



A study of the use of code-switching: Functions and perceptions in a Thai tertiary EFL classroom

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Abstract

With the linguistic globalization of English, code-switching has become a common phenomenon in communication. In the classroom, however, there are polarising perceptions regarding alternating between languages. At one end, several researchers believe that language learning should be clear of the interference of first language so as to expose students to as much target language input as possible, while those who favor code-switching contend that bilingual teaching is natural and more effective for teachers and students. The present study investigated the use of code-switching by a Thai university language lecturer in an English foundation course to see how code-switching was carried out in practice and what effects it had on English as a foreign language teaching and learning from the perspectives of the teacher and thirty-one students. Through classroom observations, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, it was revealed that code-switching was perceived positively and used for two main purposes. First, to accommodate language learning by making the target language more comprehensible and, second, to lower students' affective filter by establishing rapport and supportive learning environment. It thus appears that the alternate use of students' first language and the target language can be beneficial in the language classrooms to help promote language acquisition and cordial classroom interaction.

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1 Introduction

Code-switching (referred to as CS henceforth) is generally described by language scholars as the alternation between two languages within the same utterance or conversation (Heller, 1988; Hoffmann, 1991). When CS is used in language classrooms where English is taught as a second language (ESL) or a foreign language (EFL), its role becomes critical because the language is both “the vehicle and object of instruction” (Long 1983, p.9), meaning that students “are not only learning ‘about’ the language but also learning ‘through’ the language” (Rahmadani, 2016, p.132, emphasis in original). Using learners’ native language (L1) in an ESL/EFL class is often viewed as depriving students’ exposure to the target language (L2) and hindering their opportunities to master the language. However, complete prohibition of students’ first language (L1) may also result in little or no language acquisition. Insights into how CS is actually utilised in the classroom may be beneficial in

determining optimal use of L1 so as to enhance learners' success in ESL/EFL learning. However, little is known about the use of CS and teachers' and students' views on the issue in English language classrooms at tertiary level in Thailand. The current study explored teacher use of CS and teacher and student views on the topic in order to expand our understanding of the effects of CS as a tool in English language teaching and learning at a university level. With the purpose in mind, the research questions for this study are:

1. What are the functions of code-switching used by an English lecturer in an English foundation course in a Thai university?
2. How do the teacher and students perceive code-switching?

2 Literature Review

Maximising the use of the target language is generally agreed as desirable in language classrooms, not only because it is the subject being studied, but also because it is important to provide students with optimal exposure to the target language (Dickson, 1996; Auerbach, 1993; Polio and Duff, 1994; Crinhton, 2009). Teachers' use of the target language can act as an example or a model for students' future production of the language. On the other hand, it is also acknowledged that learners, especially beginners, naturally use their first language to decode texts and help them deal with unfamiliar input in their second language (Bolitho, 1983; Macaro, 2001; Swan, 1985). Butzkamm (2003) perceptively observes that, "no one can simply turn off what they already know. We postulate that the mother tongue is 'silently' present in the beginners, even when lessons are kept monolingual" (p.31). As such, banning of students' mother tongue would seem like depriving students of an available tool they can use to facilitate their acquisition. Teachers too can exploit learners' L1 to provide them with linguistic support and help them comprehend difficult words or concepts in the target language (Crichton, 2009; Macaro, 2001). It appears that empirical studies that look into how alternation between languages is actually manipulated in the classroom are needed so as to provide insights of what functions it serves and how it is perceived by teachers and students so that informed decisions regarding the use of CS can be made.

2.1 *Functions of classroom code-switching*

Various classifications of CS functions have proliferated in several classroom-based studies. While there is an overlap between the functions of CS with differences in the terms used in the literature, there is consistency in the two broad categories of code-switching functions. The first and most obvious role of CS is for pedagogical purposes which aim to enhance language acquisition through the provision of equivalent and additional explanation in L1. Examples of pedagogical switches include switches for translation, clarification, eliciting, grammar explanation, markers and comprehension check (Canagarajah, 1995; Forman, 2012; Ferguson, 2009; Moradkhani, 2012; Promnath & Tayjasanant, 2016). Across contexts, concern over students' linguistic competence of the target language is often the major reason that prompts teachers to code-switch for this purpose while other factors such as time constraints, student needs, and teacher beliefs are also found to be active agents that trigger switching to L1 (Chen, 2019; Cook, 2001a; Macaro, 2001; Promnath & Tayjasanant, 2016; Zhou, 2011).

