

Comparative Study on Instructors' and Students' Code-Switching in an EFL Class

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Abstract

This study investigates code-switching (CS) occurred between instructors and students in an English as a foreign language (EFL) class at an international college in China. Questionnaires and in-class observations were carried out among both instructors and students to elicit the data. Three aspects were investigated: frequency of CS, reasons for CS and attitudes towards CS. It was found that (a) English (TL) stays dominant while Chinese (L1) is auxiliary in an EFL class. (b) Most instructors and students use code-switching in class, which can be attributed to many factors. For students, low English proficiency is the underlying reason, while for instructors, the main reason lies in translating important parts. Most of them are positive towards CS. Pedagogical implications of the findings were also discussed. Overall, this study contributes to teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) on the basis of empirical and experimental results.

Key words: Code-switching; Instructors; Students; EFL class; Reasons; Attitudes; Comparative study

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INTRODUCTION

Code-switching is often broadly discussed in every subfield of linguistic disciplines, and it is especially

alarming that researchers often do not agree on a clear definition of code-switching (Nilep, 2006). However, this study focuses on classroom code-switching, which is defined as language alternation—the alternating use of more than one linguistic code in the classroom by any of the classroom participants (e.g., teacher, students, teacher aide), and this can include both code-mixing (intra-clausal/sentential alternation) and code-switching (alternation at the inter-clausal/sentential level) (Lin, 1990, 2008, 2013). It occurs when a word or a phrase in one language substitutes for a word or phrase in a second language (Li, 1996; Roberto & Jeanette, 2001).

Focus on the study of both instructors' and students' code-switching can be significant and potential. Firstly, China holds the world's largest population of students (Chinese undergraduates in this case), which quantitatively amounts to 37 million and accounts for 1/5 of the total number worldwide. The ministry of education, P.R.C. announced in their 2016 press conference that students studying abroad have reached 54,450,000 and the number is still keeping growing. For those who tend to study abroad, English proficiency test is a prerequisite. The most common ones are IELTS and TOFEL, either of which is a big headache for Chinese students. Compared with reading, the vast majority are poor in speaking. Whether this has something to do with their code-switching is worth analyzing.

Secondly, the data were collected from a famous international college in China, which has established long-term cooperation with many foreign universities including University of Montreal, King's College London and University of Lyon. The programs include short-term visiting, summer camp, 2+2 (students studying at home for the first two years, and abroad for the other two), and 3+1 (students studying at home for the first three years, and abroad for another one), 4+0, and so on. Each year, about 500 students are enrolled, and nearly half will get access to study abroad. Generally, the students enrolled

have a minimum score 115 (total score 150) in English test of China's entrance examination for higher education, which means they are comparatively better at English than their peers enrolled by other universities. And the TEFL instructors are masters returned from abroad. To some degree, both of them in this college are typical of such cohort in China. The findings will contribute to scholars or researchers who are interested in this domain and provide some information for foreign teachers who are likely to teach in China.

Thirdly, many researchers put their emphasis on code-switching in North America and Europe, for instance, code-switching to English in German advertising (Zhiganova, 2016), code-switching in Turkish-English bilinguals (Koban, 2013), etc., few scholars have ever considered CS phenomenon in countries of the "expanding circle" (Kachru, 1988), like China, Japan, South Korea and so on, where English is used as a foreign language (Shen, 2010). Literatures of students' code-switching are numerous, but comparative study on classroom code-switching of both instructors and students in China's international college is rare. Moreover, surveys and observations made by the instructors, who are the witnesses of students' classroom behavior, are comparatively reliable.

In view of the reasons above, data generated from instructors and students were employed to explain the following questions:

- (a) How often do the instructors and students code-switch in class?
- (b) What are the reasons for their code-switching in class?
- (c) What are their attitudes towards classroom code-switching from the perspective of a speaker and a listener respectively?
- (d) What pedagogical implications can be drawn from their in-class code-switching?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researches about code-switching started in late 1970s, and have intrigued significant interest among many scholars for the past several decades (Nur & Marlyna, 2014).

