

TEACHERS' CODE-SWITCHING IN CLASSROOM TALK: A CASE STUDY AT AN ENGLISH CENTER

VIỆC CHUYỂN ĐỔI NGÔN NGỮ CỦA GIÁO VIÊN TRONG GIAO TIẾP LỚP HỌC:
NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP TẠI MỘT TRUNG TÂM TIẾNG ANH

Vu Ai Linh^{1,*}, Do Thanh Loan¹

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ABSTRACT

Using a first language (L1) in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has been an intriguing topic with scholars. Accordingly, this study explores teacher codeswitching's functions in Vietnamese online EFL classrooms for adult learners and the factors that motivate those switches. This study adopted a qualitative research method with a case study approach. First, the researcher asked the participant teacher to provide video recordings. Afterwards, data was gathered from a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions with the teacher participant and the teacher's self-reflection on her practice of code-switching between L1 and L2 in the recorded lessons. The findings comprise the functions the teacher code-switching serves, including linguistic, social, and classroom-related functions. Additionally, the findings showed that numerous factors might lead to this phenomenon. The implications of the findings were discussed.

Keywords: Teachers' code-switching, teaching English, functions, factors.

TÓM TẮT

Việc sử dụng ngôn ngữ thứ nhất (L1) trong bối cảnh giảng dạy tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ (EFL) là một chủ đề thu hút sự quan tâm của nhiều nhà nghiên cứu. Do đó, bài viết này báo cáo chức năng của việc chuyển đổi ngôn ngữ của giáo viên trong các lớp học EFL trực tuyến ở Việt Nam dành cho người trưởng thành, cũng như các yếu tố thúc đẩy việc chuyển đổi này. Nghiên cứu áp dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính với cách tiếp cận nghiên cứu trường hợp. Trước tiên, nhóm tác giả đã đề nghị giáo viên cung cấp các video ghi hình. Sau đó, dữ liệu được thu thập từ một cuộc phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc với các câu hỏi mở cùng giáo viên tham gia, và sự tự phản ánh của giáo viên về việc chuyển đổi ngôn ngữ giữa L1 và L2 trong các bài giảng được ghi lại. Kết quả bao gồm các chức năng mà việc chuyển đổi ngôn ngữ của giáo viên thực hiện, bao gồm các chức năng ngôn ngữ, xã hội và liên quan đến lớp học. Ngoài ra, kết quả còn cho thấy nhiều yếu tố có thể dẫn đến hiện tượng chuyển đổi ngôn ngữ của giáo viên. Cuối cùng nhóm tác giả gợi ý cho các nghiên cứu trong tương lai.

Từ khóa: Việc chuyển đổi ngôn ngữ của giáo viên, giảng dạy Tiếng Anh, các chức năng, các yếu tố.

¹School of Languages and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry, Vietnam

*Email: linh.vu@hau.vn

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1. INTRODUCTION

Codeswitching, defined as switches between two languages in a discourse, has been discussed with its linguistic and social aspects. In the context of EFL classrooms, some researchers prioritize target language (TL) while many others support the interference of L1. Despite the differences in perspectives, from our observation, code-switching is commonly used in the Vietnamese context where no official language policy in classroom interaction has been published. Also, according to Le, there is little research on code-switching in Vietnamese EFL teaching, especially studies employing a multi-method to gather data and analyze the teacher use of code-switching in Vietnamese EFL online classes [1]. For those reasons, in this paper, the authors desire to investigate this phenomenon with its functions in EFL classrooms and the factors that inspire teachers to code-switch.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Code-switching

The definitions of code-switching have varied among

researchers. Generally, it alternates between two languages or language varieties in a discourse [2, 3]. Meanwhile, Gumperz assumed that code-switching is a switch in a language within elements of discourse including words, phrases, clauses, or utterances [4]. The above perspectives are the commonly-used definition of code-switching referring to the context of language classrooms.

