



CODE-SWITCHING PRACTICES IN BILINGUAL CLASSROOM INTERACTION: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL AND IDENTITY FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

Code-switching is a common communicative practice in bilingual classrooms, particularly in contexts where teachers and students share more than one linguistic repertoire. Although code-switching is sometimes viewed as a sign of linguistic deficiency or lack of target language exposure, sociolinguistic perspectives understand it as a meaningful interactional resource that can support explanation, classroom management, identity negotiation, and participation. This study aims to analyze code-switching practices in bilingual classroom interaction and to examine their pedagogical and sociolinguistic functions. A qualitative classroom discourse study was conducted in three bilingual secondary classrooms. Data were collected through classroom observations, audio-video recordings, teacher interviews, student focus group discussions, and field notes. The data were analyzed using interactional sociolinguistic analysis and thematic coding. The findings revealed that code-switching occurred in three major patterns: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. The functions of code-switching included clarifying academic content, managing classroom interaction, scaffolding students' comprehension, emphasizing key concepts, building

interpersonal solidarity, and negotiating bilingual identity. The findings also showed that students perceived teacher code-switching positively when it helped them understand difficult concepts, but they were less supportive when switching reduced opportunities to use the target language. The study concludes that code-switching should not be treated as random language alternation but as a strategic sociolinguistic practice that requires pedagogical awareness, functional control, and balanced target language exposure.

Keywords: *code-switching; bilingual classroom; classroom interaction; sociolinguistics; language education*

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A. Introduction

Bilingual classroom interaction is a space where teachers and students negotiate meaning through more than one language, switching codes to explain concepts, manage interaction, and express identity—a practice that is pedagogical and social, not merely linguistic.

Code-switching is the alternation of two or more languages within a conversation—between or within sentences, or through discourse markers—common across EFL, bilingual, and multilingual classrooms.

Some argue teachers should maximize target-language use for fluency, while others argue excluding students' shared language creates barriers to comprehension—so code-switching is useful when purposeful rather than habitual.

A sociolinguistic perspective sees language choice as socially meaningful, signaling topic shift, emphasis, or identity; Gumperz frames alternation as a contextualization cue, and studies show it is often orderly and goal-directed (Ferguson, 2003; Lin, 2013; Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005).

Ferguson (2003) linked switching to curriculum access; Üstünel and Seedhouse (2005) tied it to pedagogical focus; Lin (2013) urged moving beyond monolingual assumptions; Cahyani et al. (2018) found pedagogical and sociocultural functions.

In multilingual Indonesian classrooms, students use local languages at home, Indonesian nationally, and English at school—teachers switch to explain vocabulary or build rapport, students to question or negotiate tasks.

However, excessive switching may reduce target-language exposure or reproduce unequal language ideologies, so research must examine not just when switching occurs but what it does in interaction.

This study asks: what patterns of code-switching occur, what functions they serve, how teachers and students perceive them, and what implications arise for bilingual pedagogy.

B. Method

This study used a qualitative classroom discourse design with a sociolinguistic perspective, interpreting the meanings and patterns of code-switching rather than measuring achievement statistically.

The study was conducted in three bilingual secondary classrooms with three teachers and 87 Grade VIII-IX students of varied English proficiency.

Data came from observation, audio-video recording, teacher interviews, student focus groups, and field notes across twelve 80-minute meetings (~16 hours), coded for patterns and functions.

Teacher interviews explored reasons for switching; focus groups with 18 students explored perceptions of benefits, limitations, and influence on confidence.

Analysis segmented transcripts into episodes, categorized each switch by structural pattern, then interpreted function via interactional sociolinguistic analysis.

The study identified 486 code-switching instances, used descriptively for dominant patterns while analysis focused on interactional meaning.

Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and standard ethical procedures.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

Findings are presented in four parts: patterns of code-switching, pedagogical functions, sociolinguistic and identity functions, and teacher/student perceptions.

Patterns of Code-Switching in Bilingual Classroom Interaction

Three major patterns emerged: inter-sentential switching (between clauses/sentences), intra-sentential switching (within a sentence), and tag switching (short expressions or discourse markers).