As to studies on classroom code-switching, Duff and Polio (1990, 1994) found that target language (TL) usage ranges from 92% to 100% in their study on 13 foreign language classrooms. Frohlich et al. (1985) also confirmed students' strong preference for using L1 in class. Macaro (2001) reported that between 65% and 86% of the participants used TL. Kraemer (2006) concluded that a fair amount of English was used in class by German teaching assistants. Nik et al. (2013) conducted a study on code-switching of Malaysian students and found that all of the students practiced code-switching in their daily

communications as well as in classroom environment. Yang (2012) had research in a China's university, and statistics show that 98% of the students and 99% of the teachers code-switch in class.

Within researches on reasons or functions of code-switching, Legarreta (1977) exemplified that the majority of pupils use L1 to express solidarity, while teachers and aids turn to L2 for the same function. Milk (1981) and Guthrie (1984) coded interactions between teacher and students in their respective research. Milk found that L1 is used in directives, meta-statements, and humor creation. It can serve as a means of social control and arouse students' interest. There are also other functions like elicitation, expressive, reply and informative. Guthrie summarized that L1 can act as a "we-code" for solidarity, clarify or check for understanding, contrast variable meanings in L1 and L2 and anticipate likely sources of confusion for students. Malik (1994) developed 10 communicative functions including lack of facility, lack of register, affection of the speaker, habitual experience, and semantic significance, to emphasize a point, to show identity with a group, to address a different audience, to attract attention and for pragmatic reasons. Flyman-Mattsson and Burenhult (1999) indicated that code-switching carries topic switch, affective and repetitive functions. In Simon's (2001) study, teachers' code-switching is used for negotiating different frames, role-relationships and identities. Nur and Marlyna (2014) indicated that code-switching occurs to serve quotation, addressee specification, reiteration, message qualification, clarification, emphasis, checking, indicating emotions, availability, principle of economy, and free switching functions. Anna (2016) also confirmed that code-switching is functionally motivated and represents a meaningful discursive, morphological, and stylistic device.

Attitudes towards classroom code-switching usually differ. Modupeola (2013) claimed that code switching helps learners to enjoy their learning due to their ability to comprehend the teachers' input, but teachers' code-switching will slow down the rate of learning TL. Roberto and Jeanette (2001) intentionally cast their doubts on the belief that bilinguals code-switch because of a lack of language proficiency. Cook (2001) agreed that the use of L1 by students contributes to successful learning because genuineness is pursued. Sert (2005) believed that code-switching is extremely useful to students in many different aspects, especially in the teaching of beginner students.

However, Polio and Duff (1994) argued that for NNS, it may be unreasonable to expect the exclusive use of the TL in the classroom. This is enforced by Taha's (2008) study of code-switching in an Arabic university that alternation between English and Arabic in the classroom should be discouraged and that all members of the classroom were obligated to use the medium of instruction designated for the study.

Some researchers' attitude towards classroom code-switching lies in between. For example, Dash (2002) said "It may be more acceptable to claim that code-switching should be allowed whenever necessary with some learners in specific situations". Also, Chinese researcher Yang Na (2012) suggested that teachers should follow the principles of "using L1 at right time with appropriate amount" and "adapting to the course and students' situations". This is supported by Orit (2015) who added that code-switching should be regarded as a careful strategy employed by the teachers.

2. METHODS

2.1 Instrument

There are many assessment tools for measurement, including self-report surveys, observations, interviews, learner journals, dialogue journals, think-aloud techniques, and so on (Jiang & Wu, 2016). In this study, questionnaires and observations are employed. Two sets of questionnaires, one is for the students and the other is for the instructors, are well designed and scrutinized by a panel of senior professors before they are distributed out. To ensure that all the questions are fully understood, the questionnaires are bilingual (English and Chinese).

There are eight questions in total. The questions are divided into four categories: Q1-Q2 are basic information of respondents; Q3-Q5 are a 5-point Likert-type scale which measures the frequency of CS phenomenon from 1=Never to 5=All the time. Q6 is a multiple response of reasons for CS. There are ten reasons available for response, and other reasons can be supplemented by the respondents themselves. Q7-Q8 test the attitudes towards in-class CS from a speaker's and a listener's point of view respectively. For Q6, Q7 and Q8, the respondents can also add their opinions in the blanks.