2.2. Code-switching in classroom instruction

In language teaching, methodologically, numerous scholars and teachers call for teachers' maximal use of the target language (TL) in the classroom for the sake of students' language acquisition. Turnbull, Cajkler and Addelman supported the idea of maximizing TL in L2 classrooms and argued that switching to L1 can lead to the overuse of L1 in classroom instructions [5, 6]. Cook supported the principle of maximizing the use of TL in L2 classrooms, but he also emphasized that the switches to L1 could be employed positively in FL classes [7]. Accordingly, teachers could switch to L1 in case of explaining vocabulary and grammar points and assigning tasks. Cook stressed the importance of L2 as an input to students' language development. Le stated that the use of the monolingual approach in the context of FL teaching is unnatural and "unrealistic" [1]. Our study would support Cook's perspectives on the switch between two languages and their functions in the context of an EFL classroom [7].

2.3. Functions of Code-switching

2.3.1. Social functions

In the context of EFL/ESL, numerous studies have supported the social functions of teachers' code-switching. According to Hoffman, teachers might employ code-switching to socialize or express a change in attitudes or relationships toward students [3]. Tien pointed out that the social functions of code-switching can be an effort to manage rapport or establish solidarity in the classroom [8]. Also, teachers' code-switching serves social functions with personal talks or jokes [9].

2.3.2. Linguistic functions

Linguistically, code-switching allows interlocutors to bridge the gap between two languages due to a lack of linguistic proficiency [10]. For example, when unable to find a word or expression in L2, a speaker can switch code into L1 to transfer the message more effectively. Turnbull examined four teachers' use of L1 and L2, which are

English and French respectively, and found that their use of L2 varied from 24 to 72% [5]. He assumed that teachers who use TL less than 25% depend greatly on L1. According to Poplack, code-switching is a linguistic norm in a bilingual community and is a standard to evaluate bilingual competence [2].

2.3.3. Classroom-related functions

The classroom-related functions have been subject to a variety of classroom-based studies. Then and Ting's study in multilingual classrooms revealed that code-switching served classroom-related functions including explaining vocabulary and grammar, and managing classes [11]. Le added that the teacher code-switched students' comprehension [1]. Besides, he emphasized that the pedagogical treatment (i.e. clarifying grammar points or word meaning) plays the key role. Those functions of teachers' code-switching echoed Cook's strategies of using L1 for FL/SL teachers [7].

2.4. Factors leading to Teachers' code-switching

Some studies merged functions and reasons as one aspect of code-switching while others distinguished these aspects. In our view, a distinction between what teachers' code-switching does and why teachers code-switch should be made. Our assumption is supported by numerous studies [12-14]. According to those studies, factors leading to code-switching are classified into teachers' and students' factors.

2.4.1. Teachers' factors

Kim and Elder examined teachers' code-switching and their perspectives on this phenomenon [14]. Transcript analysis identified four factors: the teacher's language and educational background, teachers' beliefs on the use of TL, teachers' mental or physical issues, and time pressure of class hours. Also, Gregg and Gil admitted that teachers code-switch to ensure students' comprehension and Macaro added that teachers code-switch to give instructions [12, 13]. In particular, Le added that the teacher in his case study research code-switched because she underestimated her students' ability to comprehend TL or acted unintentionally [1].

2.4.2. Students' factors

The factors coming from students seem to be uncommon in studies. Kim and Elder stated in their research that teachers code-switched based on students' poor proficiency, their emotional or health

conditions [14]. Greggio and Gil added that teachers code-switched to reduce students' stress and anxiety in certain situations [13].

To summarize, the literature review discussed the phenomenon of code-switching. Teachers' code-switching, commonly defined as the alternate use between L1 and TL in the same discourse, serves different functions (i.e. social, linguistic, and classroom-related functions) and two main factors are motivating this practice in EFL classrooms.

The literature review in classroom-based settings identified several limitations. First, as mentioned, few studies on teachers' code-switching were conducted in the Vietnamese EFL teaching context, especially in online English classes. Second, most research on teachers' code-switching assimilated reasons for teachers' code-switching with its functions; also, they mainly focused on the classroom-related functions of this phenomenon.

This study aims to investigate the functions of the teacher's code-switching and the factors leading to her practice of code-switching in the context of Vietnamese online EFL classes with the following questions:

1. What are the functions of the teacher's code-switching in this context?
2. What are the factors leading to teacher's code-switching?

2.5. Methodology

This study employs qualitative research with a case study approach adopted from Yin [15]. The authors chose this method to study "an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" to gain in-depth knowledge of a teacher's code-switching as a phenomenon in ESL/EFL classrooms [16].

