

Tatjana Glušac*

Union University, Serbia
tatjana.glusac@flv.edu.rs

Mira Milić

University of Novi Sad, Serbia
miramilicns@gmail.com

Dragana Gak

University of Novi Sad, Serbia
dgak@uns.ac.rs

THE USE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE IN ESP TEACHING AND LEARNING FROM THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE: THE CASE OF SERBIAN

Abstract

Since the introduction of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, the use of the mother tongue (L1) in second language teaching and learning has been minimized, if not entirely excluded. However, scholarly interest in the question of the importance of L1 has recently been renewed. In light of this, the aim of this paper is to examine how often university students use Serbian as their L1 in learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP), as well as how they perceive their teachers' use of L1. A total of 146 students participated in the research conducted by means of a questionnaire exploring their practice and beliefs regarding L1. Additionally, structured interviews were conducted with 12 students. Answers obtained through the questionnaire were analyzed by means of the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests, while content analysis was employed for the analysis of the interview responses. Statistically significant differences were found with respect to the year and field of study, the length of time the students had been learning English, and the level of their language proficiency. The interview responses showed that the students employ L1 in both classroom and individual learning and that their ESP teachers also use it as a scaffolding technique or for teaching terminological standardization and contrastive analysis.

96

Key words

mother tongue (L1), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), university, foreign language (L2).

* Corresponding address: Tatjana Glušac, Faculty of Law and Business Studies Dr. Lazar Vrkatić, Bulevar oslobođenja 76, Novi Sad, Serbia.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the 1980s and 1990s, attention shifted from structure to meaning. Formal correctness ceased to be the ultimate goal of language learning and was replaced by fluency (Brown, 2000: 43). To achieve it, contextualized learning and teaching were prioritized with the aim of helping learners relate what is learned with real-life situations, so as to further aid them in utilizing the gathered knowledge in meaningful contexts or in generating new knowledge while being engaged in communicative tasks. As Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983 as cited in Brown, 2000: 45) stated, “[t]he target linguistic system is learned through the process of struggling to communicate,” which implies that learning a second language (L2) by means of CLT is a trial-and-error process in which students make use of the L2 language knowledge they possess to communicate meaning rather than rely on their mother tongue (L1). This approach has been shown to equip students with grammatical and discourse competences, alongside social, cultural, and pragmatic skills (Brown, 2000: 42). CLT remains a widely practiced approach to teaching L2, most probably since it integrates the fundamental goals of all the previously applied teaching approaches and balances linguistic and communicative competence in a way no other approach achieved before (Pilipović, 2018: 27).

Owing to its comprehensiveness, CLT now comprises numerous interpretations and applications. Brown (2000: 46) asserts that CLT is a ‘catcall term’ and warns that teachers should “avoid overdoing certain CLT features.” For instance, fluency should not be encouraged to the point where accuracy is compromised. CLT is sometimes understood as “pure ‘focusing on communication,’ which paradoxically also results in poor communicative competence owing to inaccurate language use” (Pilipović, 2018: 29). Similarly, the entire teaching and learning process is most often conducted in L2 as it is commonly believed that students should develop the ability to derive meaning from the language they are unfamiliar with, or find ways to communicate relying on the L2 language knowledge they possess at the moment. Thus, it is not uncommon for teachers to exclude the use of L1 entirely. However, Pilipović (2018: 29) stresses that “occasional use of the mother tongue is valuable when a complex instruction or explanation is to be given or when students benefit from contrastive analysis.” Along the same lines, Brown (2000: 45) asserts that “translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.”

Given the very specific nature of the teaching and learning of English for specific purposes (ESP), which might even necessitate the use of L1 in certain situations (Milić, Glušac, & Kardoš, 2018; Xhemali, 2013), the aim of this paper is to explore university ESP students’ perception of the extent and purposes of their own and their teachers’ use of L1. According to Flowerdew (2012) and Gak (2016), needs analysis of students’ learning goals, interests, and preferences is a cornerstone of

creating an effective ESP course. For this reason, the paper examines the justifiability of L1 use solely from the students' perspective.

2. USE OF L1 IN ESP TEACHING AND LEARNING

The widely practiced CLT approach to L2 teaching rests on the premise that students should develop communicative competence, but it does not offer a clear view regarding the role of L1 in honing communicative skills. The strong version of CLT rests on the premise that one needs to use L2 in order to learn it, hence the use of L1 is excluded, as the L2 classroom may be the only source of language input and should thus be maximized by exclusive L2 use. The weak version advocates teaching students how to use English and allows for L1 to be employed as a scaffolding technique in such instruction; to help students assume ownership over learning, create a bridge between two languages, etc. (Littlewood, 2013).

Language switching is not always a conscious or deliberate act, and can be quite spontaneous and natural, especially among lower proficiency students (Hughes et al., 2006). However, even advanced students can tend to implicitly employ L1 (Mahmoud, 2006). Additionally, given the very specific and complex nature of the ESP learning environment (e.g. a large number of adult students with varying degrees of language proficiency), the teachers' use of L1 can also be seen as reasonable. Thus, the question of justifiability of L1 use in the ESP context has recently been revisited. Most research studies into the effects of employing L1 in ESP teaching speak in favor of this practice (e.g. Darginavičienė & Navickienė, 2015; Kovačić & Kirinić, 2011; Xhemaili, 2013), and from the ample available literature, the following list of reasons supporting the pedagogical, linguistic, cognitive, and affective benefits of L1 use can be compiled:

(1) *Interlanguage transfer*. Students learning another language typically operate from the solid basis of their L1, assuming that L2 functions like their L1. Adult learners are especially prone to this transfer (Brown, 2000: 68), as they draw heavily on the knowledge of the only language system they possess – their L1. This transfer can have facilitating and interfering effects (Brown, 2001: 65). The former occurs when the analogy students draw reveals the two languages have common features, which aids their learning. The latter occurs when a student produces an L2 structure reflecting a direct, yet erroneous correlation between the two languages. However, mistakes, as manifestations of negative transfer, are nowadays viewed not as imperfections or failures, but as attempts to test and understand the rules of a new language system (Brown, 2000). As Kavaliauskienė (2009: 4) reports, both negative and positive transfer between the L1 and L2 are important for the development of the interlanguage, which is a natural learners' construction.

