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Original Article

University Students' Code-switching Patterns and Functions: Evidence from Mekelle University Students

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate university students' code-switching (CS) patterns and functions. To achieve this objective, data were gathered through classroom observation audio records and semi-structured interviews. For the interviews, 18 students out of 109 students were selected using stratified random sampling. Out of the 18 courses, six courses were chosen using stratified random sampling for the classroom observation audio records. From these six courses, a total of 24 lessons of 2400 minutes were recorded and transcribed. The results obtained show that first year students code-switched less while second year and third year students did it more respectively. Besides, first year students employed intra-sentential CS more dominantly while both second year and third year students practiced inter-sentential CS more dominantly. Finally, it was found that students of all class years were CS for curriculum access functions more dominantly. Based on the findings, it is concluded that CS has many functions in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, and it facilitates the teaching and learning process of English when it is used cautiously. However, the use of CS has to decrease as the students' grade level increased and when the students' EFL performance is improved since an overuse of CS has a lot of shortcomings in the EFL teaching and learning process. Therefore, teachers and all stakeholders of the education sector have to give due attention to the proper use of CS in the classes.

Keywords: Code-switching, curriculum access, excessive use, foreign language, intra-sentential, inter-sentential, native language

1. INTRODUCTION

English, that has official status in at least 75 countries with a total population of over two billion people (Ferguson, 2003), is one of the most spoken languages around the world. English has become a key for global communication as most of the information on the Internet is found in this language. This is to mean that English has become the preeminent language of the 21st century in various areas all around the world. Given that English is the language of globalization that includes cultures, economics, and education; the need to learn it is growing constantly. Owing to its increscent use as an international language, many people have inevitably begun to learn English as a second language (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL). As a result, each day, the number of nonnative-speakers increases, and speakers of ESL or EFL probably outnumber those who speak it as a first language (Harmer, 2001). However, people who learn EFL in a non-native speaking environment do not only need to know 'words', but they also need to know communication strategies (Cook, 2001).

The strategy of interest in this particular inquiry is that of code-switching. Code-switching (CS) is defined as: "…the alternation between two codes (languages and/or dialects) between people who share those particular codes. Choices about how CS manifests itself are determined by a number of social and linguistic factors" (Horasan, 2013: 18). This linguistic phenomenon is frequently presented in the ESL/EFL classrooms. "Code-switching comes into use either in the teachers' or the students' discourse" (Sert, 2005: 1). Code-switching could be referred to as "a communicative strategy, just like literal translation, appeal for assistance, mime, paraphrase, or avoidance" (Macaro, 2001: 537), and also as "an achievement strategy that learners resort to, in order to compensate for their lack of language competence of the foreign language" (Littlewood and Yu, 2011: 67).

In multicultural and multiethnic countries like Ethiopia, CS from the target language (English) to the native language (Amharic) or the vice versa is a common practice. Though the country's education and training policy states English to be used as medium of instruction beginning from grade nine (Ministry of Education, 1994), it neither endorses nor neglects the practice of CS. Due to this gap, it is very common to see students and teachers to code-switch from and into Amharic (the country's lingua franca) during EFL classes.

As stated before, Ethiopian students and teachers are multicultural and multiethnic. As a result, there are students and teachers who know little or nothing about the country's *lingua*

franca (Amharic). The gap in the knowledge of the country's *lingua franca* is high in the students (Yinager and Boersma, 2018) compared to that of their teachers. Disregard of the students who know little or no Amharic, university students and teachers code-switch from and into Amharic in the EFL classes with different amounts and patterns for various functions.

As far as the knowledge of the researchers of this study is concerned, there is no research work conducted on CS at university level where the students are heterogeneous. But there are some research works conducted at elementary schools (Nigatu, 2013), secondary schools (Kibrom, 2016), and colleges (Jemal, 2012) where the students and the teachers share the same native language (L1). Therefore, this research is conducted to fill this gap and address the following research questions.

- What proportion of Amharic to English do students of the different class years employ?
- What code-switching pattern do students of the different class years use more dominantly?
- For what functions do students of the different years of study code-switch more?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study design and study site

As this study was intended to investigate the proportion of Amharic to English, the patterns of CS, and the functions of CS; the descriptive research design was used. The study took place at Mekelle University, one of the 44 Ethiopian government universities, which was established in 1993. The university's English Language and Literature Department had one section for the three batches with 40 students in first year, 32 students in second year, and 37 students of third year.