2.2 Participants

A total of 114 students and 21 instructors (see Table 1) were recruited to fill the questionnaires. The students selected major in international business, finance, business administration, computer science, and human resources and study English as a foreign language. They were from four grade levels, freshman, sophomore, junior and senior respectively. The freshmen, who have just passed the national entrance exam for higher education, are supposed to be better at written grammar but worse at speaking compared with the other three cohorts. Most sophomores have passed College English Test Band 4 (CET4) with a vocabulary volume requirement of 4,500 words. They can conduct simple daily communication in English. The juniors have a vocabulary volume of 5,500 words, and are capable of speaking freely to a certain degree. Most of them passed College English Test Band 6 (CET6) which is equivalent to IELTS in difficulty. The seniors are more

proficient in using language compared with the other three grades.

The course was an English listening and speaking class which requires students to speak English during class.

Most of the sample instructors are senior ones with more than 3 years of TEFL experience. Both the instructors and students are from College of International Business in Chongqing Technical and Business University, China.

Table 1
Participants

Students	Male	Female	Total
Freshman	12	17	29
Sophomore	7	22	29
Junior	19	9	28
Senior	15	13	28
Total	53	61	114
Instructors			
TEFL for 1-3 years	1	6	7
TEFL for over 3 years	8	6	14
Total	9	12	21

2.3 Data Collection

Each questionnaire can only be submitted with all the questions completed. Each instructor is responsible to distribute and collect the questionnaires in his or her own class. The last 20 minutes in a 1.5-hour class were reserved for students to finish the questions. The instructors also need to make response on their own questionnaires. The participants were supposed to finish the questionnaire independently and as honestly as possible. They were required to answer the questions to the best of their consideration. 135 copies were given out and collected together. All of the responses proved to be effective.

SPSS and Microsoft Excel were employed, and all of the data were carefully calculated and reviewed by several instructors.

Observation resources were obtained from students' usual in-class performance. At the beginning of each term, a sample form was adopted by each instructor to record students' performance in each class. Usually, there are three evaluation criteria: attendance, self-presentation, group work. The first one is an independent variable while the latter two are dependent variables. This observation lasts a term (4.5 months).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A comparative analysis is adopted in this study. Each item is carefully calculated. The results show both similarities and differences in CS phenomenon, reasons, and attitudes between instructors and students.

3.1 Frequency of Classroom Code-Switching

Figure 1 shows a general situation of code-switching in an EFL classroom. The color orange represents students while the color blue represents instructors. Respectively, the number of students who never (10.53%) code-switch outweighs the ones who code-switch all the time (3.51%). 32.46% of the students often code-switch, 24.56% occasionally do that, while 28.95% of them rarely use code-switching. Although there are students who code-switch all the time, the number is minimum.

As to instructors, a majority (47.62%) of them occasionally code-switch in teaching process. 19.05% rarely code-switch, while an equal percentage of instructors often code-switch. Only a handful (4.76%) of instructors never code-switch. Surprisingly, 9.52% of the instructors code-switch all the time in class, which means at least half of the time is spent on speaking Chinese.

As shown in Figure 1, there is big difference in CS frequency between instructors and students. Data of instructors presents a pyramid model, while data

of students is irregular. If all the frequency adverbs are divided into three degrees, in which the first two (never and rarely) are categorized as low frequency, and the last two (often and all the time) are categorized as high frequency, then data shows students keep a balanced percentage at the two ends, both are about 39% (10.53%+28.95%, 32.46%+3.51%), while statistics of instructors stand out in the middle (occasionally).

The results imply that code-switching in EFL class is common and that instructors use it more consciously than students (see response on “occasionally” 47.62%). Since the debut of China’s educational reform, “pure English teaching” is highly proposed across China’s universities. But whether for instructors or students, it’s not that easy to realize the proposal in the short term, especially when they are dealing with two languages that do not share the same culture and do not apply similar grammatical and phonological properties (Noli et al., 2013). Actually, EFL curriculum in China’s universities is undergoing the transition from CS to pure English expression.