(2) *Contrastive analysis*. Both beginner and advanced students of L2 can sometimes benefit from contrastive analysis of the two language systems – their L1 and L2. Raising awareness of the similarities or differences between the two systems results in learning (Schweers, 1999) and reduces the number of mistakes students make (Darginavičienė & Navickienė, 2015; Sheen, 1996). A study conducted by Janulevičienė and Kavaliauskienė (2004) found that, among other reasons, the respondents considered L1 necessary for comparing the two languages they were learning. This comparison can be done through translation, direct instruction, or language sample analysis. Many authors recommend translation as an efficient means of comparison of two language systems (e.g. Kavaliauskienė, 2009), and highlight that if students are aware of the differences, the interference from L1 will be reduced (Ross, 2000).

(3) *Improved learning and understanding*. L1 can also be used for direct instruction, such as offering translation equivalents to students, summarizing or discussing the material covered, clarifying concepts, or for allowing students to ask questions. When asked how L1 helps them in learning ESP, the respondents in the study conducted by Kovačić and Kirinić (2011) and Xhemali (2013) claimed that L1 had aided comprehension of difficult grammar points and concepts, made them feel less lost in class, and contributed to class time being used efficiently. Also, the respondents in the study conducted by Stanojević Gocić (2016) reported comprehension benefits of using L1 for the translation of texts. Similarly, a study by Latsanyphone and Bouangeune (2009) showed that the students who received instruction in L1 improved more than those exclusively taught in L2. Numerous authors (e.g. Jerković & Komaromi, in press; Rushwan, 2017) have documented that translation as a teaching technique in ESP courses at the tertiary level improves students' overall understanding of both academic and professional discourses, as well as their understanding and use of specific language elements. Relatedly, a number of studies (e.g. Nesi, 2014) indicate students' preference for bilingual over monolingual dictionaries, as they likely benefit from direct translations or the comparison of the two language systems. Similarly, Augustyn (2013) contends that a clear advantage of monolingual or bilingual dictionaries has not been confirmed, while, Milić et al. (2018) conclude that a bilingual dictionary offering ready-made solutions and standardized forms of technical terms has not been evidenced to negatively impact students' learning. Augustyn (2013: 366) also asserts that the use of L1 in language learning has many pedagogical, cognitive, and social functions that are vital for language proficiency while translation has been undeservedly relegated to the sphere of monolingual, primarily L2, teaching.

(4) *Need to express oneself competently*. Language is a means of self-expression, and we feel relatively safe and competent expressing ourselves in our L1 as we have essentially mastered it. In the process of L2 learning, adult learners, owing to their yet imperfect knowledge of L2, are frequently incapable of expressing themselves

adequately, which is regarded as a threat to their L2 ego, a concept that refers to the learner's construction of a new identity related to a new language being learned (Brown, 2000). When an adult feels incompetent to adequately express themselves, they likely experience inhibition, shame, anxiety, and even reluctance to continue learning as inadequacy of expression is associated with one's diminished personal and/or professional value. A study by Khresheh (2012) investigated the reasons why ESP students use L1 and discovered that one of them is to avoid making mistakes in front of peers so as to not lose face. Additionally, Schweers (1999: 6) advocates the use of L1 for a number of affective reasons, including providing a sense of security and validating learners' experience.

(5) *Terminological standardization*. The present-day global linguistic dominance of English (Furiassi, Pulcini, & Rodríguez González, 2012) has imposed the need to pay special attention to lexical borrowings from English on the worldwide linguistic scene. Given that the impact of this global language is especially evident in the terminological system, the multifaceted issue of terminological standardization (linguistic, technical, pragmatic) of any world language that comes into contact with English represents a cornerstone of successful communication in the English-dominated world today. In this light, a new globally important skill of contact linguistic competence¹ has recently been recognized, which involves predominantly institutionalized forms of language planning, lexicography, and language teaching (Prčić, 2014: 152). Narrowing the scope of interest to the language relationship of English and Serbian, there has been a relatively strong involvement of Serbian linguists in standardization issues of the general lexicon (cf. Bugarski, 1996; Filipović, 1986; Prčić, 2019; Prčić et al., 2021). Less intensive, but still noteworthy, is the corresponding significant work in the field of terminological standardization (Milić, 2015; Milić, Panić Kavgić, & Kardoš, 2021; Silaški, 2012). Concerning the use of L1 in teaching ESP, a relevant study on dictionary-aided teaching of the standardization of English-based sports terms in Serbian (cf. Milić et al., 2018: 278) produced positive outcomes, yielding an important conclusion that terminological standardization should be the subject of ongoing monitoring aimed at building English-Serbian contact linguistic competence, as a constituent part of the ESP and mother tongue curricula alike.

In contrast to the above, studies that report students' and teachers' negative attitudes towards the use of L1 in ESP are rather limited (e.g. AlTarawneh & AlMithqal, 2019). The available literature references only a few potential drawbacks of the use of L1. For instance, due to their unwillingness to engage considerably, students sometimes resort to ready-made solutions available in bilingual dictionaries instead of generating their own answers by consulting monolingual

¹ As per the term created by Prčić (2014: 147), it is "a type of linguistic knowledge related to the use of elements, i.e. words and names, from English as the nativized foreign language in a non-English language that regularly comes into contact with it."

sources. As an illustration, the findings of Glušac and Milić (2020, 2021) and Knežević et al. (2021) indicate that ESP university students, regardless of their language proficiency level, most readily consult bilingual dictionaries to find direct translations of unfamiliar words and show a lack of motivation to consult monolingual references. Furthermore, Kavaliauskienė (2009: 3) also cautions that overusing L1 can “undermine the interaction in English.” In his review of literature on the use of L1 in L2 teaching and learning, Almoayidi (2018) also mentions that the employment of L1 decreases the students’ much-needed exposure to L2, hinders progress, leads to teaching about the language, and discourages students from making an effort.