The second broad function of CS is for social purposes. It is recognised that classrooms are not only a place for educational purposes but they are also considered to be social groups in which there is a constant interaction among teachers and learners (Sert, 2005). It is not unusual that teachers may alternate to students' L1 for social functions to organise classroom activities, discipline, reprimand, inject humour, encourage or compliment students (Chen, 2019; Ferguson, 2003; Moradkhani, 2012; Pham, 2015). In every classroom, positive relationships between the two key stakeholders are desirable as students learn better in a relaxed classroom atmosphere (Ferguson, 2003). Therefore, CS

may be employed during classroom interaction in order to ensure smooth operations of classroom activities and to promote a supportive learning atmosphere.

2.2 Perceptions of code switching in educational settings

The ongoing debate whether code-switching has a place in the ESL/EFL classroom has led to studies on how teachers and students perceive CS in their language teaching and learning. Negative attitudes have been found in studies such as Chowdhury's (2013). While Bangladeshi students majoring in business administration, economics, and English were positive about CS as it was helpful for them to understand English, slightly more than half of the 20 university teachers in the same study viewed CS negatively as they perceived it as an interference to language learning and reported that they switched codes consciously. However, the teachers in Xiaoji's research (2017) saw code-switching in a better light. Both teachers and students at a well-established international college in China agreed that CS was invaluable for their teaching and learning. Twenty-one instructors in the study claimed that they mostly used CS to translate difficult or important parts to avoid ambiguity while 114 students from both English and non-English majors admitted that they switched to Chinese mostly out of habit. It is noted that even though the data were collected from an international college and from English listening and speaking classes where the presence of L1 was presumably not expected, CS was still perceived as necessary in the learning process. This result resonates with another study involving two Thai teachers of English for Specific Purpose in Nursing and Tourism who agreed that CS could facilitate the teaching-learning process by helping students understand the content and reducing students' stress. However, they also acknowledged the disadvantages of CS as it could result in students' making little or no effort in using the target language or demotivating talented students. The researchers suggested that CS should only be used when the content is difficult or important or for socialising (Promnath & Tayjasanant, 2016).

Students with different levels of proficiency across contexts also demonstrate mixed feelings about CS. The findings from Nilubol's study (2015) revealed that low achieving Thai students in an international school agreed with the integration of their mother tongue in all their subjects as a strategy to help them overcome the language barrier whereas high achievers did not see any changes in their learning when Thai was used in their classrooms. Nilubol's study presented one case for different views of CS among students with different levels of proficiency and it could be compared with a study of final year postgraduate students from Commerce and English disciplines in Pakistan. Rukh (2014) used a questionnaire to compare attitudes towards CS of students in the two groups. Stark differences were found in how they viewed the effect of L1 in their learning. Students in the Commerce department tended to welcome the usage of L1 (Urdu) in their EFL classroom whereas English department students exhibited somewhat negative feelings toward it with 91% indicating frustration when their teachers code-switched.

In summary, evidence from previous studies regarding teachers' and students' views on CS provides mixed results depending on factors such as students' level of proficiency, nature of content, and types of schools. In Thailand where English is a foreign language, switching between English and Thai is presumably a common element in teaching and learning. However, studies of teacher CS in English classrooms remain scarce. This study intended to shed light on teachers' actual practice of CS, its impacts as well as teacher and student perceptions of CS in language classrooms.

3 Methodology

3.1 Settings and participants

This study was conducted at a university in Thailand where a variety of foundation English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are offered to non-English-major students. The data was collected from a foundation English course which aimed to equip first or second-year students

with fundamental English skills before they moved on to an ESP course that caters to suit their specific field of study. English was encouraged as the primary means of communication for the course. The participating lecturer has been teaching in the institute for 3 years. He was awarded a BA in Secondary Education majoring in English and MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from a prestigious university in Thailand and has more than 5 years of teaching experience at secondary schools and universities in Thailand. Thirty-one native speakers of Thai attended the class. The students were at a low-intermediate level of English and had either passed a prerequisite English foundation course in the previous semester or were exempted from the prerequisite course because their Ordinary National Education Test (O-NET) scores were between 50-74.99 points.

3.2 *Methodology*

Three different instruments were implemented to collect the data. Firstly, three 3-hour classroom observations were conducted and analysed to identify functions of CS employed by the teacher. Code-switching functions in this study were analysed based on two broad categories, pedagogical and social functions, which were informed by previous studies on classroom CS (Canagarajah, 1995; Chen, 2019; Ferguson, 2009; Forman, 2012; Macaro, 2001; Moradkhani, 2012; Promnath & Tayjasanant, 2016; Zhou, 2011). The researcher was also aware that other functions may emerge from the data.

