline-specific language demands intensify learners' reliance on meaning mediation strategies [3]. Accordingly, the present study addresses this gap by examining the functional role of cross-linguistic support in English language learning and evaluating how students in technical higher education institutions perceive its pedagogical value.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** English for Specific Purposes (ESP) emerged within Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which shifted language pedagogy toward communicative competence and meaningful use rather than formal grammar memorisation. ESP responds to discipline-specific needs in fields such as engineering and medicine, with needs analysis identifying lexical, grammatical, and genre-based requirements through empirical methods such as surveys and discourse analysis [4, pp. 12–13]. However, ESP is not a neutral pedagogical model. It is widely recognised as both needs-driven and shaped by ideological and institutional pressures, and has diversified into EAP, EOP, and specialised domains [5]. In engineering education, ESP is closely linked to EMI contexts, where students value ESP for



professional communication but report persistent gaps between classroom instruction and disciplinary practice [6, pp. 58–74]. This limitation reflects Hyland’s view that disciplinary discourse is genre-specific and cannot be reduced to general academic English [7, pp. 114–117].

Within ESP contexts, translation remains a contested but persistent pedagogical strategy. Empirical evidence shows that learners use L1 mediation for vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension support [8]. Dagilienė demonstrates that translation enhances grammatical awareness, lexical development, and metalinguistic noticing, while also supporting learner autonomy when integrated with communicative tasks [9]. From a cognitive perspective, Ellis frames L1 influence as a natural component of interlanguage development, suggesting that cross-linguistic support can function as a cognitive scaffold rather than interference [2, pp. 117–139]. Learner-centred research further confirms that strategy use, including translation, is shaped by motivation and learner beliefs in goal-oriented ESP contexts [10, pp. 215–225].

Theoretical perspectives increasingly challenge monolingual assumptions underlying traditional ESP and EMI approaches. Translanguaging theory argues that multilingual learners operate through integrated linguistic repertoires rather than separate language systems, making translation a natural meaning-making practice rather than a deficit strategy [11]. This is reinforced by EMI research which critiques English-only ideologies and positions L1 use as pedagogically productive. Sahan and Rose argue that translanguaging better reflects actual classroom practices where learners draw on full linguistic resources to construct meaning in complex disciplinary contexts [12].

Recent empirical work further extends this perspective by linking translation with knowledge construction in higher education. Heugh et al. show that machine translation and multilingual practices support not only linguistic mediation but also conceptual development and academic meaning-making, conceptualised as “transknowledging” [13, p. 89–127]. At the same time, AI-based language tools are



increasingly integrated into learning environments, though research still underexplores translation-based support as a pedagogical and cognitive process in itself [14, pp. 22–26; 15].

Overall, research converges on a critical tension: while ESP and EMI frameworks prioritise communicative competence in English, empirical and cognitive evidence suggests that translation and L1 mediation remain integral to how technical students actually learn [16]. Bilingual support is therefore most effective when positioned as a strategic scaffold within communicative pedagogy rather than as a competing methodology, particularly in technically demanding disciplines where conceptual load is high [17, pp. 83–87].

**Identification of previously unresolved parts of the general problem.** Despite growing attention to ESP, EMI, and translanguaging, the functional role of cross-linguistic support in technical ESP learning remains insufficiently specified in empirical research [18]. In particular, while translation is widely acknowledged as a cognitive and pedagogical support strategy, fewer studies differentiate how it is actually distributed across specific learning needs, such as vocabulary development, grammar clarification, comprehension of technical texts, and audiovisual understanding among higher education technical students in Ukraine. At the same time, learner perspectives in this context are still underrepresented in explaining why and in which situations translation as a learning strategy is perceived as necessary or beneficial. As a result, there remains a need for empirically grounded descriptions of translation as it is experienced and used by Ukrainian engineering students in real ESP learning environments, particularly in relation to discipline-specific language demands.