In recent years, the question of the justifiability of using L1 in ESP teaching and learning has attracted significant scholarly attention worldwide, for example in Albania (e.g. Xhemali, 2013), Croatia (e.g. Kovačić & Kirinić, 2011; Poljaković, 2016), Lithuania (e.g. Darginavičienė & Navickienė, 2015; Kavaliauskienė, 2009), Saudi Arabia (e.g. AlTarawneh & AlMithqal, 2019), Serbia (e.g. Milić et al., 2018), Spain (e.g. Chirobocea, 2018), Taiwan (Jan, Li, & Lin, 2014) and most practitioners and theorists writing on the topic unequivocally agree that a moderate amount of L1 is required for desirable learning outcomes. The amount of L1 needed as a scaffolding device in ESP instruction depends on the students’ L2 proficiency, and is applicable for such functions as explaining technical vocabulary (Kavaliauskienė, 2009), developing rapport with students, offering translation equivalents of new terminology, and giving instructions (AlTarawneh & AlMithqal, 2019), as well as for the purposes of explaining grammar or difficult concepts, or when checking comprehension (Jan et al., 2014).

A number of authors have also addressed the question of how to make an informed decision about the appropriate amount of L1. For instance, Darginavičienė and Navickienė (2015: 112) mention four factors worth considering when making this decision: students’ previous experience, their proficiency level, the stage of the course, and the stage of the individual lesson. Similarly, Kovačić and Kirinić (2011) suggest moderate use of L1, to the extent that L1 adds value to L2 learning, while the study conducted by Kavaliauskienė (2009) led the author to conclude that the amount of L1 should depend on students’ L2 proficiency and their learning styles and abilities. Alongside these authors, Almoayidi (2018) recognizes the context of learning, the type of learners, students’ purposes of learning L2, and the regulations a teacher is expected to abide by as necessary elements for consideration in determining how much L1 is appropriate.

In this context, the aim of this paper is to explore how Serbian university ESP students perceive their own and their teachers’ use of L1.

3. METHODOLOGY

In contrast to the majority of other available studies on this same topic which have included ESP students from one or two faculties, our research involved ESP students from eight (out of 13) faculties comprising the University of Novi Sad.²

The typical proficiency level of entering first-year students at the University of Novi Sad is A2 or B1 (at most non-language faculties whose students participated in this study, first-year students do a placement test). The majority of non-language faculties have one or two one-semester-long general English courses, succeeded by an ESP course starting at the B1 level. A small minority of faculties, however, introduce an ESP course in the first year. Classes are generally large and mixed-level.

3.1. Participants

A total of 146 undergraduate students consented to participate: 47.9% of them were in a technical field, 27.4% were science majors, and 24.7% were social studies students.

Regarding year of study, at the time this research was conducted, 61.6% of the students were enrolled in the first year, 17.8% in the second year, 9.6% as third-year students, and 11% were in the fourth year. They were aged between 18 and 28. The imbalance in the number of the respondents enrolled in different years of study is caused by the drop-out rate. Namely, the largest number of students are enrolled in the first year, explaining why they account for the largest number of respondents. In all subsequent years of study the drop-out rate correspondingly reduces the number of students (cf. Jarić & Vukasović, 2009; Stepanović Ilić, Tošković, & Krstić, 2020).

Regarding English language experience, 67.1% of the participating students had been learning the language for 13 years or more, while 32.9% had 1-12 years of experience. They self-assessed their knowledge of English as either excellent (15.8%), average (50.6%), or poor (33.6%).

3.2. Procedure

The research was conducted in the 2021 spring semester by means of two research instruments: a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and a structured interview (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire contained 18 questions. The aim of the first five was

² There are 14 faculties comprising the University of Novi Sad, but at one of them classes are taught in Hungarian only, while at the remaining 13, the language of instruction is Serbian. Since this research pertains to the use of Serbian as the students' L1, the Hungarian-speaking faculty was excluded.

to collect relevant information about the respondents, whereas the remaining 13 examined the students' general attitudes towards the use of L1 in ESP teaching and learning (Qs 6 and 7), their views of their own use of the mother tongue (Qs 8-12), and their perception of their ESP teachers' use of L1 (Qs 13-18). Twelve questions exploring the use of L1 in ESP teaching and learning required choosing an answer on a 4-point Likert scale, while one asked them to decide on a statement that summarized their opinion of L1 use. The results pertaining to the use of L1 both by the teachers and students were analyzed according to the year and field of study, length of English language learning experience, and self-reported language proficiency. The answers were analyzed by means of the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, as well as by means of the Mann-Whitney U test used for pairwise comparisons of different groups. Moreover, a structured interview containing 7 open-ended questions was conducted with 12 students, with the aim of obtaining in-depth information about the practice of L1 use in ESP teaching and learning. The interviewed students were chosen randomly, ensuring the sample included students of different faculties. The year of study and proficiency level were not considered when choosing the interviewees. The interview responses were analyzed by means of content analysis.