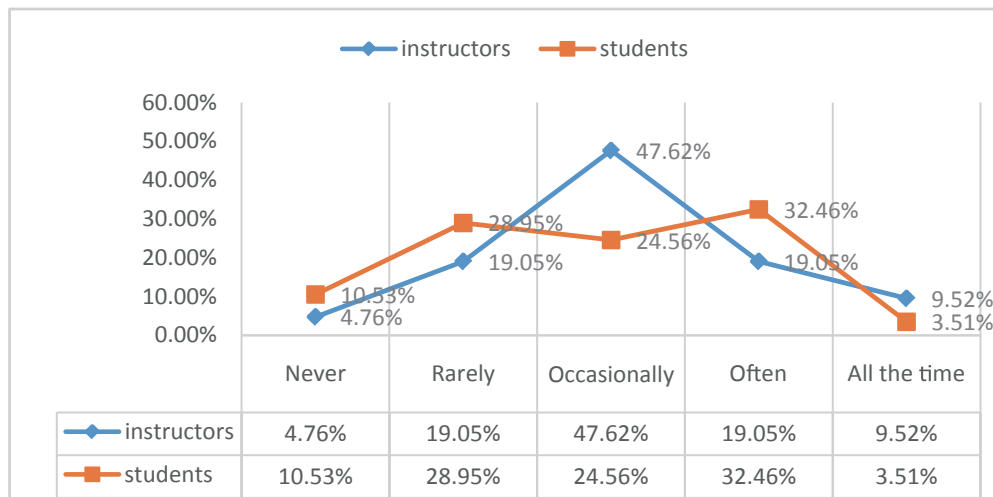


Figure 1
General Frequency

Besides general frequency, a detailed study on how the respondents use code-switching, word, phrase or sentence CS, is also investigated. As shown in Table 2, both instructors and students use word or phrase CS more often than sentence CS. Specifically, significant difference lies in word or phrase CS between the two groups of respondents. For students, the frequency of word or phrase CS is far higher than that of sentence CS ($M^1=2.89$; $M^2=2.51$). Objectively that is because students are required to speak English in class. Subjectively,

students often use code-switching unconsciously, which is consistent with Noli’s (2013) findings. It is interesting to note that most of CS take place automatically and unconsciously (Skiba, 1997; Sert, 2005; Jingxia, 2010; Noli et al., 2013). If the value $M=3$ (occasionally) is set as a medium value, then data lower than that is acceptable. Therefore, Table 2 signifies that both instructors and students kept their code-switching within an acceptable amount. ($M^1=2.90 < 3$; $M^2=2.86 < 3$; $M^1=2.89 < 3$, $M^2=2.51 < 3$).

Table 2
Detailed Frequency (Independent Sample Test)

CS frequency	Instructors (N=21)		Students (N=114)		F(sig.)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Word or phrase CS	2.90	1.09	2.89	1.08	.755(.387)
Sentence CS	2.86	0.85	2.51	0.78	.000 (.993)

3.2 Reasons for Classroom Code-Switching

Figure 2 is a reflection of multiple response which clearly signifies the differences in CS reasons between instructors and students. Here only percentage is discussed and compared because it makes no sense to discuss number (students: instructors=114:21).

As to instructors only, the highest ratio stays at 80.95%, which means most instructors use code-switching to translate difficult parts, and then to emphasize important parts and to avoid ambiguity. It is not surprising because they need to code-switch in order to clarify words, expressions, structures and rules of utterances (Greggio & Gil, 2007). The other seven reasons keep at a relatively low level, respectively, to break the silence or activate the atmosphere (38.1%), to call attention (28.57%), to save time and effort (28.57%), to cite Chinese quotations, poems, etc. (23.81%), to supplement certain parts (19.05%), temporarily forget how to express (9.52%), and for accuracy (added by respondents). Unexpectedly, no one uses code-switching out of habit.

University students in EFL class tend to keep silent most of the time, especially when they cannot understand what the instructor is saying. That is why over 1/3 of instructors would switch to Chinese to “wake up” the students. Whatever reason it is, instructors are trying their best to make themselves understood and activate the

students. In this respect, instructors see code-switching as “a bridge between two languages that the students are learning” (Faltis, 1989, as cited by Brice & Roseberry-McKibbin, 2001; Nik & Suthagar, 2013).

