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An Analysis of Code-Switching in English Classroom Interaction at SMP Negeri 10 Medan

Elisabet Butarbutar¹, Four Maida Manalu²

^{1,2}Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia

Email: elisabetbutar05@gmail.com¹, fourmaidamanalu3009@gmail.com²

Corresponding Author: Elisabet Butarbutar

ABSTRACT

Code-switching is a common phenomenon in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms where teachers and students alternate between English and Indonesian to support communication and learning. This study investigates the types and functions of code-switching in classroom interaction at SMPN 10 Medan. The objectives of this study are to identify the types of code-switching based on Poplack's (1980) classification and to analyze its functions based on Appel and Muysken's (1987) framework. This research employed a qualitative case study design. The data were collected through a 25-minute classroom observation, transcription of teacher-student interaction, and semi-structured interviews with the English teacher. The data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that two types of code-switching are dominant in classroom interaction: inter-sentential switching (76.9%) and intra-sentential switching (23.1%), while tag switching appears minimally. Inter-sentential switching is mainly used for clarification of instructions and emotional support, while intra-sentential switching occurs in grammar-related explanations and lexical insertion. In terms of function, referential function is the most dominant, followed by directive, expressive, phatic, and metalinguistic functions. These functions indicate that code-switching is primarily used to facilitate comprehension, manage classroom interaction, reduce student anxiety, and explain grammatical concepts. The results suggest that code-switching is not a language deficiency but a purposeful pedagogical strategy that supports effective teaching and learning in EFL classrooms, particularly at the junior high school level where learners still require linguistic assistance.

Keywords: Code-Switching, EFL Classroom, Inter-Sentential Switching, Intra-Sentential Switching, Classroom Interaction

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching is a common phenomenon in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, especially in contexts where students still have limited English proficiency. In many Indonesian classrooms, teachers often alternate between English and Indonesian to ensure that students are able to understand lesson materials and participate actively in learning activities. This practice is not merely a linguistic choice, but also a pedagogical strategy that helps bridge communication gaps between teachers and students.

Previous studies have shown that code-switching plays an important role in facilitating second language learning. Cook (2001) emphasizes that the first language can function as a cognitive support in understanding complex concepts in the second language. Baker (2011) also highlights that bilingual classroom interaction helps both teachers and students negotiate meaning more effectively. In addition, Sert (2005) argues that code-switching can serve as an instructional strategy to improve comprehension, classroom interaction, and student participation. However, most of these studies focus broadly on code-switching in EFL contexts, while fewer studies specifically examine its functional use in real classroom interaction at the junior high school level in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types and functions of code-switching used in English classroom interaction at SMPN 10 Medan. Specifically, this research investigates (1) the types of code-switching based on Poplack's (1980) classification, namely inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching, and (2) the functions of code-switching based on Appel and Muysken's (1987) framework, including referential, directive, expressive, phatic, and metalinguistic functions. The data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with the English teacher during a two-hour lesson focusing on grammar instruction.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how code-switching operates as a pedagogical tool in real classroom settings. Unlike studies that treat code-switching as a general linguistic phenomenon, this research provides context-based evidence of how it is systematically used to support teaching and learning processes, particularly in explaining grammar, giving instructions, and maintaining classroom interaction. The findings are expected to enrich existing literature on bilingual classroom discourse and provide insights for English teachers in similar EFL contexts.

The analysis is guided by Poplack's (1980) theory of code-switching types and Appel and Muysken's (1987) functional classification. These frameworks help to identify patterns of language alternation and their communicative purposes in classroom interaction. In addition, Cook's (2001), Baker's (2011), and Sert's (2005) perspectives are used to support the interpretation of findings regarding the pedagogical role of the first language in second language learning.

This study is limited to one classroom observation session and focuses on teacher-student interaction in a junior high school EFL classroom. The results are expected to show that code-switching is not a random practice, but a structured and purposeful strategy that supports comprehension, engagement, and effective communication in language learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design to investigate code-switching in classroom interaction at SMPN 10 Medan during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participant of this study was one English teacher and one class of ninth-grade students, selected through purposive sampling because the teacher frequently used both English and Indonesian during instruction, making the classroom

suitable for analyzing code-switching practices. The data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The researcher acted as the primary instrument in collecting and interpreting the data, supported by observation sheets, audio/video recordings, and an interview guide to ensure accurate data collection and to explore the teacher’s perspectives on the use of code-switching. The classroom interaction was recorded and transcribed to identify instances of code-switching, while interview data were used to understand the pedagogical reasons behind its use. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data condensation stage, utterances containing code-switching were selected, transcribed, and categorized based on Poplack’s (1980) types of code-switching and Appel and Muysken’s (1987) functions. In the data display stage, the findings were organized in tables and descriptive explanations to identify patterns of language alternation. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted and verified the findings through triangulation of observation, interview, and documentation to ensure the credibility and validity of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Code-Switching in Classroom Interaction

The data obtained from a 25-minute classroom observation at SMPN 10 Medan indicate that code-switching frequently occurs during English classroom interaction. Based on Poplack’s (1980) classification, three types of code-switching were identified, namely inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. However, only inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching were significantly found in the data, while tag switching appeared minimally and was not dominant in the interaction.

The use of code-switching is mainly influenced by classroom needs such as clarifying instructions, explaining grammar materials, and maintaining students’ comprehension during learning activities.

Table 1 Inter-Sentential Switching in Classroom Interaction

No.	Data	Analysis
1.	“Are you ready to study today? Siap belajar hari ini?”	According to Poplack (1980), inter-sentential switching occurs when language alternation happens between complete sentences. In this data, the teacher first produces an English sentence, followed by an Indonesian sentence. The switch occurs at sentence boundaries. The Indonesian sentence functions as clarification to ensure students understand the question, supporting Cook’s (2001) view that L1 acts as a scaffold for comprehension in L2 learning.
2.	“You will still get a good score. Jangan terlalu khawatir, yang penting kalian sudah berusaha dan mencoba yang terbaik.”	The teacher completes a full English sentence and continues with an Indonesian sentence. This reflects inter-sentential switching as defined by Poplack (1980). The Indonesian utterance functions as emotional support to reduce student anxiety. This aligns with Baker (2011), who states that bilingual interaction helps create a supportive learning environment.

The data in Table 1 show that inter-sentential switching occurs when the teacher separates English and Indonesian into complete sentences. In Data 1, switching is used to ensure comprehension of instructions. In Data 2, switching is used to provide emotional encouragement after discussing academic performance. These findings indicate that inter-sentential switching is mainly used for clarification and affective support.

Compared to previous studies, these findings are consistent with Nurhamidah et al. (2018), who found that inter-sentential switching is the dominant type in EFL classrooms. Similarly, Sert (2005) explains that teachers use sentence-level switching to maintain clarity in instruction. This study strengthens those findings by showing that inter-sentential switching is particularly dominant in junior high school contexts where students require clearer linguistic separation.

Table 2 Intra-Sentential Switching in Classroom Interaction

No.	Data	Analysis
1.	“Banyak soal reading, Ma’am, jadi harus cepat baca.”	Based on Poplack (1980), intra-sentential switching occurs when language alternation happens within a single sentence. In this case, the word “reading” is inserted into an Indonesian sentence. According to Cook (2001), L1 supports cognitive processing, while L2 terms are retained for subject-specific meaning.
2.	“Karena passive, Ma’am, jadi diubah ke active.”	The English terms “passive” and “active” are inserted into an Indonesian sentence structure. This reflects intra-sentential switching within a single clause. Baker (2011) explains that bilingual speakers naturally integrate both languages to achieve communicative efficiency in learning contexts.

Table 2 shows that intra-sentential switching occurs when English lexical items are inserted into Indonesian sentences. In Data 1, the term “reading” is used because it is directly related to the lesson topic. In Data 2, grammatical terms such as “passive” and “active” are used to explain sentence transformation.

These findings indicate that intra-sentential switching is mainly used in grammar-related explanations and lexical insertion. Compared with Metila (2009), who found similar patterns in classroom discourse, this study confirms that intra-sentential switching is less frequent because teachers tend to prefer full-sentence translation for clarity.

Table 3 Frequency and Percentage of Code-Switching Types

NO.	Type of Code-Switching	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Inter-sentential switching	30	76.9%
2.	Intra-sentential switching	9	23.1%
3.	Tag switching	0	0
	Total	30	100%

The table shows that inter-sentential switching is the most dominant type, with 30 occurrences (76.9%), while intra-sentential switching appears 9 times (23.1%). Tag switching appears minimally and does not significantly influence classroom interaction patterns.

The dominance of inter-sentential switching indicates that language alternation is structured and deliberate. The teacher tends to separate English and Indonesian into complete sentences to ensure clarity. This supports Poplack's (1980) theory that bilingual speakers adjust switching strategies based on communicative needs.

These findings are consistent with Nurhamidah et al. (2018), who also reported inter-sentential switching as the dominant type in EFL classrooms. However, this study adds contextual insight that dominance is even stronger in junior high school settings due to students' limited English proficiency.

Functions of Code-Switching in Classroom Interaction

The second research problem focuses on the functions of code-switching in classroom interaction based on Appel and Muysken (1987), who classify code-switching functions into referential, directive, expressive, phatic, metalinguistic, and poetic functions. From the classroom data, five functions were identified: referential, directive, expressive, phatic, and metalinguistic functions.

Table 4 Functions of Code-Switching in Classroom Interaction

Function	Function	Analysis
Referential	"Passive voice itu tentang action..."	According to Appel and Muysken (1987), referential function is used to explain information. In this case, Indonesian is used to clarify grammar concepts. Cook (2001) supports this by stating that L1 helps learners understand complex L2 input.
Directive	"Open your book... kerjakan halaman..."	This function is used to give instructions and manage classroom activities. Sert (2005) explains that code-switching helps maintain instructional clarity.
Expressive	"Jangan terlalu khawatir..."	Used to reduce anxiety and motivate students. Baker (2011) highlights the affective role of bilingual interaction in learning.
Phatic	"Are you ready to study today?"	Used to maintain interaction and gain attention at the beginning of lesson.
Metalinguistic	He closes the door. Jangan lupa -s..."	Used to explain grammar rules explicitly. Cook (2001) emphasizes L1 support in explaining L2 structure.

Table 4 shows that referential function is the most dominant function in classroom interaction. It mainly appears during grammar explanation where Indonesian is used to simplify meaning. Directive and expressive functions are also present, while phatic and metalinguistic functions appear in specific instructional moments.

The dominance of referential function indicates that code-switching is primarily used as a cognitive tool to support understanding rather than only for social interaction. This supports Appel and Muysken (1987), who state that referential function is common in educational contexts.

Compared with previous studies, the findings align with Sert (2005) and Cook (2001), who emphasize the pedagogical role of L1 in L2 classrooms. However, this study highlights that in junior high school EFL classrooms, referential function is more dominant than other functions because students require more linguistic support in understanding grammar concepts.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that code-switching in the English classroom at SMPN 10 Medan occurs in two main structural types, namely inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential switching, with inter-sentential switching being the most dominant. In addition, the functions of code-switching are mainly referential, followed by directive, expressive, phatic, and metalinguistic functions. These patterns indicate that code-switching is not random, but systematically used as a pedagogical strategy to support teaching and learning processes in an EFL classroom.