The research paradigm applied in this mixed-method study is explanatory sequential. First, the quantitative data were collected in relation to different variables and then the qualitative data were gathered in order to get a better insight into the ways in which L1 is employed and reasons behind its use. In the majority of other available studies investigating the same issue, the researchers either applied a quantitative method alone (e.g. Darginavičienė & Navickienė, 2015; Poljaković, 2016) or combined it with a subsequent qualitative source of information (e.g. AlTarawneh & AlMithqal, 2019). In order to enhance the comparability of our results, as well as to shed some new light on the researched topic, we opted for a mixed-method study and the explanatory sequential paradigm.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The questionnaire results

The results obtained for the questions examining the students' general perception of L1 use (Qs 6 and 7) revealed that 39% of the respondents always or sometimes used L1 in ESP classes, while 35% of them rarely employed it. The remaining 26% of the students never used the mother tongue in an ESP class. However, when asked whether they regarded the use of L1 as justifiable, the vast majority of the students either said it was justifiable to use it occasionally (43.2%) or whenever needed (39.7%). A rather small number of students (8.2%) considered the use of L1 was not justifiable at all, while a similarly small number of them (8.9%) admitted using the

mother tongue on certain occasions even though they generally believed it should be avoided.

For Questions 8-18 the respondents were asked to indicate a relevant response on a 4-point Likert scale (*always – sometimes – rarely – never*). As the collected answers for these questions were analyzed according to the year and field of study, length of language learning, and self-reported proficiency levels, they will be presented accordingly.

Since the results of skewness and kurtosis for the majority of the data revealed that the normality assumption was not satisfied, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were employed. The former test was used in cases where there were more than two groups to be compared, while the latter was conducted for pairwise comparisons in a post hoc fashion.

4.1.1. Year of study

Statistically significant differences were found in relation to 10 out of 11 questions.

A statistically significant difference in mean scores ($H=19.12$, $p=.00$, $df=3$) between several paired groups of students was recorded in relation to Question 8 (Q8) investigating whether the students would take notes in L1 during class. Such a difference was found between the first-year and third-year students ($M=57.13$ and $M=28.23$, respectively, $U=303.500$, $p=.000$) and the first-year and fourth-year students ($M=56.83$ and $M=34.75$, respectively, $U=420.000$, $p=.005$) on the one hand, as well as between the second-year and third-year students ($M=24.02$ and $M=14.63$, respectively, $U=99.500$, $p=.011$) on the other hand, indicating that the lower generation students used L1 for taking notes during class significantly more than their later generation colleagues.

A statistically significant difference ($H=12.22$, $p=.00$, $df=3$) was also recorded in regard to Q9 – the students' use of L1 for the purpose of translating for themselves what the teacher said, between the first-year students and their third-year ($M=56.53$ and $M=31.80$, respectively, $U=357.00$, $p=.002$) and fourth-year colleagues ($M=56.03$ and $M=39.28$, respectively, $U=492.500$, $p=.036$), as well as between the second-year and third-year students ($M=23.68$ and $M=15.20$, respectively, $U=108.000$, $p=.021$), indicating that the lower generation students tried to improve comprehension by translating into L1 what the teacher said.

Another statistically significant difference in this context was found between two groups in relation to the use of L1 during classroom interaction with peers (Q10) ($H=18.81$, $p=.00$, $df=3$). The difference was recorded between the first-year and third-year students ($M=56.33$ and $M=33.03$, respectively, $U=375.500$, $p=.000$), as well as between the first-year and fourth-year students ($M=55.19$ and $M=44.00$, respectively, $U=568.000$, $p=.022$), indicating that the freshmen students used L1 more for this purpose. Along the same lines, a statistically significant difference was also recorded between the second-year and third-year students ($M=23.14$ and

M=16.10, respectively, U=121.500, $p=.025$), with the same implication that the lower generation students used L1 more for this purpose.

Even though the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the four years of study with respect to the use of L1 for expressing oneself adequately (Q11) ($H=7.264$, $p=0.64$), the Mann-Whitney U test showed a difference between the first-year and third-year students (M=55.96 and M=35.23, respectively, U=408.500, $p=.010$), indicating that the lower generation students used L1 more often to express themselves adequately and thus avoid losing face.

When asked whether they translated professional texts into L1 to be able to fully understand them (Q12), the first-year students were found to employ translation to improve reading comprehension significantly more than their third-year (M=56.09 and M=34.43, respectively, U=396.500, $p=.003$) and fourth-year colleagues (M=56.99 and M=33.88, respectively, U=406.000, $p=.001$).

Another statistically significant difference ($H=29.68$, $p=.00$, $df=3$) was also obtained with regard to the students' observation of the teacher's use of L1 to explain new general lexemes (Q13). The difference was recorded between four paired groups: the first-year and third-year students (M=57.94 and M=23.33, respectively, U=230.000, $p=.000$); the first-year and fourth-year students (M=57.86 and M=29.00, respectively, U=328.000, $p=.000$); the second-year and third-year students (M=24.92 and M=13.13, respectively, U=77.000, $p=.001$), and the second-year and fourth-year students (M=24.12 and M=16.13, respectively, U=122.000, $p=.025$), indicating that the lower generation students observed their teachers as practicing this routine more than their later generation colleagues.

The answers to the question regarding whether the relevant teacher offered a translation equivalent of a field-specific lexeme (Q14) revealed statistically significant differences ($H=21.74$, $p=.00$, $df=3$) between the following paired groups: the first-year and third-year students (M=57.18 and M=27.90, respectively, U=298.500, $p=.000$), the first-year and fourth-year students (M=56.98 and M=33.91, respectively, U=406.500, $p=.003$), the second-year and third-year students (M=24.44 and M=13.93, respectively, U=89.000, $p=.003$), and the second-year and fourth-year students (M=23.92 and M=16.44, respectively, U=127.000, $p=.026$), showing that the lower generation students perceived that their teachers used L1 more to teach new field-specific vocabulary.