Contrary to instructors, students often code-switch mostly out of habit (67.54%), which highlights the findings above, that is, they insert Chinese unconsciously. Also more than half of the respondents use code-switching because they temporarily forget how to express in English (57.89%), and to save time and effort (61.40%), they resort to L1. There is a common phenomenon that students used to stammering or repeating in whatever kind of oral practice, because they are nervous. The more nervous they are, the more mistakes they make. Then they would forget certain words or phrases, even though the words or phrases were very familiar to them before. This is quite discouraging. But students indeed have a strong desire to avoid ambiguity (50.88%), to emphasize (34.21%) and supplement (30.7%) what they originally think. These data suggest that student are eager to learn and make themselves understood by peers. A few students (15.79%) code-switch to translate difficult parts, which is extremely different from that of instructors (80.95% > 15.79%). The disparity is closely related to their English level. Most students mentioned that they suffered a lot from low proficiency.

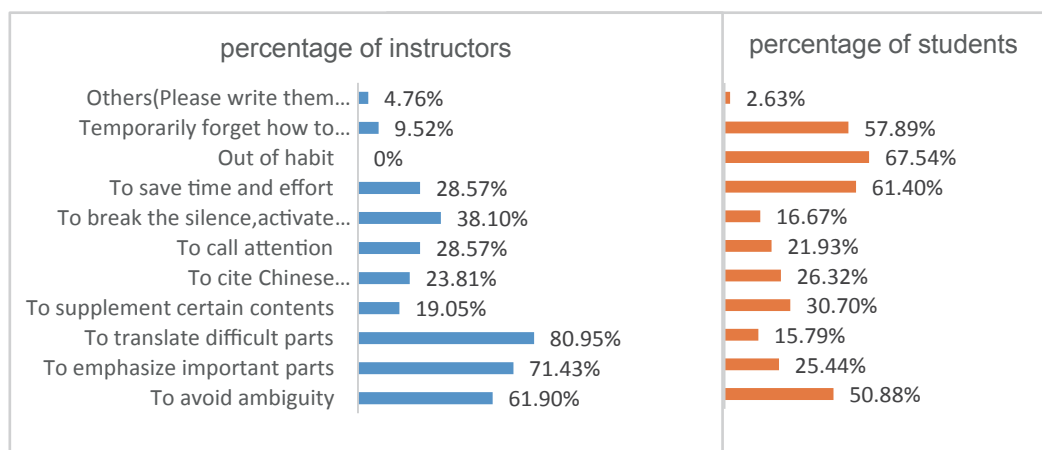


Figure 2
Ranking of CS Reasons

Figure 3 is linear comparison of reasons between instructors and students. The rise and fall can be observed visually. Overall, instructors tend to code-switch in class mostly to emphasize and to translate, which is parallel to Taha’s finding that Arab teachers teaching English tend to make statements in English and

repeat them in Arabic in order to emphasize the point of the statement or to make the students understand what the teachers are talking about (Taha, 2008). Students usually code-switch to save time and effort or because of habitual experience, which reveals a lack of self-confidence in them.