### **Formulation of the objectives of the article (problem statement)**

The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of translation in English language learning among technical students at the National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute” and to analyse learners’



perceptions of bilingual support as a supportive pedagogical and cognitive tool in ESP contexts. The study is based on the results of an anonymous questionnaire conducted among students of the mentioned university.

Objectives of the article:

1. To identify technical students' attitudes toward the use of translation in the process of learning English.

2. To analyse the role of L1 mediation in learners' educational practices, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, speech production, and understanding of English-language audiovisual materials.

3. To evaluate the pedagogical and cognitive functions of translation as a supportive strategy in teaching English to technical students in higher education.

**Main material.** To investigate learners' perceptions of translation in ESP learning, an empirical questionnaire-based study was conducted among students of the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute". The questionnaire involved 85 respondents, who represented various engineering and technical specialisations and studied English within compulsory ESP courses. Data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire entitled "Learning English through Translation: Anonymous Questionnaire of English Learners" (Google Forms) [19]. The anonymity of the survey was intended to reduce social desirability bias and encourage more accurate self-reporting of learning behaviours and attitudes.

The questionnaire combined closed and open-ended items aimed at identifying learners' difficulties in English use, attitudes toward translation, and cognitive strategies in language processing. Speaking difficulties were first examined as an indicator of cognitive load during oral production. The results show that learners most frequently experience grammar-related difficulties (57.1%) and lexical retrieval problems (48.6%), indicating that accuracy-oriented processing and word-level access represent the primary constraints in speech production. In comparison, fewer respondents reported difficulties in speaking quickly (34.3%), which reflects



limitations in fluency development, while only 17.1% indicated problems with understanding others, suggesting that receptive skills are significantly less problematic than productive ones.

These results indicate a clear hierarchy of cognitive difficulty, where grammatical control and lexical access dominate over fluency and comprehension. The close proximity of grammar (57.1%) and vocabulary (48.6%) difficulties suggests that these two dimensions function as interrelated cognitive bottlenecks rather than independent issues. In other words, learners simultaneously struggle with structural encoding and lexical retrieval, which increases processing demands during real-time speech production. Qualitative responses further support this interpretation by revealing metalinguistic awareness and concerns about precision in word choice. One respondent noted: “I mean the thesaurus is right there but it's still important in certain conversations to not mess it up with the wrong word choice,” which reflects conscious monitoring of lexical selection and hesitation during formulation. Another response, “I think I know English better than Ukrainian at this point,” indicates a shift toward stronger English lexical dominance for some learners, although such cases remain marginal within the group.

Taken together, these findings suggest that learners rely predominantly on controlled cognitive processing rather than automatic retrieval. The high frequency of grammar and vocabulary difficulties (57.1% and 48.6%) indicates that linguistic production requires continuous monitoring and decision-making, which increases cognitive load and slows down spontaneous communication. This processing condition creates a natural context for the emergence of compensatory strategies, including translation-based thinking, which is further confirmed in subsequent sections of the study. As shown in Table 1, technical students predominantly experience grammar- and vocabulary-related difficulties and generally demonstrate a positive attitude toward translation-based support.

**Table 1.** *Students' difficulties, attitudes, and readiness to use translation*



Category	Item	Response	%
Speaking difficulties	Grammar		57.1
	Finding the right word		48.6
	Speaking quickly		34.3
	Understanding others		17.1
Attitudes toward translation	Translation is effective	Yes	60.0
		No	20.0
		Maybe	20.0
Readiness to stop translation		Maybe	34.3
		Rather no	22.9
		Ready to stop	14.3
		Never translated	8.6

Source: Author's own survey data collected among technical students of NTUU "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute".