2.2 Data gathering instruments

Data were collected through classroom observation audio record and semi-structured interview. The classroom observation audio record was used since it provides researchers the opportunity to identify the proportion of L1 to L2, the patterns of CS employed, and the possible functions of CS employed by students in the classroom (Singh, 2007). In this method, the observers neither manipulated nor stimulated their subjects. Because of this, the activities in the classroom were observed as they were presented without any interruption of the observers. The purpose of this observation was to pay attention when the students were

CS in the classroom. Cohen (2000) states that observation provides a live data from naturally occurring social situations. Due to this, observation was conducted by the presence of the researchers with a non-participatory role along with an audio-recording.

Semi-structured interview was again used since it enables the researcher to probe questions depending on what was observed in the classroom observation (Singh, 2007). Dornyei (2007) revealed that semi-structured interview allows modification of the previous prepared questions as well as the addition of new questions that emerged during the interview. Cohen *et al* (2007) adds that semi-structured interview is one type of interview where the researcher plans a set of questions to be raised before the interview takes place, but builds in considerable flexibility about how and when these issues are raised and allows for a considerable amount of additional topics to be built in response to the dynamics of conversational exchange. Many of the interview questions were adapted and developed from Selamat (2014) and Mokgwathi (2011).

2.3 Sample size and sampling techniques

Almost all of the English language courses of the English major students at university level have three credits per week. One credit is 50 minutes. The programs were arranged in such a way that the two credits were taught consecutively – with no interruption between them and the other one credit on another day. The one credit hour period was observed and recorded during the pilot study. So, the two credit hours were observed and recorded for this study.

When this study was taking place, the students of all batches were taking six courses per semester. One semester is four months (16 weeks). This indicates that 48 hours is allotted for one course. Two courses from each batch, which were selected randomly so as to avoid bias, were observed for one month (four weeks). In other words, six courses out of 18 courses which were selected using stratified random sampling were observed for a month and transcribed in verbatim. This shows that almost 8 hours (17%) of the courses were observed and recorded. This sample represents the whole hours of the course as Sing (2007) suggests 10- 20% to be taken for generalizing large samples. Therefore, four lessons (100 minutes per lesson) for each course of all batches, with a total of 24 lessons or 2400 minutes, were observed, recorded, and transcribed. The reason for that is that if the observation was conducted for a few days, students could hide their actual behavior of code-switching.

The semi-structured interview was conducted with 18 students out of 109 students. Based on the classroom observation, the students of the different class years were grouped into three categories. The first category was those who participate and did not code-switch. The second group was those who participate and code-switch. The last category was those who did not participate. From these three categories, two students from each group (six students from each class with a total of 18 students) were selected randomly. Therefore, 18 students out of 109 students were selected using stratified random sampling.

2.4 Procedures and data analysis techniques

Classroom observations took place first, then interviews continued. This procedure was used for two reasons. First, the participants could hide their actual behavior if they were well informed of what the study was about. Secondly, the interview questions were asked based on what was observed in the classroom. Therefore, the interview was used as a follow up for the classroom observation. A triangulation of classroom observation along with an audio-recording and interviews was employed so as to check the reliability and validity of the data gathered.

The classroom observations were recorded using three latest and sophisticated recorders that yield quality sound from distant. The recorders were borrowed from Adigrat University's Department of Journalism and Communication. One of the recorders was placed at the back of the class. The second recorder was placed at the middle or center of the class while the third one was placed at the front of the class. This helped the researchers to depict some inaudible messages. The interviews were recorded using one of these recorders.

The results obtained through the aforementioned data gathering tools were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The data gathered from the semi-structured interview were analyzed qualitatively. Results of the classroom observation (audio recording) were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis. To illustrate it more, after the audio recording was transcribed in verbatim; extracts were taken, coded thematically, and discussed to show what patterns of CS were used and to indicate the functions they were used for. Again, the utterances were categorized as Amharic and English by using a word as a counting unit. Next to tallying the verbatim transcription in to the above listed categories, they were converted into percentages. This helps to express and quantify how much percent of Amharic to English was used in the EFL classes and the functions that Amharic language was used for.