2.5.1. Participants and contexts

This paper explores the practice of code-switching by a single teacher with nine years of teaching experience, including three years of experience teaching online classes. The authors recruit the participant teacher by purposive sampling based on appropriate sections of the population [17].

The study is conducted in a private institution in Hanoi where English is taught through Zoom, an online platform. The course was designed for pre-intermediate adult learners who study English for specific purposes. The curriculum was adopted and adapted from the coursebook Market Leader published by Pearson.

2.5.2. Data collection and management

In this study, triangulation, referring to the use of multiple methods of collecting data in a human behavior study, will be employed to ensure credibility [15, 16]. First, class recordings, used to increase the study's trustworthiness [15] are used to get information on the functions of code-switching. Afterwards, a semi-structured interview which involves a set of questions was chosen to get in-depth knowledge of a teacher's code-switching. With pursuing and probing techniques, this data collection method allows the interviewer to get new themes from the data set [17], and clarify some points in case the class recording transcriptions are unclear.

To pilot the interview guide, the authors employ three steps: internal testing, expert assessment, and field testing, as Kallio et al. proposed [17]. However, to avoid any potential changes in participant's behavior in classrooms, we follow the first two steps. First, the data collected goes through a preliminary data analysis. The authors transcribed what was said in class and the interview recording without any predetermined focus [18]. The authors also send transcripts to the teacher and ask her to correct any misinterpretations. Afterwards, the authors conducted the thematic analysis with a data-driven approach proposed by Boyatzis with three steps, including deciding on sampling and issues, generating themes and codes, and validating and using codes [18]. Also, the class recordings will be examined and reflected by the teacher to get the teacher's insights into her switches.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on class video recordings, teacher reflections, and interviews, this part presents the functions that teachers' code-switching served and factors that encouraged the teachers to code-switch in their English classrooms from the teacher's perspectives, followed by a discussion of those findings.

3.1. Functions of codeswitching

3.1.1. Linguistic functions

Transcribing class recordings also identified a linguistic function the teacher's codeswitching served.

Extract 1:

T... tức là mọi người phải deal với nhau và chị phải thuyết phục được chị Lan Anh bởi vì chị Lan Anh yêu cầu chỉ có 3 đồ thôi...

<It means that you have to deal with each other, and you must convince Miss Lan Anh because Miss Lan Anh wants it with 3 dollars>

The teacher code-switched the above extract with the word "deal". In the reflection, she wrote: "'Deal' is a common word in Vietnam even when we have conversations in our mother language, so I just used it as a habitual action". This finding supports the linguistic functions of codeswitching in Merrit et al.'s study [10].

3.1.2. Social functions

The data revealed that the teacher's practice of code-switching also facilitates the social aspect of classroom interaction. In the present study, the teacher code-switched to manage rapport with her students. Her effort to establish rapport with students included encouraging students, praising their performance, and joking.

The following extract identified the teacher's effort in encouraging students to perform an oral task

Extract 2:

T All right nhìn chung là mình đặt câu hỏi như thế này cũng khá là thành công rồi có mất mỗi cái câu này thôi được chưa ạ but I can understand

<All right, in general, you succeeded in making questions, except for this question, but I can understand>

In the above extract, after commenting on their performance, the teacher switched between English and Vietnamese. In her reflection, the teacher admitted that she had corrected numerous errors before that turn, so she switched to English to confirm her intelligibility despite her students' mistakes. This practice, from her perspective, encouraged her students to use the target language with a lower level of anxiety.

Also, she code-switched to give compliments.

Extract 3:

S climbing

T Đúng rồi hay rồi đấy ạ rockclimbing

<Yes, that was great, rock climbing>

In the extract above, the teacher appraised students in Vietnamese "đúng rồi hay rồi đấy ạ", then switched to English by reading the word "rock climbing" again to confirm her compliment to students' correct pronunciation.

Joking, in the form of switches between L1 and L2, was recruited to manage rapport in classroom interaction.

Extract 4:

T Vậy giờ chị đi lại đi nhiều thứ mới lắm. Local food phải đi với local people đúng không chị thì mình mới biết được nhiều quán ngon chứ xem trên mạng sợ là cũng không được

<Now you should go back there, go with local people to try local food right, local people know good restaurants while reviews on the Internet are not reliable>

When students argued about restaurants in Da Nang, the teacher, as the teacher self-reflected, switched back and forth to make the conversation less serious. The social functions of those switches aimed to make students more comfortable and establish solidarity in classroom interactions [8], and thus, students might become more engaged in the lessons [20].