Secondly, a questionnaire developed from the review of previous studies of CS in EFL contexts was used to obtain the students' views on their experience of CS (Abad, 2010; Martinez Agudo, 2017; Naveed, 2014; Yao, 2011). To ensure that the students fill in their answers appropriately and not randomly due to limited understanding of the statements, the questionnaire, initially designed in English, was translated into Thai. Back translation was performed by a university lecturer who holds a PhD in Education and Applied Linguistics to identify any inconsistencies and no major discrepancies were found. The questionnaire responses were analysed using descriptive statistics. Sixty percent of those who completed the questionnaire were age 19 and twenty percent of the students were 20. Female students accounted for the majority of students at 23 (76.7%) out of 31.

Finally, the teacher and five volunteer students were interviewed regarding their perceptions of CS. Semi-structured interviews were used for both the teacher and students to ensure similar structure for each of the student participants and to serve as a guided session for the teacher interview. All student interviews were carried out in Thai so that they were able to freely share their thoughts without linguistic hindrance. The teacher's interview was conducted in English. Commonalities and distinctive features of the teacher and the student responses were analysed by means of Gibson and Brown's (2009) approaches to thematic analysis.

4 Findings

4.1 *Pedagogical purposes*

The analysis of code-switching functions reveals that the teacher used L1 for a number of pragmatic purposes which can be classified into pedagogical and social with the former more predominantly used than the latter (Figure 1). Eliciting emerged as one of the top three roles of the teacher's pedagogical switches (Figure 2). It was observed that when there was a delay in students' responses, the teacher might be concerned whether the students understood the question, so he provided the Thai equivalent. Eliciting in students' first language may be more effective in extracting students' answers as well as provoking students' thinking and participation (Chen, 2019).

The second and third most frequent functions were switches to check student responses and comprehension and switches that provided comments, respectively. Checking answers, comprehension and comments were expressed in both Thai and English. Code-switching used for facilitating

students' learning is also evident in previous studies such as Chen (2019), Puspawati (2018), and Sali (2014).