2.5 Ethical issues

The participants of this study were asked permission to take part in this study. They were also informed their information to be kept confidentially and not to be used for other purposes other than for this research study. But they were not told about the specific questions to be answered in the study until the observations were completed in order not to influence their code-switching behavior. The teachers who were teaching to the observed classes were also asked permission their classes to be observed, and they were assured that their teaching skills or any other methodological issues would not be the focus of the observation in order not to cause stress or any undesired behavior or feelings. In short, the students and teachers were informed that there would be a discourse analysis of the speech in class rather than the teaching skills so that they were reminded that the observations would not have a focus on the pedagogical skills such as classroom management or the methods they would use. After all participants gave their informed consent, the classroom observations and the interviews took place. Therefore, the students and teachers expressed their informed consent to participate in the study and the findings of the study to be published. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. In conclusion, there is no conflict of interest up on the publication of this research finding

3. **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

3.1 The proportion of Amharic to English

The classroom observation, which was made to reveal the exact amount of English and Amharic words utilized by the students in the EFL classes, is presented in table 1.

Table 1 presents the six courses (24 lessons or 2400 minutes) classroom observation audio record of the three class year students. As it is seen in table 1, the students' words were categorized as English words and Amharic words.

With regard to first year students, they uttered a total of 9180 words. From these words, the 8364 (91.1%) were English while the remaining 816 (8.9%) were Amharic. When we come to second year students, 11851 words were spoken which were 9412 (79.4%) English and 2439 (20.6%) Amharic. As far as third year students is concerned, a total of 10483 words were uttered. From this total, 7854 (74.9%) were English, and the rest 2629 (25.1%) were Amharic. This figure tells us that students in the EFL classrooms at university level have used relatively large amount of Amharic.

The classroom observation witnessed that first year students code-switched (8.9%) fewer than second year (20.6%) and third year (25.1%) students. To say it differently, third year students code-switched more frequently than first year and second year students. No matter how different the frequency was, it was possible to conclude that the students used Amharic while learning English. This result goes in accord with the students' interview responses.

Almost all of the students in the interview, participants of all grade levels, also reported the use of Amharic in the English lesson to be less than ten percent.

Table 1. The proportion of Amharic and English words uttered across the different grade levels

Class Year	**Courses**	**Lessons**	**English Words**		**Amharic Words**		**Total Words**	
			number	**%**	number	**%**	number	**%**
1st Year		Lesson 1	978	92.9	75	7.1	1053	100
	Course 1	Lesson 2	879	89.6	102	10.4	981	100
		Lesson 3	1086	94.6	63	5.5	1149	100
		Lesson 4	1156	87.7	162	12.3	1318	100
		Lesson 1	1062	93.7	71	6.3	1133	100
		Lesson 2	973	90.8	99	9.2	1072	100
	Course 2	Lesson 3	1064	89	132	11	1196	100
		Lesson 4	1166	91.2	112	8.8	1278	100
		Total	**8,364**	**91.1**	**816**	**8.9**	**9,180**	**100**
2nd Year		Lesson 1	1193	81.3	275	18.7	1468	100
	Course 1	Lesson 2	793	77.1	236	22.9	1029	100
		Lesson 3	1601	83.4	319	16.6	1920	100
		Lesson 4	794	78.8	214	21.2	1008	100
		Lesson 1	1008	82.6	212	17.4	1220	100
	Course 2	Lesson 2	1516	76.5	466	23.5	1982	100
		Lesson 3	1071	75.9	340	24.1	1411	100
		Lesson 4	1436	79.2	377	20.8	1813	100
		Total	**9,412**	**79.4**	**2,439**	**20.6**	**11,851**	**100**
3rd Year		Lesson 1	996	78.3	276	21.7	1272	100
	Course 1	Lesson 2	855	71.4	342	28.6	1197	100
		Lesson 3	1079	77.1	320	22.9	1399	100
		Lesson 4	743	74.5	254	25.5	997	100
		Lesson 1	1151	75.6	372	24.4	1523	100
	Course 2	Lesson 2	822	76.9	247	23.1	1069	100
		Lesson 3	1297	72.8	484	27.2	1781	100
		Lesson 4	911	73.2	334	26.8	1245	100
		Total	**7,854**	**74.9**	**2,629**	**25.1**	**10,483**	**100**

Example:

"*As to me, Amharic has not to cover more than ten percent of the whole period*." (Year 1; Student B)

"*I prefer less than ten percent*." (Year 3; Student F)

As indicated in the above extracts which are taken from the interview, the interviewee students responded that Amharic should cover less than 10% of the total utterances. The actual classroom data, however, disclosed that second year and third year students used above 20% of Amharic of the total utterances. This indicates that the classroom realities and what the students thought were fairly different. The amount of Amharic language used at the three different grade levels was found to be excessive. Kibrom (2016) found that the students of grade 9, 10, 11, and 12 students of Suhul Michael Secondary school using 3%, 0.29%, 0.25%, and 0.22% of L1 (Tigrigna) respectively. Jemal (2012) also revealed that 11-15%, 6-10%, and less than 5% of L1 (Oromifa) out of the L2 class time to be used by 1st year, 2nd year, and 3rd year students of Jimma Teachers' College respectively. Besides, Abiy and Mohamed (2010) displayed that 22.3% of the class time was covered by Amharic which they said it too much. Kayaoglu (2012) recommends below 10% of L1 to be used at university level.