The students' answers to the question pertaining to whether the relevant teacher employed L1 for explaining how to adequately use an anglicism (Q15) revealed another statistically significant difference ($H=8.84$, $p=.03$, $df=3$). The answers of the students enrolled in the first and second year of study differed significantly from those of the third-year students ((M=55.77 and M=36.40, respectively, U=426.000, $p=.016$) and (M=23.62 and M=15.30, respectively, U=109.500, $p=.022$)). The obtained differences suggest that the teacher was perceived to use L1 for this purpose more often with the lower generation students.

Another statistically significant difference was found pertaining to whether the students observed their ESP teacher as using L1 for explaining grammar (Q16) ($H=36.71$, $p=.00$, $df=3$). The difference was found between three paired groups: the first-year and second-year students ($M=64.26$ and $M=35.48$, respectively, $U=562.00$, $p=.000$), the first-year and third-year ($M=57.85$ and $M=23.90$, respectively, $U=238.500$, $p=.000$), and the first-year and fourth-year ($M=58.31$ and $M=26.47$, respectively, $U=287.500$, $p=.000$), indicating that the freshmen students observed their teachers as using L1 for grammar explanations most frequently.

As for the question regarding the relevant ESP teacher's use of L1 for giving instructions in class (Q17), a statistically significant difference ($H=34.77$, $p=.00$, $df=3$) was found between four paired groups of students: the first-year and third-year ($M=58.75$ and $M=18.50$, respectively, $U=157.500$, $p=.000$), the first-year and fourth-year ($M=58.01$ and $M=28.13$, respectively, $U=314.000$, $p=.000$), the second-year and third-year students ($M=25.70$ and $M=11.83$, respectively, $U=57.500$, $p=.000$), and the second-year and fourth-year students ($M=24.50$ and $M=15.53$, respectively, $U=112.500$, $p=.014$), showing that the lower generation students perceived that their teachers employed L1 for this purpose more than their later generation colleagues.

The answers as to whether the relevant teacher used L1 to explain field-specific concepts (Q18) also revealed statistically significant differences ($H=37.63$, $p=.00$, $df=3$) between different pairs of groups of students: the first-year and third-year ($M=59.06$ and $M=16.67$, respectively, $U=130.000$, $p=.000$), the first-year and fourth-year ($M=57.79$ and $M=29.34$, respectively, $U=333.500$, $p=.000$), the second-year and third-year students ($M=26.60$ and $M=10.33$, respectively, $U=35.000$, $p=.000$), the second-year and fourth-year students ($M=24.68$ and $M=15.25$, respectively, $U=108.000$, $p=.010$), revealing that the ESP teachers were perceived to use L1 for this purpose more with the first-year and second-year students. However, the difference between the third-year and fourth-year students ($M=13.00$ and $M=18.81$, respectively, $U=75.000$, $p=.049$) revealed that L1 seemed to be used for this purpose more with the fourth-year than with the third-year students.

4.1.2. Field of study

For the purpose of investigating whether this variable affects students' use and perception of their teacher's use of L1, the students were classified in three groups in alignment with the existing classification of study fields in Serbia: technical field, science, and social studies.

This variable was found to exert statistically significant differences with respect to five out of eleven questions. The differences were found between two paired groups of students: technical and science majors on the one hand, and the science and social studies students on the other hand. No differences were recorded between the technical and social studies majors.

Firstly, when asked if they used L1 for taking notes in class (Q8), the students in the science field were found to use L1 for this purpose significantly more than the students in the technical field (M=46.77 and M=66.05, respectively, U=812.000, $p=.001$). The question pertaining to how their ESP teacher explained general lexemes (Q13) also revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, indicating that the teacher in the domain of science was perceived to use L1 more for that purpose (M=47.62 and M=64.47, respectively, U=870.500, $p=.004$). Also, when observing their ESP teacher's use of L1 for explaining grammar (Q16), a statistically significant difference was obtained between these same groups (M=45.17 and M=69.04, respectively, U=701.500, $p=.000$), revealing the science students observed their teachers using L1 for this purpose more than the students in the technical field. Additionally, the teachers teaching the science majors were found to employ L1 more when giving instructions in comparison to their colleagues teaching the students in the technical field (M=48.37 and M=63.07, respectively, U=922.500, $p=.015$). The answers to the question pertaining to the teacher's use of L1 for explaining field-specific matter (Q18) also displayed a statistically significant difference between the two groups: the teachers in the science field were indicated as employing L1 for explaining domain-related matter far more often than their technical field colleagues (M=48.20 and M=63.39, respectively, U=910.500, $p=.012$).

The results also revealed statistically significant differences between the science majors and social studies students. The science majors reported their own and their teacher's more frequent use of L1 in the following situations: taking notes in class (Q9) (M=43.74 and M=31.26, respectively, U=453.500, $p=.008$), explaining general lexemes (Q13) (M=42.16 and M=32.84, respectively, U=512.000, $p=.044$), and explaining grammar (Q16) (M=46.43 and M=28.57, respectively, U=354.000, $p=.000$).

4.1.3. English language learning experience

To examine how this variable impacts their own and their teacher's use of L1, two groups of respondents were formed: students learning English for 1-12 years and those learning it for 13 years and more.

Statistically significant differences were obtained for eight questions, all indicating that the less experienced students used and perceived their teachers to use L1 more than the more experienced students. Firstly, when asked if they used L1 for taking notes in class (Q8), the less experienced students were found to use L1 for this purpose more than the more experienced students (M=86.67 and M=67.05, respectively, U=1720.000, $p=.006$). Similarly, the students learning English for a shorter span of time reported a more common practice of translating for themselves what the teacher said than those learning the language longer (Q9) (M=88.98 and M=65.92, respectively, U=1609.000, $p=.001$). Relatedly, the former group used L1 more often to adequately express themselves (Q11) than the latter group (M=89.34 and M=65.74, respectively, U=1591.500, $p=.001$). In their observations of the

teachers' use of L1, the students with less experience in learning English reported their teachers' more frequent use of L1 for teaching general lexemes (Q13) and grammar (Q16) than was observed by the more experienced students (($M=89.13$ and $M=65.85$, respectively, $U=1602.000$, $p=.001$) and ($M=91.85$ and $M=64.51$, respectively, $U=1471.000$, $p=.000$)). Also, the less experienced students reported that their teachers gave instructions for tasks in L1 (Q17) more frequently than indicated by the more experienced students ($M=89.97$ and $M=65.43$, respectively, $U=1561.500$, $p=.001$). Lastly, the students learning English for a shorter period of time regarded their teachers' use of L1 to explain the domain-specific matter (Q18) as more frequent than that reported by the students learning English longer ($M=90.66$ and $M=65.10$, respectively, $U=1528.500$, $p=.000$).