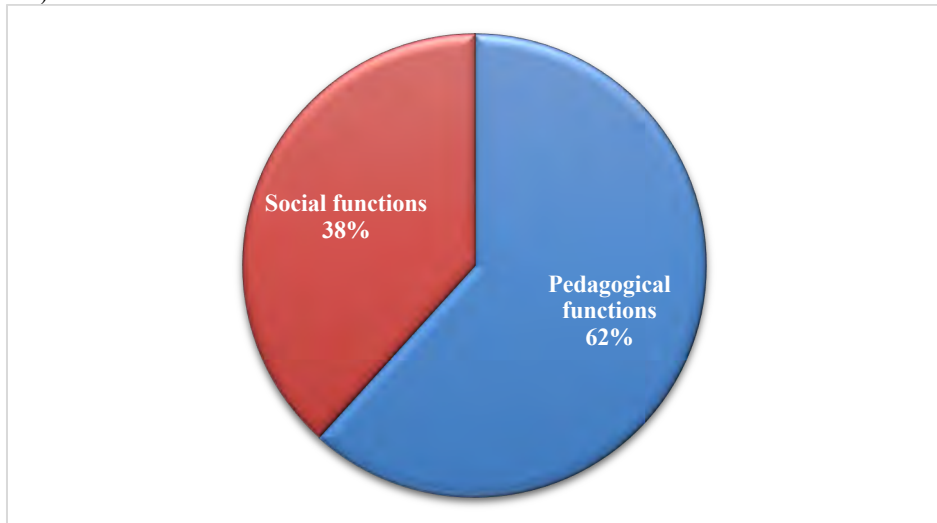


Figure 1: Comparison of pedagogical and social functions

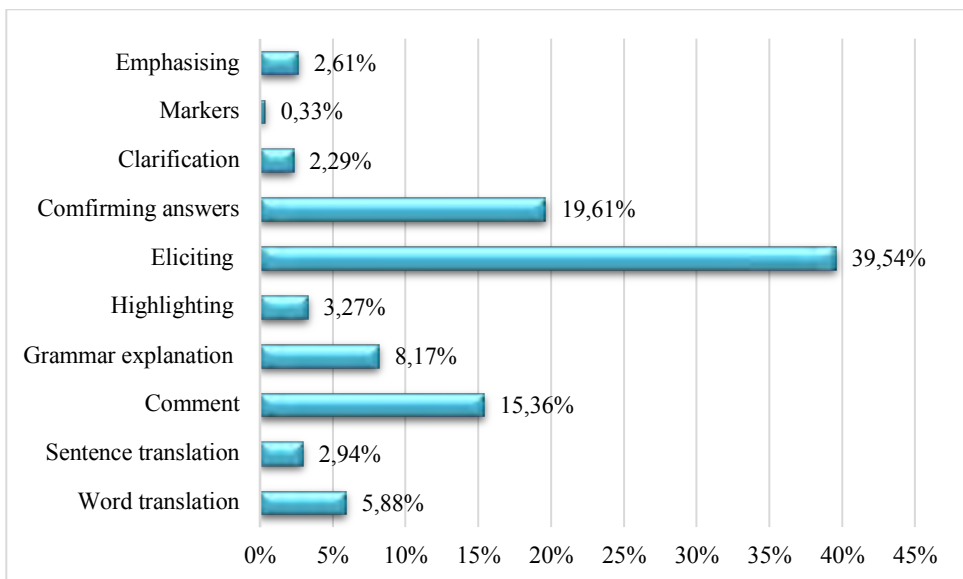


Figure 2: Pedagogical functions

4.2 Social purposes

The teacher also used CS to serve social functions. Managing classroom activities, telling jokes and making casual talk were major social purposes found in this study (Figure 3). While the teacher normally began in English for matters regarding giving instructions, managing an activity and monitoring an activity, the teacher also turned to students' first language for these purposes to ensure that the students could follow the instructions and the activity. Furthermore, it could also be said

that by using Thai as the medium of instruction, a connection between the teacher and students was established. When the students could understand the instructions and the process of an activity more comprehensively, it facilitated the flow of the activity and enabled the students to learn from and enjoy the activity, reducing their anxiety and creating a supportive learning environment (Puspawati, 2018; Sert, 2005). These results are consistent with the data obtained in Ching-Yi's (2004) study which found that Mandarin was used rather than English in classroom activities by two English instructors in a university in Taiwan.

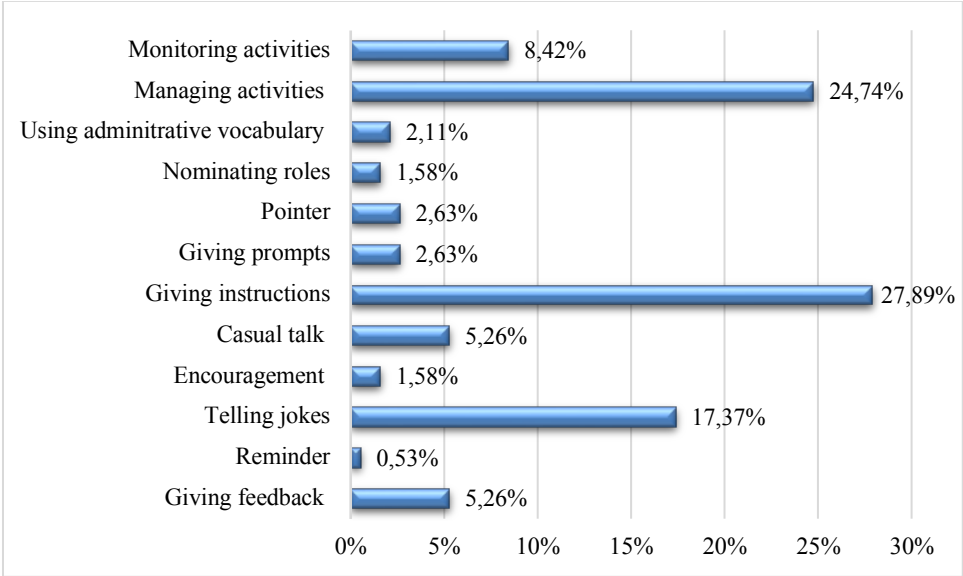


Figure 3: Social functions

A supportive learning atmosphere was also created through the production of laughter. When it comes to creating humour and playfulness in the classroom, the teacher was often seen switching to the students' L1. The result echoes those of Chen (2019) and Pham (2015) who also found the teachers' use of L1 was in making jokes. An obvious reason why students' L1 was chosen for jokes was that it could be easily understood by all students and, more importantly, some jokes require shared knowledge between interlocutors to ensure their success. Jokes may not give the desired humorous effect if they are translated to a language that students are not fluent in. More importantly, the byproduct of jokes in students' mother tongue is that they can help build a relaxing and cheerful classroom atmosphere as it reduces tensions in challenging situations, which is learning a foreign language in this case, and this possibly helps increase students' learning interest (Chen, 2019; Pham, 2015; Raschka et al., 2009).