3.1.3. Class-related functions

a) Teaching content

While teaching vocabulary, the teacher explained the vocabulary, and spelling by translating or asking students to translate the target words into either Vietnamese or English. The extracts below illustrated the teacher's practice of codeswitching when she explained vocabulary.

Extract 5:

T Rock climbing Climbing rock Rock Rock là gì ạ

S là nhảy à

T No mình có từ climb là leo trèo vậy tìm cho em ạ rock climbing

Đúng rồi vậy nó là gì ạ rock climbing là leo gì ạ

S leo núi

First, the teacher mentioned the word presented on the slide and then asked students what it meant. Afterwards, she separated the word "rock climbing" to check if students understood each component of the word and activated students' prior knowledge of each word (rock and climbing) to understand the whole word. Meanwhile, she switched back and forth to Vietnamese to explain the vocabulary.

In addition to vocabulary, Vietnamese was employed as a tool used to clarify the English pronunciation.

Extract 6:

T buffet buffet cái âm et này hay được đọc là ei lắm ví dụ mình có ballet nó cũng viết như này ballet đúng không ạ đó cũng là ei luôn hoặc là chẵn bông đúng không

ạ duvet đó buffet ballet duvet ok đó tất cả et đều đọc là ei thường viết như này mọi người hay đọc là ballet hay buffet gì đó mình đọc là buffet ballet duvet so be careful with that

In the example above, the teacher corrected students' pronunciation of the word "buffet" after the speaking session in the form of delayed feedback. First, she modeled the pronunciation of "buffet" by saying "cái âm et này hay được đọc là ei lắm" ("et" is usually pronounced as [ei]), then switched into Vietnamese to facilitate students with the pronunciation of "buffet". Simultaneously, she switched back to English to introduce some words with similar pronunciation, i.e. ballet, duvet "buffet ballet duvet ok", then summarized "đó tất cả et đều đọc là ei thường viết như này mọi người hay đọc là ballet hay buffet gì đó mình đọc là buffet ballet duvet" (so all "et" that you pronounced as [bʌf.ɛt] [bal.ɛt] [dʌv.ɛt] should be [bə'feɪ] [bæl'eɪ] [du:'veɪ]).

In the following extract, the teacher code-switched to compare the pronunciation between two languages.

Extract 7:

T lại cho em nào rock chứ không phải rốc nhé rock nhạc rock ấy đúng không ạ rock rockclimbing

<one more time rock not roc rock rock music right rock rock climbing>

S rockclimbing

T âm b bị câm nha bỏ qua chữ b cho em climbing climbing

<b is silent skip it climbing climbing>

After the pronunciation drill for students, the teacher found some students mispronounced the word "rock climbing", so she switched to Vietnamese to clarify the differences between pronouncing 'rốc', a Vietnamese word, and "rock", and explain how to read the word "climbing" correctly.

The instructor code-switched to L1, Vietnamese while giving lectures that included explanations of English grammar points. Normally, the teacher starts with the concepts of grammar in English, and then explains the rules and how to apply those concepts in Vietnamese, as shown in the following examples:

Extract 8:

T mọi người có nhớ từ too và enough không ạ too nghĩa là gì ạ

S quá

T nếu đã là quá thì từ này có nghĩa tốt hay không tốt ạ positive or negative chỉ có tốt và không tốt chứ không có không tốt lắm nha okay negative luôn ạ cái gì quá thì cũng không tốt còn enough thì có nghĩa là đủ nha thì nó là tốt nhưng giờ mình dùng là isn't enough thì lại là không tốt ngay đúng không ạ còn từ too thì nó luôn là negative rồi được chưa ạ

In the above extract, the majority of the explanations are in English but sometimes she switched back and forth "mọi người có nhớ từ too và enough không ạ too nghĩa là gì ạ" (do you remember what "too" and "enough" means?). Similarly, she said "nếu đã là quá thì từ này có nghĩa tốt hay không tốt ạ positive or negative" (if it means "too much", is it good or not, positive or negative?), and "enough thì có nghĩa là đủ nha thì nó là tốt nhưng giờ mình dùng là isn't enough thì lại là không tốt ngay đúng không ạ còn từ too thì nó luôn là negative rồi được chưa ạ" ("enough" means "we have enough", it is good but if we say "isn't good enough", it is negative. Meanwhile, "too" is always negative, okay?).