Learners' attitudes toward translation-based support demonstrate a generally positive orientation toward its pedagogical value. When asked whether translation helps in learning English, 60% of respondents considered it effective, while 20% expressed disagreement and another 20% remained uncertain. A similar tendency was observed in a more detailed evaluation, where 51.4% selected "rather yes than no" and 17.1% "absolutely yes." Only a small minority expressed negative views, while 34.3% chose "maybe" and 22.9% "rather no" when asked about readiness to stop using translation. This distribution indicates that although learners do not unanimously endorse translation, the dominant perception positions it as a supportive rather than obstructive learning tool.

Importantly, attitudes toward abandoning translation completely further confirm its embedded role in learners' cognitive strategies. The largest proportion of respondents (34.3%) selected "maybe," followed by 22.9% who were rather unwilling to stop translating, while only 14.3% indicated readiness to abandon translation. Additionally, 8.6% reported never using cross-linguistic support at all. These results suggest a predominantly transitional orientation, where learners acknowledge both the usefulness of translation and its potential limitations, but are not prepared to eliminate it from their learning process.



The analysis of speech production strategies further confirms the persistence of mental translation as a cognitive mechanism. When producing English speech, 42.9% of respondents reported partial translation, 28.6% full reliance on translation, and 28.6% no translation. The predominance of partial translation indicates that for most learners, bilingual support functions as an intermediate processing stage rather than a fixed or exclusive strategy. This suggests a hybrid cognitive system in which learners combine direct lexical retrieval in English with occasional mediation through their native language.

Frequency data reinforce this interpretation, showing a concentration of responses in the low-to-medium range (scores 2–4 on a five-point scale), which indicates that translation-based support is not constant but context-dependent. In terms of mental content, 77.1% of respondents translate individual words, 45.7% translate ideas, and 34.3% translate full sentences, while fewer students translate grammatical structures (14.3%) or avoid translation entirely (8.6%). This distribution demonstrates that mental translation operates primarily at the lexical level but extends to conceptual and syntactic processing in more complex cases. Such a pattern reflects an intermediate stage of second language development, where learners have not yet fully automated lexical access and still rely on bilingual mediation for meaning construction. Table 2 summarises the frequency and forms of mental translation used by respondents during speech production.

**Table 2.** *Mental translation in speech production*

Aspect	Category	%
Use before speaking	Partial translation	42.9
	Full translation	28.6
	No translation	28.6
Content of mental translation	Words	77.1
	Ideas	45.7
	Full sentences	34.3
	Grammar patterns	14.3
	No translation	8.6

Source: Author's own survey data collected among technical students of NTUU "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute".



Audiovisual comprehension strategies reveal a similar reliance on translation-based support mechanisms. When watching English-language content, 37.1% of respondents prefer original versions with subtitles, while 22.9% watch without subtitles. In contrast, 25.7% rely on dubbed Ukrainian versions, and 5.7% use dubbed content with English subtitles, indicating varying degrees of dependence on native-language mediation. These results suggest that while a substantial proportion of learners engage with authentic English input, a considerable number still rely on translation-based or hybrid viewing strategies.

When faced with comprehension difficulties, 57.1% of respondents indicated that they rely on subtitles, while 17.1% continue watching without additional support. Smaller groups either switch to dubbing (11.4%) or pause the video to check vocabulary or ask for help (11.4%). Only 2.9% reported alternative strategies. These findings demonstrate that subtitles function as the primary compensatory mechanism in audiovisual comprehension, enabling learners to maintain access to meaning while reducing cognitive load. As presented in Table 3, subtitles remain the dominant support strategy in audiovisual comprehension among technical students.

**Table 3.** *Audiovisual comprehension strategies*

Situation	Strategy	%
Watching English-language content	Original with subtitles	37.1
	Original without subtitles	22.9
	Dubbed Ukrainian	25.7
	Dubbed + English subtitles	5.7
If comprehension is difficult	Use subtitles	57.1
	Continue without support	17.1
	Pause/check vocabulary	11.4
	Switch to dubbing	11.4

Source: Author's own survey data collected among technical students of NTUU "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute".