Regarding switching for social purposes, a closer relationship between the teacher and students was created through casual talk when sharing personal experience and through encouragement. As the focus of these acts was not on developing students' L2 ability, student's mother tongue was often used in these situations. The possible effect of using the language with which students were familiar in personal talk and encouragement is that it enhances the teacher's personal involvement and shows attention given to students' emotions, which subsequently helps establish classroom rapport and engagement (Kow, 2003).

Another interesting feature that was found in the analysis of the classroom observations is the teacher's use of tag switching and kin terms that exist in Thai language. Tag switching involves the insertion of a word or a phrase (such as an exclamation, a parenthetical statement, a sentence filler

or a particle) from one language in a sentence in another language (Poplack, 1980). In the study, a common Thai particle *krup* and a kin term *louk* were identified. In Thai, the final particle '*kha*' (also spelt *ka*) is generally used by females and '*krup*' by males to show politeness and respect. These Thai particles can 'convey emotions, feelings and expressing attitudes of speakers' (Angkapanich-kit, 2012, p. 95). They are commonly used in formal situations to show politeness and, without them, one may sound abrupt, impolite and lacking in respect. In this study, the teacher sometimes added '*krup*' or '*na krup*' at the end of his English sentences. The particles '*krup*' or '*na krup*' do not have any meanings or English equivalence, nor do they change the sentence meanings. However, when spoken to Thai people, they indicate that the speaker is being polite and respectful. It could be assumed that the teacher used these particles to make a sentence sound gentler to his students. For example,

OK, now, those are four types, those are four types of instructions that we, we will see in our mid-term exam as well so just go back and, you know, review and do some exercise na krup

Another Thai tags that were found in the observation data was a kin term '*louk*' with a literal meaning of 'child'. The use of '*louk*' is an epitome of Holmes' (2008) assertion that language can reveal how the speaker feels about the addressee. When '*louk*' is added to a sentence by an older Thai person to address a younger person, it signifies an expression of affection and familiarity as well as group identity. In this study, the teacher sometimes addressed his students as '*louk*' which conveyed his affection and kindness towards the students. In the example below, the teacher added *louk* to an utterance to elicit students' responses. With the word, the sentence appeared gentler and soft to Thai listeners.

What about the second one louk. HiNative is like a mini language exchange but [Stressed the word here] your time and money... [Voiced trailed off for students' answer]

Although these switches do not add any grammatical value to the sentences they belonged to, they convey discourse or sociolinguistic information such as social status, age, politeness and attitude of speakers or listeners (Maklai et al., 2017). In particular, the employment of Thai particles such as *louk* is indicative that the teacher indexed himself closely to the students and it served as a way of reducing the distance or the power difference between the teacher and his students. Thailand is a country defined by its hierarchical relationship among members in the society including the classroom where students intuitively respect the teacher who is regarded as superior by age, status and knowledge. When the teacher in this study used Thai and addressed the students with such terms, the students would find him more approachable and their participation could possibly increase.

4.3 Teacher's and students' perceptions of code-switching

Table 1 shows the students' perceptions regarding CS. Statements 1 to 14 show the mean scores between 3.5- 5 which indicate their positive attitude towards CS for facilitating language learning, classroom management, and the classroom environment. They perceived code-switching to Thai as indispensable in explaining grammar rules, words and/or expressions, clarifying lesson content as well as in maintaining discipline, and managing class activities (item 1-11). Additionally, it is clear that the students believed that Thai was essential for building and maintaining positive relationships between the teacher and students (item 12-14). The majority of students agreed that the formality and the distance between them and the teacher could be reduced when Thai was employed. Statements 15-20 received mean scores that fell between 1-2.29 which indicates a negative view. It is clear that the students in the study did not regard the teacher's switching to Thai as an indicator of his lack of English proficiency and did not see Thai as a hindrance in their language learning.