The teacher tends to employ code-switching as a strategy to explain new concepts, terms, and grammar points, and this finding might lend support to Bhatti et al.'s and Lee's findings on this phenomenon [21, 22]. Also, Mochacha and Lwangale assumed that the proper use of L1 in teaching vocabulary and grammar facilitates students' L2 development [23].

b) Giving instruction

Teachers' instruction management refers to how they give and manage instructions during lessons. The following extract presented the teacher's practice of codeswitching in a variety of activities to manage her instructions including explaining and exemplifying instructions.

Extract 9:

T OK So that's good for the first time just yes and then answer the question But for the second time I want you to give more information for each answer OK Cái phần này thì chị Lan Anh làm trước nha tức là lần tiếp theo này chị Phụng hỏi và chị Lan Anh trả lời. Ví dụ chị Phụng hỏi International School tức là chỉ có 1 cái đúng không ạ đây It's Toronto School chẳng hạn and it's for both Vietnamese students and foreigners to study there và thêm thông tin it's in the center of the city for example tức là mình phải cung cấp thêm thông tin chứ không phải chỉ mỗi yes hoặc no. Get the point. Đúng cho em nhé ví

dụ một người Hà Nội một người Đà Nẵng có cái gì thì nói cái đấy đúng thông tin được chưa ạ

OK So from you right now Miss Phung will ask questions and Miss Lan Anh answer <OK So that's good for the first time just yes and then answer the question But for the second time I want you to give more information for each answer OK Miss Lan Anh will start first It means that this time Miss Phung asks and Miss Lan Anh answer for example when Miss Phung asks about "International school", there is only one right. "It's Toronto School", for example, "and it's for both Vietnamese students and foreigners", and add information "it's in the centre of the city, for example". It means that you have to provide more information, not "yes" or "no" only. Got the point... Tell the truth for example one from Hanoi and one from Danang tell me the correct information okay... Okay from you right now Miss Phung will ask questions and Miss Lan Anh answer>

First, the teacher spoke English to give instruction then switched to Vietnamese to clarify the instruction and the shift of task, a change of roles between two students. The teacher switched back and forth to exemplify the instruction "Ví dụ chị Phụng hỏi International School tức là chỉ có 1 cái đúng không ạ đây It's Toronto School chẳng hạn and it's for both Vietnamese students and foreigners to study there và thêm thông tin it's in the centre of the city (for example, when Miss Phung asks about "International school", there is only one right. "It's Toronto School", for example, "and it's for both Vietnamese students and foreigners", and add information "it's in the centre of the city, for example").

Her turn ended when she switched back to Vietnamese to emphasize that students give authentic information, not make up the answer.

She reflected that her switches in this extract aimed to simplify the instruction and avoid confusion during the instructional process. This extract with the teacher's reflection is consistent with Ijudin et al.'s, and Lee's findings, which revealed that teachers code-switched while giving instructions to facilitate their teaching process [22, 24].

c) Classroom management

Teachers also codeswitched to facilitate her classroom management including checking students' understanding and closing instructions.

In extract 9, the teacher says "Got the point" to check if students are clear about the instruction. After an utterance in Vietnamese to add instruction about

authentic information, the teacher changed her code to English when she said: "OK So from you right now Miss Phung will ask questions, and Miss Lan Anh will answer" after an emphasis on authentic information during the upcoming task. This change indicates that the instruction has been closed, and now students have to do the task.

From extract 6, at the end of her turn-taking, she used English "so be careful with that" to highlight important information with pronunciation. She also confirmed in the reflection that, during wrap-up sessions or when she highlights some points, English is commonly used first, and then she translates into L1. This finding aligns with Then and Ting's findings in the context of Malaysian EFL classrooms [11].

3.2. Factors motivating teachers' practice of code-switching

Analysis of classroom recordings and an interview showed that there are two factors motivating teachers' code-switching, teacher factors and student factors.