The students' CS practices do no match with the suggested amount of utterances by Bilgin (2015) who recommends 95% of English words to 5% of L1. This figure is even greater than what Al-Hourani (2016) reports 5 to 10% of the class time. From this, it is concluded that the amount of Amharic which was being employed by second year and third year students could be judged to be relatively excess and inappropriate which is above the findings of all the researches which are conducted till now, at national and international levels. As this indicates excessive usage, it could impede the students' target language learning which Nguyen (2013) and Mokgwathi (2011) call 'it reduces students' exposure to the target language'. Therefore, there was a gap on the extent to which the students want Amharic to be used in the EFL classes and their practice. In other words, the students in the interview demand less than 10% of Amharic to be helpful for English language learning while their actual practice witnessed above 10% of Amharic usage.

3.2 Patterns of code-switching

The classroom observation showed that students of the different class years were employing inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching with a varied amount. The detail is presented in table 2.

As shown in table 2, the dominant code-switching pattern which was employed by first year students was intra-sentential code-switching (58.3%) followed by inter-sentential code-switching (41.7%). Contrary to this, both second year and third year students employed inter-

sentential code-switching more dominantly with 50% and 71.1% respectively. Besides, second year and third year students employed intra-sentential code-switching with 47.6% and 22.2% respectively. The results on table 2 indicate that students of first year did not employ tag switching while second year and third year students practiced tag switching at a lower rate of 2.4% and 6.7% respectively. This implies that third year students employed more of tag switching compared to the other class year students.

Table 2. The patterns of CS employed in class across the different grade levels of students

Class Year	**Courses**	**Inter-sentential CS**		**Intra-sentential CS**		**Tag switching**		**Total**	
		number	**%**	number	**%**	number	**%**	number	**%**
1st Year	Course1	8	72.7	3	27.3	0	0	11	100
	Course2	2	15.4	11	84.6	0	0	13	100
	Total	**10**	**41.7**	**14**	**58.3**	**0**	**0**	**24**	**100**
2nd Year	Course1	9	50	9	50	0	0	18	100
	Course2	12	50	11	45.8	1	4.2	24	100
	Total	**21**	**50**	**20**	**47.6**	**1**	**2.4**	**42**	**100**
3rd Year	Course1	16	61.5	8	30.8	2	7.7	26	100
	Course2	16	84.2	2	10.5	1	5.3	19	100
	Total	**32**	**71.1**	**10**	**22.2**	**3**	**6.7**	**45**	**100**

The study has disclosed that there is a clear difference between first year and the other two grade levels of EFL students with regard to their CS practice; that is, the majority of first year students used intra-sentential CS, whereas most of second year and third year students employed inter-sentential CS. Jingxia (2010) and Nguyen (2013) state that intra-sentential CS is performed by fluent speakers of both languages as the speakers have the syntactic knowledge of both languages, which the researchers of this study do not agree with. If a speaker is capable of speaking both languages fluently, he/she produces more inter-sentential CS than intra-sentential CS. Similar to our understanding, Dereje and Abiy (2015) explained that inter-sentential CS is seen most often between fluent bilingual speakers, and it occurs unconsciously. According to them, intra-sentential CS is transferring focus from one language to another, and it is motivated by situational and stylistic factors. They add that the switch between the two languages, in intra-sentential CS, is conscious and intentional. Once a speaker is fluent bilingual, he/she is not aware of which languages he/she is using. In contrast, a speaker switches from one language into another to emphasize a point (Ghorbani, 2011), to give attention (Horasan, 2013), or to compensate for the gap he/she has in either language (Kayaoglu, 2012) which is done consciously, and this is intra-sentential CS. Farooq and Umer (2013) asserts that intra-sentential CS is practiced more with young children at early language learning stages.

As far as this study is concerned, first year students are believed to be less fluent in both languages (English and Amharic) compared to second year and third year students. Again, third year students are expected to have fluency in the two languages. That might be the reason why overwhelming students of third year practiced inter-sentential CS while first year students did intra-sentential. Here are some examples of the different patterns of CS.