Table 1 Students' perceptions of code-switching

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
1. Teachers' code-switching between English and Thai is helpful in English language learning.	4.43	0.56
2. I understand the lesson better when the teacher uses Thai in class.	4.46	0.57
3. I think Thai is necessary for explaining English grammar rules.	4.56	0.56
4. I think Thai is necessary for teaching new English words and/or expressions.	4.4	0.67
5. I think Thai is necessary for clarifying the lesson content taught in English classes such as explaining differences between Thai and English.	4.6	0.62
6. I think Thai is necessary for checking students' understanding.	4.13	0.89
7. I think Thai is necessary for maintaining discipline and control in class.	3.63	0.96
8. I think Thai is necessary for attracting students' attention.	3.86	0.81
9. I think Thai is necessary for eliciting responses from students.	4.03	0.92
10. I think Thai is necessary for administrative issues of the course such as exam announcement, giving assignments and deadlines.	4.06	1.08
11. I think Thai is necessary for clarifying complex task instruction.	4.63	0.71
12. I think Thai is necessary for creating a relaxing classroom atmosphere through humorous and positive comments.	4.4	0.56
13. I think Thai is necessary for building and maintaining positive relationships with the teacher and students.	4.23	0.93
14. I think Thai is necessary for reducing the formality and distance between the teacher and students.	4.1	0.95
15. Use of Thai in English classes shows the teacher's lack of knowledge about English language.	1.96	1.29
16. Teachers who switch codes between English and Thai may cause difficulty in understanding.	2.03	1.18
17. I understand the lesson very well when the teacher only uses English.	2.76	1.07
18. I think that Thai should be excluded from English classes.	2.06	0.86
19. I think it is impossible to learn the skills of English language if Thai language is used in English classes.	2.26	0.73
20. If the teachers regularly explain the content both in English and Thai, I tend to tune out English and wait for explanation in Thai.	2.33	1.24

The results from the interviews with the teacher and five volunteer students confirm the questionnaire results and demonstrate that the teacher's CS had positive effects in aiding their second language acquisition in two main aspects. First, both the teacher and the students were in consensus that students' comprehension could be increased when CS was used. The concern of English proficiency levels played a major part in the teacher and the students' perceived need for CS. Many students self-diagnosed their proficiency of English and felt this limited their L2 learning ability. If teaching were carried out entirely in English, they would struggle to understand or respond. Students' perceived level of proficiency appears to be a common factor that prompts CS as can be seen

in studies from Vietnam (Grant & Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2013), China (Chen, 2019; Xiaoji, 2017), Indonesia (Puspawati, 2018) and Thailand (Nilubol, 2015).

The presence of Thai in this study allowed the students to understand better and assisted them during their English lessons. The students' perceived usefulness of CS corroborates the earlier findings from similar studies of English as a foreign language context, such as those of Yao (2011) and Chen (2019) from China and Nursanti (2016) from Indonesia, which found that CS was beneficial to students in ESL learning. This finding also aligned with the teacher's reason for switching languages. According to the teacher, the decision to switch was often made consciously and was often triggered by the students' proficiency, level of content difficulty or students' reaction. He elaborated that:

Sometimes when it comes to explanation on the grammar or the abstract concept it would be much better, I believe in my opinion, to switch from English to Thai to explain the rules, the regulations, things like that. I think it kind of helps students understand more, more than explain the thing in English. Oftentimes I try to speak English first and then I see if they understand, if they seem to understand I will move on to other content. But if I see that their faces like, you know, they frown, frowned eyebrows, things like that, then I'll switch to Thai.

This implies the teacher's awareness of L1 as a facilitating tool in L2 learning and justified the switches to L1.

The other positive effect of CS perceived by the teacher and the students is the affective functions that serve for building a relaxing learning environment. Bailey (2011) previously observed that learning a foreign language can be nerve-racking for some students. The observation appears accurate in the current study as the students reported feeling embarrassed when speaking English for fear of being wrong or as a student put it, "*some people panic or are scared of English*". When Thai was present in their English class, they felt more at ease and were less anxious. One student commented that:

When Thai was used, I felt less stressed. Initially, I feared that all lessons would be delivered in English the whole period, the teacher might not use Thai, which would make me feel a bit tense as I am not good at English. Will I understand him? Once the teacher used Thai, I was like 'I see. It's like this'. It made me feel more relaxed.

The awareness of affective variables in learning a foreign language was also present in the teacher's views. Feelings of anxiety in learning a foreign language played a role in the teacher's decision to switch to Thai and his practice of CS was driven by his pedagogical belief. He explained that:

I think that when talking about academic or theoretically, people always say that you need to use English all the time but to me, particularly in Thai context, or in Thai classrooms, we still need to have some code-switching in our class in order to help students to, you know, first to build like their confidence and try not to push them too much when they have to expose to English or not too much pressure. Once they have more pressure in learning, then they would get anxiety or negative factors, or affective domain will arrive. It might affect their learning outcome and their self-efficacy something like that so using Thai is not a bad thing in terms of teaching English in the Thai context.