4.1.4. Self-reported L2 proficiency

Regarding their self-reported level of English language proficiency, the respondents were classified in one of the following three groups: excellent, average, and poor.

The analysis of the results revealed that this variable showed a statistically significant difference with respect to nine out of 11 questions. Interestingly, a general observation is that the students who assessed their knowledge of English as excellent or average reported using L1 more than the students indicating having poor knowledge. To illustrate, the students who reported high L2 proficiency were found to use L1 more than the students with average knowledge to express themselves adequately (Q11) ($M=65.72$ and $M=42.51$, respectively, $U=338.000$, $p=.000$). Moreover, the same two groups also differ with respect to how they reported their teachers' use of L1 for explaining grammar (Q16): the students with excellent knowledge perceived that their ESP teacher used L1 for that purpose more ($M=62.17$ and $M=43.36$, respectively, $U=402.000$, $p=.005$). The use of L1 among the students with excellent knowledge and their perception of their teacher's use of L1 were also recorded to be higher than among the low proficiency students in the following situations: taking notes (Q8) ($M=56.50$ and $M=29.04$, respectively, $U=108.000$, $p=.000$), translating what the teacher said (Q9) ($M=55.67$ and $M=29.32$, respectively, $U=123.000$, $p=.000$), communicating with colleagues in class (Q10) ($M=42.17$ and $M=33.91$, respectively, $U=366.000$, $p=.049$), expressing oneself adequately (Q11) ($M=58.44$ and $M=28.38$, respectively, $U=73.000$, $p=.000$), translating professional texts to improve comprehension (Q12) ($M=53.06$ and $M=30.21$, respectively, $U=170.000$, $p=.000$), explaining general lexemes (Q13) ($M=44.56$ and $M=33.09$, respectively, $U=323.000$, $p=.029$), teaching grammar (Q16) ($M=50.28$ and $M=31.15$, respectively, $U=220.000$, $p=.000$), giving instructions (Q17) ($M=46.94$ and $M=32.28$, respectively, $U=280.000$, $p=.007$), and explaining the domain-related matter (Q18) ($M=45.47$ and $M=32.78$, respectively, $U=306.500$, $p=.020$).

Additionally, statistically significant differences were found between the students with average and poor knowledge, showing the tendency of those with

average knowledge to use L1 more for the following reasons: taking notes (Q8) (M=77.99 and M=45.42, respectively, U=976.000, $p=.000$), translating what the teacher said (Q9) (M=77.85 and M=45.60, respectively, U=986.000, $p=.000$), communicating with colleagues in class (Q10) (M=69.03 and M=58.08, respectively, U=1647.500, $p=.019$), expressing oneself adequately (Q11) (M=77.89 and M=45.55, respectively, U=983.000, $p=.000$), and translating professional texts to improve comprehension (Q12) (M=74.16 and M=50.83, respectively, U=1263.000, $p=.000$). Additionally, the difference between the two groups was also found in relation to how the students observed their teacher using L1 to explain the meaning of general lexemes (Q13) (M=70.53 and M=55.97, respectively, U=1535.500, $p=.021$), indicating that the students with average knowledge perceived that their teacher employed L1 for this purpose more.

4.2. The questionnaire results

The results of the structured interview conducted with 12 students revealed the following:

1. When asked if they used L1 during the class and, if so, for what purposes, 11 students confirmed using L1 for the purpose of taking notes or translating a text as these activities improve their comprehension and retention. Only one student did not report using L1 as they believed they were proficient enough in English.
2. As regards the use of L1 for communication with colleagues in class, 11 students reported using the mother tongue, as communication conducted in L1 was quicker and devoid of misunderstanding.
3. Nine students reported their ESP teacher used L1 in class to give instructions, explanations, or translation equivalents. One student reported the teacher used L1 since some students were not suitably proficient in English, while one stated the teacher used L1 only to give important class information in the introductory part.
4. When the students were asked if they sometimes translated from English into Serbian, 10 gave an affirmative answer. They all indicated practicing translation exclusively at home, which included individual words, texts, songs, films, and short stories. Seven students emphasized they benefited significantly from translation.
5. All the interviewed students reported that their teachers used L1 to explain the standardization rules regarding how to use anglicisms in Serbian.
6. Nine students confirmed their ESP teacher compared the two language systems, especially the word building processes and grammar. One student said the teacher compared all the language elements, while another emphasized they did not find such comparison helpful.

7. The students did not have any additional observations pertaining to their own or their ESP teachers' use of L1.

5. DISCUSSION

Statistically significant results were obtained for all the four variables, indicating that the year of study, field of study, language learning experience, and proficiency level can all impact the use of L1 in ESP teaching and learning. Of the four variables, L1 use was shown to be the most strongly conditioned by year of study, language proficiency, and language learning experience.

The results pertaining to the year of study revealed that the lower generation students, primarily freshmen and then sophomore, reported using L1 considerably more than their later generation colleagues, especially for taking notes, translating what the teacher said, and interacting in class. Moreover, these two earlier generations reported much more frequent teachers' use of L1 for the purpose of explaining both general and specialized lexemes and field-related concepts, as well as for giving instructions and discussing standardization rules. When compared to their colleagues from later years of study, the freshmen students seemed to perceive that their ESP teacher used L1 most often for teaching grammar. Given that the context of university ESP learning presupposes large groups with varying degrees of language proficiency, sometimes including L2 beginners, it is not surprising that the freshmen students, closely followed by the sophomores, reported their own and their teachers' use of L1 as rather frequent. Both the students and their teachers seemed to be using L1 to improve comprehension and learning, which corroborates the findings of Kovačić and Kirinić (2011) and Xhemaili (2013). The students reported that their teachers used L1 in a number of situations, most frequently as a scaffolding technique (for giving instructions, offering translation equivalents of general lexemes, etc.) and for the purpose of raising the students' awareness of the standardization rules in L1, just as asserted as necessary by Latsanyphone and Bouangeune (2009) and Milić et al. (2018), respectively. Additionally, the lower generation students were found to employ L1 significantly more than their later generation colleagues in order to alleviate negative emotions, just as evidenced by Khresheh (2012) and Schweers (1999). A heavy reliance on L1 among the lower generation students could also result from their low proficiency, causing them to switch codes more often (Hughes et al., 2006) in attempting to fill in voids, make sense of what they are learning, and express themselves adequately.

In relation to this generational variable, the obtained results for all the questions revealed an interesting finding: L1 use, both among the students and teachers, was not found to decrease with generational advancement, with perceived usage most prominent among the first two years of study and least prominent in the third. Another noteworthy finding is that the lower generation students indicated translating professional texts into L1 to aid comprehension significantly more than

their later generation colleagues. The results revealed that translation was seen as a practice exercised most by the first-year students, and least by the fourth-year students. Also, the interview responses indicated that the translation of professional texts was generally a self-initiated activity which the students did at home to enhance comprehension of a text covered in class. A number of authors (e.g. Jerković & Komaromi, in press; Rushwan, 2017; Stanojević Gocić, 2016) have called for a greater use of translation as a teaching technique for its learning benefits. The results of our research indicate that the students employed translation since they benefited from it, further suggesting that its use as a teaching technique is worth greater examination.

When the variable related to the field of study is considered, the results revealed that L1 was used significantly more both by the students and their ESP teacher in the science field than by the students and their teacher in the technical field. To illustrate, the science students were found to use L1 significantly more for taking notes, while their ESP teachers were reported as using L1 significantly more than their colleagues in the technical field for explaining new general lexemes, grammar, and domain-specific matter, as well for giving instructions. Moreover, when compared to the social studies majors, the science students were found to employ and observe their teachers employing L1 significantly more for the following purposes: taking notes, explaining general lexemes and grammar. No differences were recorded between the technical and social studies majors.

The other variable that was documented as having the potential to determine the use of L1 is the length of the L2 learning. The obtained results for this variable indicate that the students with up to 12 years of L2 learning experience both used and perceived their teachers to use L1 for various purposes as more frequent than their longer-studying peers. More precisely, the less experienced students used L1 to improve comprehension (taking notes and translating for themselves what their teachers said significantly more than their more experienced colleagues). The finding that L1 was used to aid comprehension is strongly supported by relevant literature (e.g. Kovačić & Kirinić, 2011; Xhemaili, 2013). Moreover, the less experienced students were also found to use L1 significantly more than the other group to adequately express themselves, which has been repeatedly indicated to diminish students' experience of negative emotions (Brown, 2000; Khresheh, 2012). Also, the less experienced students reported that their teachers used L1 as a scaffolding device aimed at improving comprehension more than their more experienced peers did. Overall, the students reported L1 as being used mostly for teaching general lexis and grammar, giving instructions, and explaining field-specific matter. Relevant literature (e.g. Augustyn, 2013) emphasizes that the use of L1 can have numerous pedagogical, cognitive, and social functions that are vital for language proficiency.

The results related to the students' self-reported level of FL proficiency revealed that this variable also has the potential to strongly impact the use of L1. The students indicating an average or excellent knowledge of English used L1 for a

variety of reasons (taking notes, translating what the teacher says, for affective reasons, translating texts, etc.), sharply contrasting with the students with poor knowledge. Such a finding is not uncorroborated. For instance, Mahmoud (2006) claims that the use of L1 is not uncommon among advanced speakers of L2, while Stanojević Gocić, (2016), Jerković and Komaromi (in press), and Rushwan (2017) accentuate the pedagogical potential of translation among students of different proficiency levels. However, the finding that the students with excellent knowledge of English used L1 for affective reasons runs counter to what the literature suggests. Namely, Brown (2000) contends that those learners who cannot adequately express themselves and thus risk losing face in front of peers experience a threat to their L2 ego, for which reason they might employ different strategies to alleviate negative emotions, one of them being the use of L1. The respondents who thought highly of their L2 ability and, thus, assessed their general language competence as excellent, would appear to still lack self-esteem in oral communication.

The interview results mostly confirmed the results obtained through the questionnaire: the vast majority of the respondents used L1 for a number of reasons (taking notes, translating, and communicating in class) and they perceived their teachers' use of L1 as frequent for the purpose of giving instructions or translation equivalents, explaining grammar, comparing the two systems, and teaching standardization issues. However, the interview results also shed light on some important aspects of both students' and teachers' use of L1. To illustrate, the results showed that the students appeared to see translation as a very effective learning strategy and to use it both in class and when learning the language at home. Additionally, the responses demonstrated that they seem to employ L1 both for the translation of ESP related and non-related content (e.g. songs, films, etc.), which further implies they are engaged in informal language learning as well. Moreover, the interview responses showed that the students' heavy reliance on L1 during communication with peers in class is not caused by affective factors, but rather ensures quicker communication devoid of misunderstanding. Finally, the interview responses suggest that teaching standardization and contrastive analysis of the two language systems seem to be constituent parts of different ESP curricula, as the vast majority of students reported their teachers teach those.

6. CONCLUSION

The results of our study showed that both university students and their ESP teachers use L1 for pedagogical, linguistic, cognitive, and affective benefits to enhance L2 learning. Statistically significant differences were obtained for all the four variables, while three were documented as having a more considerable influence on the use of L1: field of study, L2 learning experience, and language proficiency. L1 was documented as being used most by the first-year and second-year students and their teachers. Also, the science students and teachers were reported as using L1 more

than in other fields (social studies and technical). Furthermore, the students learning English for 12 years or less and their teachers were found to use L1 more than those students with more learning experience and their teachers. Interestingly, the students categorized as having excellent and average knowledge of English showed a tendency towards more frequent and varied use of L1 than the students registering poor knowledge of L2. The results of the interview imply that the students employ L1 and perceive their teachers use it for various functions. Also, the analysis of the use of L1 across different variables shows a tendency of both the students and teachers to employ L1 in ESP for a variety of reasons, though several learning and teaching situations exhibited heavy reliance on L1. Such situations might be attributable to some fields of study having a relatively more difficult specialized vocabulary, to students with less L2 learning experience needing more assistance in L1, and L1 potentially serving as a metalanguage to spur the L2 progress of adults.

Our research is generally in concert with other studies investigating the use of L1, since Serbian also appears to be used to improve comprehension, diminish negative emotions, compare the two language systems, and discuss standardization rules. Moreover, the tendency of both the teachers and students to use L1 suggests that interference and code-switching are not seen as obstacles to language learning, just as proposed by relevant theory.

The time may have come for the role of L1 in L2/ESP learning to be revised, but to make an informed decision of its necessity and functionality, other studies are needed that would investigate the following issues in order to yield a more compressive view of: the impact of L1 on the amount and quality of L2 learned, the degree to which the use of L1 in ESP teaching is context-dependent and/or L1-dependent, and other functions of the use of L1 in ESP classroom in other countries. Additionally, this research may serve as an exploratory study that will spark the interest of other researchers to further explore the use of L1 probably on a larger, more coherent or more balanced sample.

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TATJANA GLUŠAC is a full professor at the Dept. of English, Faculty of Law and Business Studies *Dr. Lazar Vrkatić*, Novi Sad, Serbia. Her main research interests include foreign language teacher education and professional development, critical thinking in EFL, and foreign language assessment. She has authored and co-authored a number of articles on these topics, and has published two books: *New Insights into Foreign Language Testing* (2022) and *Međusobno obučavanje kolega kao oblik usavršavanja profesora engleskog jezika [Peer Coaching as a Form of Professional Development of Teachers of English]* (2016).

MIRA MILIĆ is a retired associate professor of ESP at The Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Novi Sad, Serbia. Her interests include ESP teaching, English-Serbian contact and contrastive issues, and specialized lexicography. She authored an English-Serbian dictionary of sports terms (2006), an

ESP textbook (2012), a monograph on Anglicisms as synonyms in Serbian (2013), and numerous research papers. She was also a co-editor of *A Serbian Dictionary of Recent Anglicisms* (2021) and a co-author of *A New English-Serbian Dictionary of Sports Terms* (2021).

DRAGANA GAK is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad. She has been teaching courses in General English, Business English, and English for Specific Purposes for more than twenty years. Her main interests include metadiscourse in business English, academic writing, and business communication in industrial engineering and management. She has authored and co-authored a number of scientific papers in the field of business English communication.

Appendix 1 Questionnaire

1. What faculty and what particular department are you enrolled in?
2. What year of study are you enrolled in?
I II III IV V PhD studies
3. How old are you?
4. How long have you been learning English?
5. How would you assess your English language proficiency?
excellent average poor
6. How often do you use your mother tongue in your ESP classes?
always – sometimes – rarely – never
7. What do you think about using the mother tongue in ESP classes? (Please indicate only one answer)
a. It should never be used.
b. I should not use it, but I sometimes do.
c. It is acceptable to use it from time to time.
d. It is fine to use it whenever it is needed.
8. I use my mother tongue for taking notes during class.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
9. I use my mother tongue to translate for myself what the teacher said.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
10. I use my mother tongue to communicate with my colleagues when we need to do a task together.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
11. I use my mother tongue when I think I will not be able to express myself adequately in English.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
12. I translate professional texts into L1 to be able to fully understand them.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
13. The teacher uses the mother tongue when explaining the meaning of new general lexemes.
always – sometimes – rarely – never

14. The teacher provides translation of new technical words.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
15. The teacher uses the mother tongue to explain in what form we should use a technical word that is borrowed from English into Serbian (since the word does not have a Serbian equivalent), i.e. whether it is correct to write 'emailom', 'email-om', or 'imejlo'.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
16. The teacher uses the mother tongue to explain grammar.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
17. The teacher uses the mother tongue when giving instructions for the tasks we need to do.
always – sometimes – rarely – never
18. The teacher uses the mother tongue to explain professional content (e.g. types of contracts, process of production, etc.).
always – sometimes – rarely – never

Appendix 2

Structured interview questions

1. Do you use Serbian during English language classes, e.g. for taking notes, writing down how a word is pronounced or its translation? Why do you use it / do you not use it?
2. When you are supposed to do a task in class, do you communicate with your colleagues in Serbian or in English? Why do you do it / do you not do it?
3. Does your English teacher sometimes use Serbian in class? When does he/she use it?
4. Do you sometimes translate from one language into another? Why do you translate?
5. Does your English teacher explain to you how to adequately use those words from the English language that do not have translation equivalents in Serbian?
6. Does your teacher sometimes compare the systems of the two languages, e.g. vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spelling, etc.?
7. Do you have any other observations/thoughts regarding the use of L1 in learning English?