Extract 1: Teacher: …There are many historical places where foreigners come and visit them. So, how could you ask and give the direction for some of these places?

Student: ፈረንጆቹ tour guide ስላላቸው እኛን አይጠይቁም። (Taken from year 1 lesson 3)

Translation: As foreigners have tour guides, they do not ask us.

This is an example of intra-sentential code-switching where two English words are inserted to the Amharic sentence.

The extract below is taken from the classroom observation audio record of year 1 lesson 3. It was taken from the conversation between a student who acted as a receptionist and the one who had a room in the hotel. When the receptionist asked him if he had a bed in the hotel, the customer replied him by saying "yes". Then, the receptionist asked him to show him if he had an ID using Amharic which is an example of intra-sentential CS.

Extract 2: Student 1: Yes, my friend booked me a room.

Student 2: May I see your መታወቅያ?(taken from year 1 lesson 3)

Translation: May I see your **ID card**?

The above extract is an example of intra-sentential code-switching where an Amharic word is inserted to the English sentence.

Extract 3: Student: አንድ አንድ ሰዎች መፅሐፉን አንብበየዋለሁ፣ ግን አልገባኝም ይላሉ። So, can we say these people have not read it? (Taken from year 2 lesson 1)

Translation: Some people say I have read this book, but I do not understand it. So, can we say these people have not read it?

This is an example of inter-sentential code-switching where the two clauses are in Amharic while the other one is in English.

Extract 4: Teacher: Do you know what flipping is? (Taken from year 2 lesson 2)

Student: ገፆችን በተደጋጋሚ ገልበጥ ገልበጥ ማድረግ።

Translation: Turning over the pages quickly and repeatedly.

This is an example of inter-sentential code-switching where the teacher asked the students to respond his question, but the students answered the question in Amharic.

Extract 5: Teacher: … By the way, what is new today? (Taken from year 2 lesson 3)

Students: ስለ ምኑ ነው teacher.

Translation: **What are you talking about, teacher**?

This is an example of tag switching where an English word “teacher” is inserted to the Amharic sentence. The use of this English word has nothing to do in this sentence.

As indicated in table 2 and the extracts above, students of all class years employed inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag switching. Though the frequency for using it was different, they all were employing. Such practices of employing the different patterns of code-switching were reported at different grade levels both at national and international levels. Some of the researchers who found similar result with this one at national level are Dereje and Abiy (2015) and Samuel (2019). Such various pattern of code-switching employment was reported at international levels of different settings by Jingxia (2010), Farooq and Umer (2013), and Nguyen (2013).

In a nut shell, first year students employed inter-sentential code-switching next to intra-sentential code-switching more dominantly. Both second year and third year students, however, employed inter-sentential code-switching more dominantly which was followed by intra-sentential code-switching. Among the three CS patterns, the students’ tag switching was the least. Though the students employed tag switching less, third year students’ tag switching overweighs the other class year students.

3.3.Functions of code-switching

As it can be seen in table 3, students of all class years were found using Amharic language in the EFL classes for interpersonal relations, classroom management, and curriculum access. As far as first year students is concerned, they were found using more Amharic for curriculum access (59.2%) and interpersonal relation (23.9%) functions respectively. Among the different types of interpersonal relation functions of code-switching, first year students used more Amharic in the EFL classes to talk about issues that are not related to the lessons (12%).

The teacher asked one student to come to the stage to answer the question that the teacher asked, and she said:

Extract 6: Student: ኦረ እኔ አፍራለሁኝ ጋሸቹ። (Taken from year 1 lesson 1)
Translation: Sir, I have stage fright please.

When she was asked a question, she talked about her personal behavior rather than answering the question, which is an example of interpersonal function of code-switching.

With regard to the classroom management functions of code-switching, first year students used more Amharic for asking permission (7.1%) and correcting mistakes while talking English (7.1%) with an equal amount. First year students were found using more Amharic to ask for clarification (14%) among the different types of curriculum access functions of code-switching.

Extract 7: Student: Teacher! ሰው ከውጭ ይፈልገኛል እና ልውጣ?(Taken from year 1 lesson 2)

Translation: Teacher! Someone is calling me from an outside. So, shall I go out?

This is an example of code-switching which was used by first year students for asking permission.