It appears that when the students were addressed in Thai, they felt more comfortable in their learning process. The familiarity of their native language makes students feel supported and secure. When CS is practiced, it can be said that the pressure of learning a foreign language was partially lifted. The injection of humorous comments, casual talk and encouragement in L1 also added the element of friendliness and informality, which help establish rapport and positive personal relations between the teacher and students. Moreover, as Thailand is a country with strong social hierarchy, a certain degree of the gap of the status between teachers and students can intuitively be felt by students. The use of L1 can bridge the gap between the teacher, the figure of authority, and students, enabling them to enjoy and engage in the learning process with little to no worry or anxiety (Chen,

2019). As one student asserted: the presence of Thai “*brought me closer to the teacher*” and “*makes me feel more acquainted with the teacher because he spoke the language I’m familiar with*”. Solidarity and intimate relations between the teacher and students can then be built as students are more able to understand the teacher’s input and, consequently, they become more comfortable to learn, and motivated to participate in the lesson (Modupeola, 2013). There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by the teacher and the students in this study and those described in Liu (2010), Nilubol (2015), Xiaoji (2017), Puspawati (2018) and Chen (2019).

5 Discussion and implications

The availability of more than one language in foreign language classrooms often raises the question whether students’ native language has a place in the learning process. While it cannot be denied that students should be exposed to the target language as much as possible, several learning experts contend that it is entirely natural to use students’ L1 in ESL/ESL classrooms as language learners strategically make sense of unfamiliar input through linguistic resources with which they are already familiar (Atkinson, 1993; Butzkamm, 2003; Cook, 2001b; Macaro, 2001; Stern, 1992).

A thorough review of the studies on the use of code-switching published in the last decade confirms the valuable role of L1 in bilingual teaching and learning (Shin, Dixon & Choi, 2020). A number of empirical studies, including the current study, on the use of codes-switching validate its role in the teaching of a foreign language, specifically in the teaching of grammar, explaining new vocabulary or concepts, giving instructions, making confirmation checks, maintaining the flow of classroom activities, injecting humour, motivating students, and building good rapport in the classroom. Consistent with the literature, the findings of this study demonstrated that CS serves both pedagogical and psychological functions in the teaching and learning of a foreign language. In addition, the teacher and the student perceptions corroborated the two main functions of CS used in this study. Both parties exhibited a favourable disposition towards the use of CS as it was deemed invaluable in terms of pedagogical and psychological importance.

For pedagogical purposes, CS in FL learning can act as a linguistic tool to connect the known to the unknown. From a cognitive perspective, the exclusive use of L2 does not always translate to maximum language acquisition because students, especially those with a poor grasp of L2, can become overloaded cognitively. Alternation to L1 offers learners comprehensible input and cognitive support necessary for them to maintain interest and make demanding tasks more manageable (Macaro, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003). Students’ existing knowledge of their first language can be exploited to increase their acquisition of a new language. This can be connected to Vygotsky’s (1962) zone of proximal development (ZPD) that refers to the area that learners’ development can occur with assistance. If students are learning something that is below their current level of knowledge, their language learning will not improve. Likewise, if they are learning something that is too difficult for their existing knowledge, their language learning will not develop. Thus, it is critical that teachers recognise students’ ZPD and offer appropriate assistance. Such assistance can come in various forms, one of which is through interacting with the teacher and peers in a cooperative learning environment. Calling it ‘code-scaffolding’, Fennema-Bloom (2009) adds that code-switching can also be considered as support for L2 learners to work effectively in the ZPD. It can put students in a secure zone of language when their competence does not meet the classrooms’ linguistic level (Simon, 2000). For example, while explaining grammar points entirely in the target language may be challenging for some students, switching to their mother tongue provides linguistic support so that they have a better understanding of the content and, consequently, are able to better engage in the lesson. In short, L1 can be strategically used as a scaffold to make learning of L2 more comprehensible so that students can develop linguistic competence.

It is commonly acknowledged that acquisition does not only involve cognitive functions. Learners also bring to class their own ‘baggage’ which may influence their emotions, feelings and attitudes regarding L2 learning. Krashen’s (1982, 1985) affective filter hypothesis pertains to this. He

made a shrewd observation that learners' emotional state plays a role in the acquisition of language. The language classroom can be an intimidating place for some students due to a number of factors, particularly the unfamiliarity of the medium of instructions. When learners feel anxious, tense, embarrassed, angry, or bored, their affective filters are activated and learning may be impeded because they are less likely to actively engage or take risks in learning (Auerbach, 1993; Krashen, 1982, 1985). Making students feel comfortable and secure lowers their filters and thereby maintains their interest and increases their motivation and self-esteem (Lightbrown & Spada, 1993). Using code-switching, as in the observed classroom, is one way to mitigate the affective filters because it signifies that students' L1 competence is recognized and valued and it gives them some familiarity to approach L2 learning without overwhelming apprehension (Adrisoh & Razi, 2019; Auerbach, 1993). The presence of students' native language can be interpreted as teachers' attempts to build solidarity with the students as well as creating a non-threatening classroom climate and establish positive relationship between teachers and students (Jingxia, 2010; Lin, 2013).