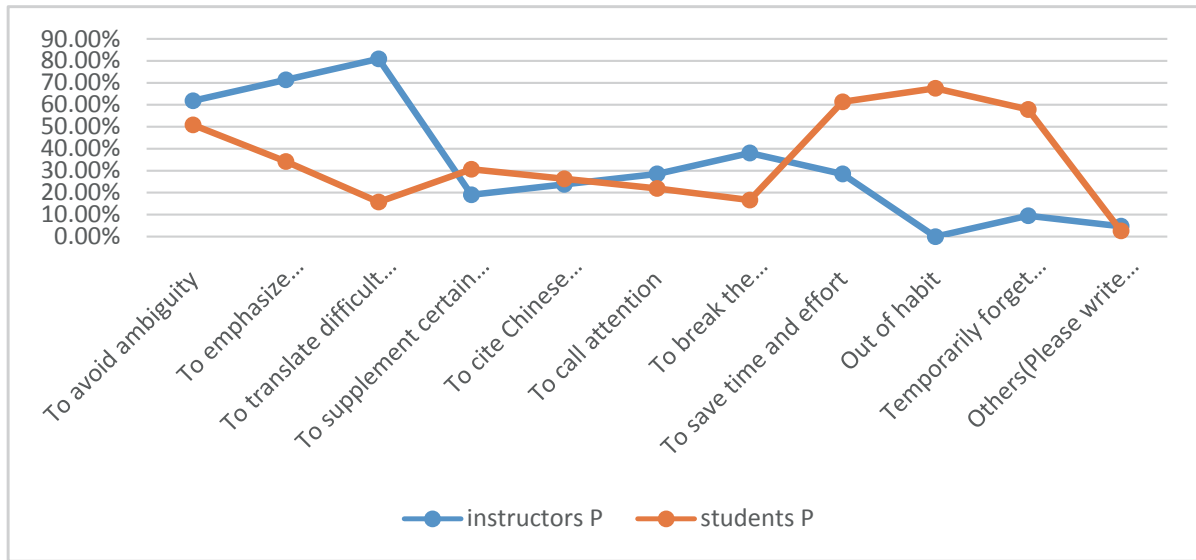


Figure 3
Comparison of CS Reasons Between Instructors and Students

Figure 4 pictures the reasons for code-switching in students of different grades. For most of the time, the four lines intertwined together, which means no significant difference can be drawn from the four cohorts. For sophomore, junior and senior, the climax stays at the 9th

reason (temporarily forget how to express in English). Subtle difference lies at the blue line (sophomore), which presents a slightly higher percentage than the other three lines, especially at the 9th reason. The yellow line (junior) is the second higher.

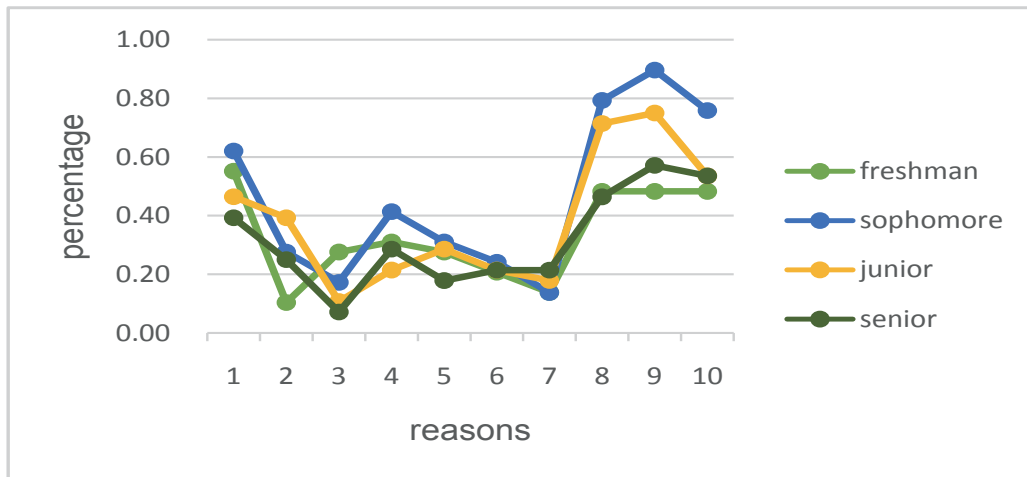


Figure 4
Comparison of CS Reasons in Students of Four Grades

As shown in Figure 5, the overall trend is consistent, while difference occurs at the 6th reason (to call attention), the 7th reason (to break the silence), and the 10th reason (temporarily forget how to express in English). Junior instructors tend to use more code-switching to call

attention or because of memory slip, which indeed has something to do with their teaching experience. Senior instructors appear to be more flexible in dealing with such situations.