3.2.1. Students' factor

The teacher admitted that most of the time, she codeswitched to facilitate students' comprehension. The students in the recorded classes are from A2 level with a limited range of vocabulary and linguistic knowledge, so the teacher had to switch between L1 and L2 to make sure they understand the new words or the grammar rules:

"I often use English and then I will I will analyze if my students understand or not if they don't understand I would use Vietnamese to explain again"

Also, she codeswitched when she observed students' confusion about a long stretch of English instructions:

"Actually, when they feel a little bit uncomfortable when I say a long sentence in English"

She assumed that she codeswitched "to make them (students) feel more comfortable that they feel like it's not too difficult for them to learn". Code-switching between L1 and L2, from the teacher's perspective, makes students more relaxed while learning a new language, and "with that motivation, I think that they can learn much better". This result aligned with previous studies by Kang, Kim and Elder, and Greggio and Gil which agreed that when students felt unwell physically or uncomfortable, teachers tend to codeswitch to make students less anxious and more comfortable [13, 14, 25], and promote their performance [25]. This result echoed findings on teachers' practice of code-switching.

3.2.2. Teacher's factor

The teacher reported in the interview that some factors emerging from teachers include classroom needs, teacher beliefs and teacher's linguistic needs.

a) Classroom needs

In the interview, when asked about factors motivating the practice of code-switching, the teacher said that she code-switched due to classroom needs.

"And sometimes I need to confirm that (students' comprehension) because I teach online 100% so sometimes the network is not stable"

Environmental issues such as students' various dialects (Northern and Southern Vietnamese accents) and network connections motivated her switches. From that belief, she codeswitched, normally from English to Vietnamese.

Also, time pressure might lead to teacher's code-switching. The teacher admitted that she codeswitched, typically from English to Vietnamese when she "ran out of time". In this vein, Kim and Elder found out that to ensure the timeline of the lesson and students' comprehension simultaneously, the phenomenon of teachers' switching between L1 and L2 is natural and necessary [14].

b) Teachers' belief

Besides, the teacher believes that code-switching is inevitable in some situations.

"When I use 100% English they will feel very uncomfortable and hard to understand the whole thing"

The teacher was aware that her students possessed a low and uneven level of English proficiency, followed by her assumption that her instructions should not be delivered in English completely and continuously. Ijudin et al. agreed that teachers' code-switching, in EFL classroom interaction, is compulsory and unavoidable [24].

However, from my observation of class recordings, the students, who are at the A2 level, seemed to understand her instructions without translating or instructions only in L1. The teacher, in her reflection, wrote:

"When I said "đọc từ này cho em ạ" (read this word for me), I think it's more habitual than necessary because I was teaching pronunciation in Vietnamese previously."

This finding supports Le's findings on a teacher's code-switching based on the teacher's belief [1].

4. CONCLUSION

The case study has investigated the functions and factors underneath the teacher's practice of code-

switching with a qualitative research design. The study, despite its small scale, has explored linguistic, social, and classroom-related functions of codeswitching in the context of EFL classrooms for adult learners. These findings indicated that, although the teacher's use of L2 is crucial for students' language development, the positive effects that code-switching between two languages brings to EFL classrooms are undeniable, and, thus, teachers' code-switching is natural and unavoidable. However, findings also revealed that there are situations when the teacher overused L1 for giving classroom instruction and teaching language units and switched to L1 as an automatic and habitual action. This finding inferred that teachers should consider the factors that motivate their switches.

In summary, being aware of the functions and the factors encouraging teachers' code-switching is beneficial for both policymakers and teachers in the context of Vietnamese EFL classrooms and the field of language teaching in general.

Due to the small sample size, the result could not be generalized and represent the whole scenario. Although the study employed multiple methods to collect data, further studies should be conducted on a larger scale and from different institutions to help generalize the findings.

Additionally, with students' decline to participate in the interview, the study excluded students' perceptions of teachers' code-switching in classroom interaction. Since there are student-related factors motivating teachers' code-switching, it is worth exploring students' perspectives in future studies. The correlation between teachers' and students' opinions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of code-switching.

Finally, the present study was on a case study with one participant teacher. This implies that further studies on code-switching might take into account different variables, such as teachers' age, gender, educational background, and experience.

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THÔNG TIN TÁC GIẢ

Vũ Ái Linh, Đỗ Thanh Loan

Trường Ngoại ngữ - Du lịch, Trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội