

## Code Switching in English Classroom Interaction at Grade VIII of SMPN 27 Medan

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to analyze the types of code-switching used by the English teacher and the reasons for using code-switching during classroom interaction at Grade VIII of SMPN 27 Medan. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The data were collected through classroom observation, audio recording, and semi-structured interviews during the teaching and learning process. The collected data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's qualitative data analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the teacher used three types of code-switching based on Poplack's theory (1980), namely intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and tag switching. Among those types, intra-sentential switching became the dominant type because the teacher frequently mixed English and Indonesian within the same utterance while explaining materials and giving classroom instructions. Furthermore, the findings showed that the teacher used code-switching for several communicative reasons based on Gumperz's theory (1982), namely message qualification, personalization versus objectification, and addressee specification. Message qualification became the dominant reason because the teacher frequently switched to Indonesian to clarify explanations and facilitate students' understanding during the learning process. The findings indicate that code-switching plays an important role in supporting effective classroom communication, improving students' comprehension, reducing students' anxiety, and creating a comfortable learning atmosphere in EFL classrooms. Therefore, code-switching can be considered an effective pedagogical strategy in English language teaching, especially in junior high school classrooms where students still have limited English proficiency.*

*Keywords: Code-Switching, Classroom Interaction, EFL Classroom, Sociolinguistics, English Teaching*

### INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role as an international language used for communication, education, science, and technology. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language and becomes one of the compulsory subjects taught at junior high school, senior high school, and university levels. However, many Indonesian students

still experience difficulties in learning English because English is not used as the primary language in daily communication. Students often face problems related to vocabulary mastery, grammar understanding, pronunciation, speaking ability, and confidence during classroom interaction. Consequently, English teachers need to apply effective teaching strategies and communication techniques to help students understand the material more easily during the teaching and learning process. Classroom interaction becomes one of the important aspects in English language learning because interaction allows teachers and students to exchange ideas, ask questions, provide responses, and build communication during classroom activities. According to Walsh (2011), classroom interaction refers to communication occurring between teachers and students during the teaching and learning process. Through classroom interaction, teachers can explain materials, manage the classroom, and encourage students to participate actively in learning activities. However, because English is considered a foreign language in Indonesia, many students still struggle to fully understand explanations delivered entirely in English. Therefore, teachers frequently use bilingual communication strategies during classroom interaction.

One of the communication strategies commonly used in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is code-switching. According to Poplack (1980), code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages within communication. In bilingual classrooms, teachers often switch between English and Indonesian while explaining lessons, giving instructions, asking questions, and interacting with students. This phenomenon naturally occurs because teachers attempt to maintain students' understanding while still providing exposure to English during classroom interaction. Code-switching can occur in the form of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences depending on the communication context and classroom situation. The use of code-switching in EFL classrooms has become an important topic in sociolinguistics and language teaching studies. According to Holmes (2013), bilingual speakers often switch languages depending on situations, topics, participants, and communicative purposes. Similarly, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) explain that code-switching frequently occurs in bilingual communities because speakers use language strategically to achieve communicative goals. In classroom contexts, teachers often use code-switching to clarify explanations, emphasize important information, maintain classroom interaction, and create comfortable communication with students.

Furthermore, Gumperz (1982) explains that code-switching has several communicative functions, namely quotation, addressee specification, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization versus objectification. These functions indicate that code-switching is not simply random language mixing, but rather a purposeful communication strategy used by speakers in social interaction. In EFL classrooms, teachers frequently use code-switching to explain difficult vocabulary, clarify grammar explanations, reduce students' anxiety, and encourage classroom participation. Therefore, code-switching can function as an effective

pedagogical strategy in English language teaching. However, the use of code-switching in English classrooms still becomes a topic of debate among educators and researchers. Some researchers argue that excessive use of code-switching may reduce students' exposure to English and limit opportunities to practice the target language. On the other hand, several studies show that code-switching helps students understand the material more effectively and creates positive classroom interaction. According to Harmer (2007), teachers should balance the use of the first language and target language during English teaching because both languages may support the learning process depending on classroom situations and students' proficiency levels.

Several previous studies have investigated code-switching in EFL classrooms. Wilda et al. (2023) found that intra-sentential switching became the dominant type used during online EFL classroom interaction because teachers frequently combined English and Indonesian within the same utterance while explaining materials. Sampurna (2023) also found that teachers frequently used code-switching during classroom communication to facilitate students' understanding and maintain classroom interaction. Furthermore, Ardian and Indah (2022) explained that code-switching helped teachers explain lessons more effectively and encouraged students to participate actively during classroom activities. In addition, Taufiq et al. (2022) found that code-switching functioned as a communication strategy to increase students' participation during EFL classroom interaction. Although many previous studies have discussed code-switching in EFL classrooms, most of the studies focused only on identifying the types of code-switching used by teachers during classroom interaction. In addition, several studies were conducted in online learning settings and senior high school contexts. However, studies investigating both the types and communicative reasons for using code-switching in junior high school classroom interaction, particularly at SMPN 27 Medan, are still limited. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap by analyzing not only the types of code-switching used by the teacher, but also the communicative reasons underlying the use of code-switching during classroom interaction.

Based on preliminary observation conducted at SMPN 27 Medan, the researcher found that the English teacher frequently switched between English and Indonesian during classroom interaction. The teacher used both languages while explaining materials, giving instructions, asking questions, and interacting with students during the teaching and learning process. Students also responded using mixed languages during classroom communication. This phenomenon indicates that code-switching naturally occurs during English learning activities in the classroom. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types of code-switching used by the English teacher and the reasons why the teacher used code-switching during classroom interaction at Grade VIII of SMPN 27 Medan.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### A. Participants / subject

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is used to explore and understand social phenomena occurring naturally in society. This study focused on analyzing the use of code-switching during classroom interaction at Grade VIII of SMPN 27 Medan. The participants of this study were one English teacher and students of Grade VIII at SMPN 27 Medan. The English teacher became the primary source of data because the teacher frequently used code-switching during classroom interaction. Meanwhile, students' responses during classroom communication also supported the analysis of code-switching occurring during the teaching and learning process.

### B. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were classroom observation, audio recording, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation was conducted to observe the interaction between the teacher and students during the teaching and learning process. Audio recording was used to record classroom interaction because video recording was not permitted during the research process. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain deeper information regarding the teacher's reasons for using code-switching during classroom communication.

### C. Data analysis procedures

The data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) qualitative data analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, the researcher transcribed the classroom interaction into written form. After that, the researcher identified utterances containing code-switching and classified the data based on Poplack's theory (1980), namely intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and tag switching. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed the reasons for using code-switching based on Gumperz's theory (1982).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the English teacher used three types of code-switching during classroom interaction, namely intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and tag switching. In addition, the findings also revealed several communicative reasons for using code-switching during classroom interaction.

### 1. Types of Code-Switching

#### a. Intra-sentential Switching

Intra-sentential switching became the dominant type found in this study. The teacher frequently mixed English and Indonesian within the same utterance while explaining grammar, giving classroom instructions, and interacting with students.

Table 1. Intra-sentential Switching

No	Teacher's Utterance	Explanation
1	"Next kita cek lagi ya simple present tense ini sering kita gunakan setiap hari."	The teacher mixed English and Indonesian within the same utterance.
2	"Very good jadi hari ini kita sudah belajar simple present tense."	The teacher combined English appreciation and Indonesian explanation.
3	"Open your book halaman 25 dan coba kerjakan latihan nomor satu."	The teacher inserted English instruction into Indonesian sentence.

The findings indicate that intra-sentential switching helped students understand the lesson more easily while still receiving English exposure during classroom interaction.

#### b. Inter-sentential Switching

Inter-sentential switching occurred when the teacher switched languages between clauses or sentences during classroom interaction.

Table 2. Inter-sentential Switching

No	Teacher's Utterance	Explanation
1	"Okay now I want to ask you, apa yang kalian lakukan setiap hari di rumah?"	The teacher switched from English into Indonesian.
2	"Oke sekarang saya mau tanya, what do you usually do in the morning?"	The teacher switched from Indonesian into English.
3	"Please answer the question. Kalau belum paham kita bahas bersama-sama."	The teacher switched language between two clauses.

This type of switching helped students understand explanations and classroom instructions more clearly.

#### c. Tag Switching

Tag switching was found through short English expressions inserted into Indonesian utterances.

Table 3. Tag Switching

No	Teacher's Utterance	Explanation
1	"Good next kelompok 2."	The teacher inserted English tags into Indonesian utterance.

2	“Good jawabannya?”	The teacher inserted English appreciation into Indonesian sentence.
3	“Okay sekarang kita lanjut ke materi berikutnya.”	The teacher inserted English tag into Indonesian instruction.

Tag switching contributed to positive classroom interaction and encouraged students’ participation during classroom activities.

## 2. Reasons for Using Code-Switching

To analyze the reasons why the teacher used code-switching during classroom interaction, the researcher applied Gumperz’s theory (1982). According to Gumperz, there are six functions of code-switching, namely quotation, addressee specification, interjection, reiteration, message qualification, and personalization versus objectification. However, based on the findings of this study, only three functions were found in the teacher’s utterances and interview results, namely message qualification, personalization versus objectification, and addressee specification.

### a. Message Qualification

Message qualification refers to the use of code-switching to clarify explanations or provide additional information in communication. In this study, the teacher frequently switched from English into Indonesian when explaining difficult vocabulary, grammar, and classroom instructions in order to help students understand the material more clearly.

Table 4. Message Qualification

No	Teacher’s Statement	Explanation
1	“I do that because not all students can fully understand English. If I only use English, some of them may get confused.”	The teacher switched language to clarify explanations for students.
2	“Sometimes I also switch when explaining difficult words or grammar.”	The teacher used code-switching to explain grammar and vocabulary more clearly.
3	“It helps them understand the material and builds their confidence.”	The teacher used code-switching to support students’ comprehension.

Based on the findings above, message qualification became the dominant reason for using code-switching in classroom interaction. The teacher believed that students could not fully understand the lesson if English was used continuously

during the teaching process. Therefore, the teacher switched to Indonesian in order to clarify explanations and ensure that students understood the material properly.

b. Personalization versus Objectification

Personalization versus objectification refers to the use of code-switching to express personal feelings, emotions, or social closeness in communication. In this study, the teacher used code-switching to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere and reduce students' anxiety during the learning process.

Table 5. Personalization versus Objectification

No	Teacher's Statement	Explanation
1	"Yes, I think it helps. It makes them feel more comfortable and less stressed."	The teacher used code-switching to create a supportive classroom atmosphere.
2	"I understand that they are still learning, so sometimes they mix languages too."	The teacher showed understanding toward students' learning condition.
3	"Yes, of course. I always encourage them, but I understand that they are still learning."	The teacher supported students emotionally during classroom interaction.

Based on the findings above, the teacher realized that students still had limited English ability and often felt anxious when English was fully used during classroom interaction. Therefore, the teacher used Indonesian to reduce students' stress and help them participate more actively during the lesson.

c. Addressee Specification

Addressee specification refers to language switching based on the listener's level of understanding or social condition. In classroom interaction, the teacher adjusted language use depending on students' English proficiency and classroom response.

Table 6. Addressee Specification

No	Teacher's Statement	Explanation
1	"I still try to use English as much as possible, but I use Indonesian when it is really needed."	The teacher adjusted language based on students' understanding.

2	“That’s why I need to adjust my language depending on their level.”	The teacher considered students’ English proficiency in classroom communication.
3	“Some students try to follow, but others look confused or stay quiet.”	The teacher adjusted communication based on students’ classroom response.

Based on the findings above, the teacher considered students’ understanding before deciding to switch language during classroom interaction. The teacher realized that students had different levels of English proficiency, so the use of Indonesian was necessary in certain situations to ensure that students could follow the lesson effectively.

### Discussion

The findings revealed that the English teacher used three types of code-switching during classroom interaction, namely intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and tag switching. These findings are consistent with Poplack’s theory (1980), which classifies code-switching into those three categories. Among those types, intra-sentential switching became the dominant type because the teacher frequently combined English and Indonesian within the same utterance while explaining materials, giving instructions, and interacting with students during classroom activities. The dominant use of intra-sentential switching indicates that the teacher attempted to maintain English exposure while still supporting students’ understanding during the teaching and learning process. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted by Wilda et al. (2023) and Sampurna (2023), which also found that intra-sentential switching was commonly used in EFL classroom interaction.

Furthermore, the findings showed that message qualification became the dominant reason for using code-switching during classroom interaction. The teacher frequently switched to Indonesian to clarify explanations and facilitate students’ understanding during English learning activities. This finding supports Gumperz’s theory (1982), which explains that message qualification occurs when speakers switch language to provide clearer explanations and additional information. The findings also indicate that code-switching contributed positively to classroom interaction because students became more comfortable and confident during English learning activities. The use of Indonesian helped students reduce anxiety and encouraged them to participate more actively during classroom communication. Therefore, code-switching can be considered an effective pedagogical strategy in EFL classrooms because it supports communication, comprehension, and classroom interaction during the teaching and learning process.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the English teacher at Grade VIII of SMPN 27 Medan used three types of code-switching during classroom interaction, namely intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and tag switching. Among those types, intra-sentential switching became the dominant type because the teacher frequently mixed English and Indonesian within the same utterance during classroom communication. Furthermore, the study found that the teacher used code-switching for several communicative reasons, namely message qualification, personalization versus objectification, and addressee specification. Message qualification became the dominant reason because the teacher frequently switched to Indonesian to clarify explanations and facilitate students' understanding during the learning process. Overall, the findings indicate that code-switching plays an important role in supporting effective classroom communication, improving students' comprehension, reducing students' anxiety, and creating a comfortable learning atmosphere in EFL classrooms.

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