Table 1. Patterns of Code-Switching in Bilingual Classroom Interaction

No.	Code-Switching Pattern	Frequency	Percentage	Example Function
1	Inter-sentential switching	238	48.97%	Explaining concepts and giving instructions
2	Intra-sentential switching	167	34.36%	Explaining vocabulary and combining technical terms
3	Tag switching	81	16.67%	Checking attention and building interaction
Total		486	100%	

Source: Processed from classroom transcript data.

Inter-sentential switching was most frequent: teachers explained a concept in English then restated it in Indonesian to

ensure comprehension, common during explanation and comprehension checking.

Intra-sentential switching appeared when speakers inserted English terms into Indonesian sentences or vice versa—e.g., "kalau main character-nya sudah muncul" or "we must cari evidence from the text"—combining resources to complete tasks.

Tag switching used short expressions ("okay," "ya," "right," "kan," "so") to manage attention and rhythm; though less frequent, it played an important role sustaining interaction.

Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching

Code-switching served several pedagogical functions: clarifying content, explaining vocabulary and grammar, checking comprehension, giving instructions, and managing behavior.

Table 2. Pedagogical Functions of Code-Switching

No.	Function	Frequency	Percentage	Classroom Meaning
1	Content clarification	112	23.05%	Helping students understand lesson concepts
2	Vocabulary explanation	86	17.70%	Explaining word meanings and contextual use
3	Classroom management	74	15.23%	Giving instructions and managing behavior
4	Comprehension checking	69	14.20%	Confirming students' understanding
5	Grammar explanation	58	11.93%	Clarifying forms and rules
6	Emphasis and repetition	51	10.49%	Highlighting important points
7	Affective support	36	7.40%	Reducing anxiety and building rapport
Total		486	100%	

Source: Processed from classroom transcript coding.

Content clarification was most frequent, used for abstract concepts or grammatical meaning, maintaining lesson continuity and preventing misunderstanding.

Vocabulary explanation switched to Indonesian for meaning, examples, or context after introducing English terms—connecting form, meaning, and use for unfamiliar words.

Classroom management used Indonesian for urgent instructions or group organization, creating immediate clarity before teachers returned to English once stabilized.

Comprehension checking paired "Do you understand?" with Indonesian prompts ("sudah jelas?"), letting students express confusion more openly.

Grammar explanation switched to Indonesian after English examples to explain structures, showing grammar remained tied to the shared language.

Affective support used Indonesian to encourage students, reduce anxiety, or build closeness—especially when students hesitated to speak English.

Sociolinguistic and Identity Functions of Code-Switching

Beyond pedagogical functions, code-switching helped negotiate classroom roles, bilingual identity, solidarity, and social distance—the classroom was a site for performing bilingual identities, not only learning language.

Students used code-switching to participate despite limited English, beginning in Indonesian while inserting English keywords like "setting," "problem," and "moral value," enabling partial target-language participation.

Code-switching also marked peer solidarity—Indonesian or local expressions when joking or helping classmates—while more English was used for formal tasks, linking language choice to role and context.

Teachers used code-switching to manage social distance: English maintained the formal frame while Indonesian created

closeness or humor when students looked confused or needed encouragement.

Table 3. Sociolinguistic Functions of Code-Switching

Function	Interactional Evidence	Sociolinguistic Meaning
Identity negotiation	Students combined Indonesian explanation with English academic terms	Students positioned themselves as emerging bilingual learners
Peer solidarity	Students used Indonesian or local expressions during group work	Code-switching created informal support and closeness
Role marking	English appeared in formal responses; Indonesian appeared in negotiation	Language choice indexed classroom roles
Affective alignment	Teachers switched to Indonesian when encouraging hesitant students	Shared language reduced anxiety
Topic framing	English was used for academic terms; Indonesian for explanation	Codes marked shifts between content and clarification

Source: Synthesized from classroom observation and transcript analysis.

These findings show code-switching was not random but reflected awareness of audience, task, topic, role, and emotional context, helping organize classroom meaning.