Open-ended responses further clarify the function of subtitles as both a comprehension aid and a vocabulary acquisition tool. Students reported that subtitles are especially useful in cases of fast speech, unfamiliar accents, or unclear pronunciation. Many also indicated that subtitles help them learn new lexical items in

authentic contexts, which suggests incidental vocabulary acquisition through multimodal input. At the same time, responses reflect both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning: while many learners prioritise comprehension efficiency, others emphasise authenticity, emotional tone, and naturalness of original speech. This indicates that audiovisual preferences are shaped not only by linguistic difficulty but also by motivational and experiential factors.

The perceived usefulness of bilingual support is further reinforced by learners' views on its pedagogical role. Students consistently indicate that translation is most beneficial at early stages of learning, particularly for vocabulary acquisition, grammar clarification, and understanding abstract or technical content. It is also frequently used as a quick reference tool when meaning is unclear or when immediate comprehension is required. However, several respondents explicitly acknowledge that overreliance on translation may hinder fluency development, suggesting awareness of its transitional nature in language acquisition. The major thematic patterns identified in learners' open-ended responses are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Thematic analysis of open-ended responses*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Illustrative evidence</b>
Vocabulary learning	Translation used for acquisition of new lexical items	learning new words / building vocabulary / meaning of words
Comprehension support	Helps understanding spoken and written English	helps me understand meaning better / for understanding words and phrases
Grammar clarification	Used to explain complex grammatical structures	grammar explanation / complex grammar structures
Cognitive load reduction	Reduces processing difficulty in fast or complex input	when I cannot comprehend / fast speech / unfamiliar accent
Authenticity preference	Preference for original-language content	dubbing does not convey the soul / preference for original version

Source: Author's own survey data collected among technical students of NTUU "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute".



Overall, the findings demonstrate that translation occupies a dual role in English language learning among technical students. On one hand, it functions as a cognitive support mechanism that facilitates lexical access, comprehension, and grammatical understanding. On the other hand, it serves as a transitional strategy that gradually decreases as learners develop greater linguistic independence. The data indicate that translation is neither rejected nor used uniformly; rather, it is integrated into a flexible repertoire of learning strategies shaped by task difficulty, proficiency level, and communicative context.

**Conclusions.** The present study investigated the role of translation in English language learning among technical students in higher education and analysed learners' perceptions of translation as a supportive pedagogical and cognitive tool in ESP contexts. The findings demonstrate that translation continues to play an important role in vocabulary acquisition, grammar clarification, speech production, and comprehension of authentic English-language content.

The results show that technical students experience the greatest difficulties in grammatical accuracy and lexical retrieval, which contributes to the use of mental translation as a compensatory strategy during communication. Most respondents perceive translation positively and consider it particularly useful at early and intermediate stages of language learning. Audiovisual learning practices additionally confirm the importance of subtitles and other translation-based support mechanisms in understanding English-language media.

The study also indicates that learners recognise both the advantages and limitations of translation. While L1 mediation facilitates comprehension and reduces cognitive difficulty, excessive reliance on it may hinder fluency development and direct processing in English. Therefore, translation should not be excluded from ESP teaching but integrated selectively in combination with communicative approaches.

Thus, the objectives of the article were achieved. The research identified technical students' attitudes toward translation, analysed the functions L1 mediation

performs in learning practices, and evaluated its role as a cognitive and instructional strategy in higher technical education.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. The findings are based primarily on self-reported learner perceptions rather than experimentally measured language performance. In addition, the study did not differentiate respondents according to language proficiency levels and focused on learner perceptions rather than classroom intervention. Therefore, further research may include comparative studies across proficiency levels, larger samples of technical students, and experimental investigation of translation-based and AI-assisted pedagogical techniques in ESP contexts.

Overall, the findings support contemporary translanguaging and cognitive approaches which view L1 mediation not as interference but as a flexible support mechanism in second language acquisition.

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