The dominance of inter-sentential switching (76.9%) suggests that the teacher tends to separate English and Indonesian into complete sentences. This pattern is theoretically significant because, according to Poplack (1980), inter-sentential switching requires clear grammatical separation between two languages. In this study, the teacher uses this type mainly for clarification and emotional support, such as repeating instructions in Indonesian after English sentences or providing reassurance to students. This finding confirms Cook's (2001) argument that L1 functions as a cognitive scaffold in L2 learning, helping students process meaning more effectively. It also supports Sert's (2005) view that teachers use code-switching strategically to ensure comprehension and maintain classroom clarity.

Intra-sentential switching (23.1%), although less dominant, appears consistently in grammar-related explanations and lexical insertion, such as the use of "reading," "passive," and "active" within Indonesian sentences. According to Poplack (1980), this type of switching requires higher bilingual competence because both languages are integrated within a single syntactic structure. The occurrence of this type in the classroom suggests that both teacher and students have sufficient familiarity with basic English terminology. However, its limited frequency also indicates that the instructional context prioritizes clarity over linguistic mixing. This aligns with Baker (2011), who explains that bilingual speakers often switch languages strategically to achieve communicative efficiency rather than stylistic complexity.

From the perspective of function, the referential function emerges as the most dominant. This indicates that code-switching in this classroom is primarily used to explain academic content, especially grammar concepts such as passive voice. Appel and Muysken (1987) describe the referential function as language use aimed at transmitting information more effectively. In this study, Indonesian is used to simplify abstract English concepts, making them more accessible for students with limited proficiency. This finding strengthens Cook's (2001) theory that the first language plays an important role in facilitating cognitive understanding in second language learning environments.

The directive function is also frequently observed in classroom management, such as giving instructions and guiding student activities. This supports Sert (2005), who argues that teachers use code-switching to maintain instructional efficiency and reduce misunderstanding in task execution. Meanwhile, the expressive function reflects the teacher's effort to reduce students' anxiety and create a supportive learning atmosphere. This aligns with Baker's (2011) claim that bilingual interaction contributes to affective support in language learning, particularly in lowering students' emotional barriers.

The phatic function, although less frequent, plays an important role in maintaining classroom interaction and engagement, especially at the beginning of lessons. This shows that code-switching is not only used for academic explanation but also for sustaining communication flow between teacher and students. The metalinguistic function, on the other hand, appears during explicit grammar explanation, indicating that code-switching is also used as a tool for language awareness and form-focused instruction.

When compared with previous studies, the findings are consistent with Nurhamidah et al. (2018), who found that inter-sentential switching is the dominant type in EFL classrooms. Similarly, Metila (2009) reported that intra-sentential switching appears mainly in language explanation contexts. However, this study adds a more specific contextual contribution by showing that in junior high school settings, inter-sentential switching is significantly more dominant due to learners' lower proficiency level and need for clearer linguistic separation. This strengthens the argument that the level of students' language competence strongly influences the type and frequency of code-switching used in classroom interaction.

the findings confirm that code-switching in the classroom is a purposeful pedagogical strategy rather than a language deficiency. It serves multiple functions, including cognitive support, instructional clarity, emotional encouragement, and interaction maintenance. These results support the broader theoretical proposition that bilingual practices in EFL classrooms contribute positively to both comprehension and classroom communication. At the same time, the study highlights that the effectiveness of code-switching is highly context-dependent, particularly influenced by learners' proficiency level and classroom dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that code-switching in the English classroom at SMPN 10 Medan occurs mainly in two forms, inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching, with inter-sentential switching being the most dominant type. The dominance of this type indicates that language alternation is mostly done at sentence boundaries to ensure clarity and comprehension during teaching and learning activities. In terms of function, code-switching is primarily used for referential purposes, followed by directive, expressive, phatic, and metalinguistic functions, showing that it serves multiple pedagogical roles such as explaining grammar concepts, giving instructions, supporting students emotionally, and maintaining classroom interaction. These findings indicate that code-switching is a purposeful instructional strategy that supports effective communication and facilitates students' understanding in the EFL classroom rather than indicating language deficiency.

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