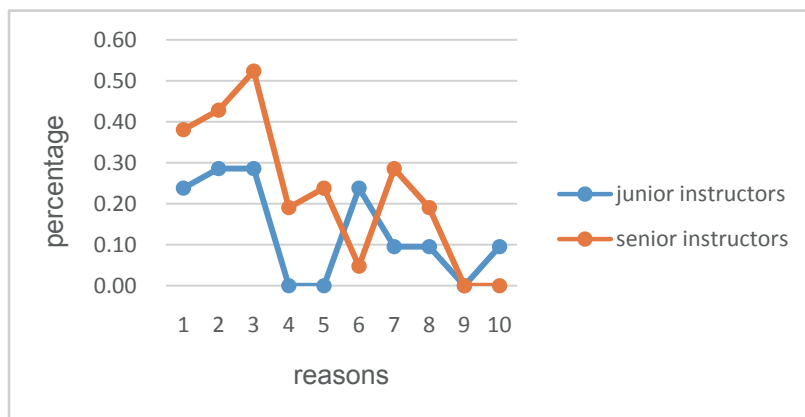


Figure 5
Comparison of CS Reasons Between Instructors With Different Years of Experience (Junior Instructors: 1-3 Years, Senior Instructors: Over 3 Years)

3.3 Attitudes Towards Classroom Code-Switching

As shown in Table 3, despite minor difference, positive attitudes win opposite ones overwhelmingly both from the perspective of a speaker (74% > 13%) and a listener

(67% > 26%). The same results apply to instructors (57% > 0%, 52% > 5%) and students (77% > 15%, 70% > 30%) respectively. It seems that currently in EFL classroom setting, code-switching is inextricable.

Table 3
Attitudes of Instructors and Students Towards CS in Class

	Attitudes	Instructors		Students		Instructors + students			
		N	P	N	P	Total	P	M	SD
As a speaker	Positive	12	57%	88	77%	100	74%	1.12	0.33
	Neutral	9	43%	9	8%	18	13%	1.50	0.51
	Oppositive	0	0%	17	15%	17	13%	1.00	0.00
	Total	21	100%	114	100%	135	100%	1.16	0.36
As a listener	Positive	11	52%	80	70%	91	67%	1.12	0.33
	Neutral	9	43%	0	0%	9	7%	2.00	0.00
	Oppositive	1	5%	34	30%	35	26%	1.03	0.17
	Total	21	100%	114	100%	135	100%	1.16	0.36

The instructors who support classroom code-switching stated that:

- “It is meaningful for lower-level students especially.”
- “It is necessary.”
- “It can help students have better understanding.”
- “It is important to clarify contents.”
- “It can consolidate language points.”

But for students CS in class, instructors hold that:

- “It is better when used necessarily.”

“Generally, students are required to use English in class. But if they do need the mother tongue to help them find the proper expression, it’s OK to switch to Chinese.”

Opinions against code-switching hold that “students should try to express whatever on their mind in English, because they are learners.”

As speakers, students respond that low English proficiency serves as the culprit for their code-switching.

Another aspect is that they feel embarrassed among peers when they are stuck in speaking English, especially in making self-presentation. As learners, there is a consensus that through code-switching, rapport can be established between instructors and students and among peers. It is even a psychological comfort for them sometimes. This is confirmed by Noli (2013) that the use of L1 reduces students’ language anxiety and eventually uplifts the affective environment for the study.

Either side above is reasonable in case of corresponding situations. TEFL or EFL learning is a dynamic process during which necessary but not too much code-switching is acceptable. What should be done is not to exclusively cut off the phenomenon, practically it is impossible, but to improve the situation. Several suggestions may be advisable to undo the dilemma.

For instructors, paraphrasing is an alternative for code-switching, because a teacher’s use of the TL tends to

encourage students to use the TL as well, a phenomenon called “reciprocal reinforcing effect” by Polio and Duff (1994, p.320). Remember, pure language environment is fairly important for imitators. The Chinese EFL learners do not often have the opportunity to be exposed to a naturalistic target language environment to develop their speaking skills. The teachers may need to help the learners create and make full use of opportunities in which when naturalistic use of target language is possible (Jiang & Wu, 2016).

As to students, inner tranquility is required while delivering. Practice makes perfect. Students should be bold enough to express what they think and have a good cooperation with peers. Unless emergency occurs, no hurry is pursued in speaking. Body language is another way to “borrow” words from instructors or peers. Extracurricular preparation is also needed if one wants to be fully confident in class. In sum, both instructors and students should have a moderate usage of CS in class. Code-switching is the last choice to keep the utterance going.