The role of CS for affective support can be even more powerful in Thai classrooms where deep hierarchical relations are embedded in the social structure. Thai teachers are typically viewed as the pillar of knowledge and, hence, a figure of authority by students due to their knowledge, experience and age. It has been asserted that attitudes towards teachers can determine students' attitudes regarding foreign language learning (Mettewie, 2004; Young, 2021) and acquisition of the target language may be hindered because of the unequal status between teachers and students (Pica, 1987). Consequently, when teachers switch to students' L1, as did the teacher in this study, the status gap between teachers and students can possibly be minimised as students are able to use their L1 to navigate their learning and feel closer to the teacher who shares their first language. Additionally, according to Greene and Walker (2004), code-switching is "a strategy at negotiating power for the speaker. Code-switching reflects cultures and identity and promotes solidarity" (p.436). As such, the use of Thai particle such as *krup* and *louk* can be seen as the teacher's approach to adjust power and encourage solidarity in the power asymmetry in Thai classrooms. While the use of these words may have no syntactic significance as removing them would still make the sentence comprehensible, they display sematic attributes as they add extra meaning to the sentences by denoting a respectful and supportive relationship between the teacher and student.

In conclusion, this study proves useful in expanding our understanding of how CS is actually practised in EFL classrooms and what effect it has on learners. It supports literature arguing for the inclusion of students' L1 in L2 classrooms as evidence shows that CS can be a tool to scaffold students' linguistic acquisition and fortify students' positive views of EFL classrooms. Novice or current teachers who face a dilemma about whether to use CS in their classrooms can use the study's findings as a yardstick for deciding whether CS will be necessary or helpful in their individual classrooms. In the Thai context, this study appears to be one of the first attempts to highlight the social impact of CS through jokes, casual talk, sentence particles or kin terms in easing the culturally dominant status of teachers which may also be relevant in similar contexts such as Japan or China.

Despite the positive impact CS has on language learning discussed in this study, it should be noted that this study does not intend to overlay the role of L1 in the teaching and learning of L2. It merely intends to report on and discuss, based on evidence, possible effects and benefits in which educators can make use of students' first language. It should be kept in mind that even though using students' L1 can provide scaffolding for students' understanding of the target language and allow them a certain extent of emotional comfort, excess use of L1 may restrict L2 opportunities or result in reduced effort in using the target language. In an English as a foreign language context like Thailand where students' exposure to L2 mainly comes from the teacher, it is crucial that teachers approach CS with caution as their classroom language "is probably the major source of comprehensible target language input the learner is likely to receive" (Nunan, 1991, p. 189). In the past, numbers have been thrown into the debate of how much L1 is appropriate. For example, Turnbull (2001) suggests using L1 less than 25% of classroom discourse while Macaro (2011) argues that 85% of class time should be in the target language.

In practice, the right proportion of L1 and L2 may be impractical to determine considering that language used in individual classrooms are different and classroom language can fulfill different functions depending on a myriad of contextual factors such as students' proficiency level, teachers' beliefs, focus of the lessons, and teacher and student emotions (Gabrys-Barker, 2018). Consequently, it is suggested that CS will only work in teachers' and students' favor when it is selectively and deliberately used (Grant and Nguyen, 2017; Macaro, 2001; Shin, Dixon & Choi, 2020). Teachers are in the best position to critically evaluate whether a switch to students' L1 is justified (Rivers, 2011). Careful consideration should be made based on several factors such as the purpose of a switch at a particular stage of the lesson, students' proficiency level, students' needs, expectations or even emotions in order to achieve beneficial and judicious use of code-switching.

6 Limitations

A number of limitations to this study need to be elucidated to warrant attention for future research. Due to the small size of the population which comprised only one class, generalisation to other educational contexts is not advised. Future research may be conducted with a larger size of participants or different cohorts of students to see whether the results of this study were unique or different. Comparative studies between students of different levels of proficiency or disciplines may provide a well-rounded picture on the effect of CS used in diverse contexts. Another limitation of this study is the lack of data pertaining to students. The data from classroom observations were collected mainly from the teacher through the use of video recording at the back of the classroom. Any switching produced by the students or their immediate reactions to the teacher's code-switching could not be captured due to limited recording devices. For future research, it would be ideal to obtain students' discourse and behaviours during the learning process. The information may further provide insights into the effect of teachers' code-switching on students.

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