Teacher and Student Perceptions of Code-Switching

Teachers viewed code-switching as necessary but requiring control: English should remain the main target, with Indonesian useful for clarification and emotional support, though excessive switching risked reducing willingness to process English.

Students generally perceived teacher code-switching positively, especially for vocabulary, grammar, and instructions; lower-proficiency students valued Indonesian for reduced anxiety,

though some wanted English first with switching only when necessary.

Table 4. Teacher and Student Perceptions of Code-Switching

Participant Group	Positive Perception	Concern
Teachers	Code-switching supports comprehension, classroom management, and rapport	Excessive switching may reduce English exposure
High-proficiency students	Code-switching clarifies complex ideas	Too much Indonesian may slow English development
Moderate-proficiency students	Code-switching helps them follow the lesson	They still need more English practice
Low-proficiency students	Code-switching reduces anxiety and confusion	They may become dependent on translation

Source: Synthesized from teacher interviews and student focus group discussions.

Perception data suggest code-switching is most effective when strategic, limited, and tied to learning goals—students preferred English central with Indonesian as support.

2. Discussion

Code-switching here is a structured sociolinguistic practice, not random alternation: the three patterns show teachers and students used it in different positions for different purposes, supporting research that switching is orderly and tied to pedagogical focus (Lin, 2013; Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005).

Inter-sentential switching was most frequent, used to clarify concepts and instructions—consistent with Üstünel and Seedhouse's view of switching as pedagogical-focus organization, functioning as an instructional repair mechanism.

Intra-sentential switching showed blending of linguistic resources, retaining academic terms in English while explaining in Indonesian—reflecting bilingual discourse's hybrid nature rather than avoidance of English.

Tag switching served discourse-management functions, maintaining interactional flow and checking attention as contextualization cues despite their minor appearance.

These functions align with prior research (Ferguson, 2003; Cahyani et al., 2018) on pedagogical and sociocultural functions of code-switching, extending it by showing how these appeared in secondary classrooms and how students interpreted them.

Content clarification and vocabulary explanation dominated since students needed support understanding English input—strategic switching can aid content access while developing competence, provided it doesn't become so frequent students stop inferring meaning.

The sociolinguistic functions matter: students used code-switching to participate and perform bilingual identity, supporting a view of bilingual classrooms beyond monolingual ideology, consistent with Creese and Blackledge's (2010) translanguaging perspective.

Code-switching and translanguaging are not identical—the former treats languages as distinct codes, the latter as an integrated repertoire—though this study's interaction also showed flexible meaning-making resembling translanguaging, suggesting combined future analysis.

Teacher control was key: strategic switching after first attempting English, for key clarification or managing difficulties, supported learning, while habitual unpurposeful switching could reduce English exposure, requiring teacher awareness of when to switch and return.

Implications: code-switching should be a recognized classroom resource used for specific functions (clarification, scaffolding, affective support), balanced with sufficient target-language exposure, and neither banned nor left uncontrolled.

For students, code-switching reduces anxiety and increases participation, especially for lower-proficiency learners, though teachers should gradually push toward more target-language use, treating it as a bridge rather than a destination.

Assessment should distinguish preparation and negotiation (where shared-language use is acceptable) from final language production, which may require more target-language use depending on objectives.

Overall, code-switching has pedagogical, interactional, and identity significance—a resource for organizing classroom meaning, where the key question is not whether it should exist but how it can be used responsibly.

D. Conclusion

This study examined code-switching in bilingual classroom interaction sociolinguistically. It occurred in three patterns—inter-sentential (most frequent), intra-sentential, and tag switching—serving pedagogical functions (content, vocabulary, and grammar clarification, classroom management, comprehension checking, affective support) and sociolinguistic functions (identity, solidarity, role, and emotional negotiation). Teachers and students viewed it positively when it supported comprehension and participation, while noting the risk of excessive switching reducing exposure. Code-switching is a strategic bilingual practice, not a weakness, with effectiveness depending on purposeful use, pedagogical control, balanced exposure, and teacher awareness across school levels and subjects.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

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