CONCLUSION

The findings have helped answer the questions put forward in introduction.

First, it has been a fact that both instructors and students code-switch in class, while instructors switch slightly more often than their students. Junior instructors tend to use code-switching more often than senior ones.

Second, code-switching is a result of various intertwined factors. For instructors, to translate, to emphasize important parts and to avoid ambiguity come as the major reasons. However, students use code-switching mostly to save time and effort, or out of habit. Some turn to code-switching because they temporarily forget how to express in English. At this aspect, there is no obvious difference between students of different grade levels, which means English level doesn't influence the reasons of code-switching here.

Third, there is no significant difference between instructors' and students' attitudes towards classroom code-switching. Both feel it necessary to use code-switching under certain circumstances. Therefore, most of the opinions are positive. A handful of instructors disagree by saying that “classroom language” (here English) should be followed till the end of the class whatever difficulties the students will meet. Minority students' view that instructors are supposed to set up a good example in avoiding speaking Chinese in class should also be considered.

In summary, data shows that code-switching is inextricably used in class. Hence, it is not the matter that whether code-switching should be allowed in EFL class, but that since such phenomenon has occurred in actual practice, what can be done to improve the situation.

After all, TEFL is not to stop the instructors or students speaking their mother tongue, but to improve students' English proficiency and fluency. Conclusions such as these, we suggest, could be “fed back” into the planning and delivery of language teacher education programmes to ensure “remedial” action can be implemented (Valerie, Ayumi, & Mark, 2010).

(a) Rearrangement of EFL Curriculum

Currently in China's universities, “one-to-all” mode is being exercised in EFL curriculum planning, which means the same textbook and teaching method are adopted, and the same cohort of instructors are employed, whatever the students major in. The problem is that there is a gap between instructors and students. Both of them have their own specialty, but no connection is established, that's why both of them would resort to code-switching. Rearrangement of EFL curriculum includes reallocation of instructors and division or extension of the original curriculum.

First, change “one-to-all” mode to “one-to-one major” mode. Direction-targeted EFL is proposed here. It is far more enough to be proficient only in English language for instructors. They are supposed to be trained and acknowledged in certain major like human resources, accounting, international business, computer science and so on, which will certainly facilitates them in teaching the corresponding students in that major. Rapport can be fostered between instructors and students since they can better understand each other.

Second, subdivide traditional general college English curriculum into two types: reading & writing, and listening & speaking. Traditional EFL curriculum is a mix of the four branches conducted once a week. Students have little time to speak. If listening and speaking curriculum can be “isolated” from reading and writing and be taken twice a week, more time will be saved for students' interaction. Less grammar explanation but more heuristic excitation is appreciated.

(b) Internationalization of EFL Curriculum

Numerous universities have invited short-term foreign teachers to domestic EFL classroom, but seldom assess the effectiveness of such practice. Often there is a high mobility in foreign teachers. Some teachers are not even professional. As a result, few of them really know students' situation, not even make an in-depth study on teaching methods. Thus, rather than internationalize the students, the foreign language teacher is localized by the students instead.

Inviting teachers of the target language country is no doubt recommendable, but TEFL is a long-line project. Therefore, how to keep them and utilize their inherent superiority comes as a challenge for educational personnel. It doesn't mean that domestic instructors have nothing to do but can only stand by. Instead, they must have a follow-up each time and work together with foreign

teachers. Making EFL curriculum internationalized is popular among students, because it provides a naturalistic target language environment for them. Also short term should be extended to long term with at least four years, because it takes time for both teachers and students to adapt to each other.

To sum up, code-switching itself is not a problem, instructors and students are not to blame for code-switching in class as long as it is necessary. Exploratory solutions take precedence over constraints on students' code-switching. What we need to do is to excavate better ways to improve students' English skills till one day they find themselves burst out fluent English unconsciously without code-switching. Besides English, this is also applicable for other foreign language learning. Therefore, more research work needs to be done in this domain.

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