Table 3. Students' functions of Amharic use in the EFL class and their proportion across the three grade levels

SN	Functions of Amharic language Use		1st Year Students		2nd Year Students		3rd Year Students		TOTAL	
			number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
1	**Interpersonal Relations**	To talk about personal experiences	2	4.8	4	6.6	5	6.3	**11**	**6**
		To tell jokes	3	7.1	0	0	11	13.8	**14**	**7.7**
		To talk about issues not related to the lessons	5	12	5	8.2	2	2.5	**12**	**6.6**
TOTAL			**10**	**23.9**	**9**	**14.8**	**18**	**22.6**	**37**	**20.3**
2	**Classroom Management**	To talk about homework, exams and assignments	1	2.4	0	0	2	2.5	**3**	**1.6**
		To ask permission	3	7.1	0	0	1	1.3	**4**	**2.2**
		To correct mistakes while talking English	3	7.1	0	0	1	1.3	**4**	**2.2**
TOTAL			**7**	**16.6**	**0**	**0**	**4**	**5.1**	**11**	**6**
3	**Curriculum Access**	To explain difficult concepts	2	4.8	2	3.3	9	11.3	**13**	**7.1**
		To check comprehension	1	2.4	18	29.5	8	10	**27**	**14.8**
		To explain grammar rules	3	7.1	0	0	1	1.3	**4**	**2.2**
		To give the meaning of new vocabulary	4	9.5	3	4.9	3	3.8	**10**	**5.5**
		To ask and/or respond questions	2	4.8	11	18	26	32.5	**39**	**21.3**
		To ask for clarification	6	14	7	11.5	3	3.8	**16**	**8.7**
		To give feedback or comments	1	2.4	0	0	1	1.3	**2**	**1.1**
		To emphasize	0	0	3	4.9	1	1.3	**4**	**2.2**
		To avoid misunderstanding	3	7.1	1	1.6	0	0	**4**	**2.2**
		Lack of its English meaning	3	7.1	7	11.5	6	7.5	**16**	**8.7**
TOTAL			**25**	**59.5**	**52**	**85.2**	**58**	**72.3**	**135**	**73.8**

Similar to first year students, second year students used more Amharic in the EFL classes for curriculum access functions (85.2%) though the amount for using it was quite high. Contrary

to first year students, second year students did not use Amharic for the different types of the classroom management functions and for joking. In line with that of the first-year students, second year students used more Amharic to talk about issues that were not related to the lessons (8.2%). Among the different types of the curriculum access functions of code-switching, second year students used more for checking comprehension (29.5%) and for asking and responding questions (18%) respectively.

> *Extract 8: Student: Reading ማለት የተፃፈ ነገር ማየትና መረዳት ነው ብለናል። ዓይነ ስውራን ማንበብ ኣይችሉም ማለት ነው? (Taken from year 2 lesson 1)*
>
> **Translation***:* Reading is looking and understanding of a written text. Does this meant that blind people cannot read*?*

In this case, the student code-switched to check his understanding of what reading is meant.

Among the various curriculum access functions of code-switching, second year students did not code-switch to explain grammar rules and to give feedback.

Third year students, too, were found CS more for curriculum access functions (72.8%) followed by interpersonal relation functions (22.6%). From the varied types of interpersonal functions of CS, third year students code-switched for talking jokes (13.8%). Among the different types of classroom management functions, third year students code-switched more for talking about homework, exams, and assignments (2.5%). For asking and responding questions (32.5%), explaining difficult concepts (11.3%), and checking comprehension (10 %) were the dominant curriculum access functions of code-switching which were employed by third year students. Here is an extract taken from the classroom observation.

The extract below is taken from lesson 1 of year 3. In that class, one student came late. Then, the teacher asked him to look at his watch, but the student replied that his mobile's battery was off which he lied when it was checked. When the teacher asked the students to give comments on the student who lied him, one of the students in the class replied as follows for the sake of joking by CS in to Amharic.

> *Extract 9: Student: የፖስት modern period characters እኮ አጭበርባሪዎች እና ዉሸታሞች ናቸውኔ ለዚህ ነው እንደዚህ የሆነው። (Taken from year 3 lesson 1)*
>
> **Translation**: The postmodern characters are cheaters and liars. That is why he behave so.

This code-switching was uttered by a student for the sake of joking when the teacher asked the students to give comments on the misbehaved student.

Many of the students who took part in the interview confirmed Amharic to be used more to explain grammatical concepts, difficult words, and when misunderstanding occurs between the students and the teachers which are examples of CS for curriculum access. The students also explained their desire to use Amharic to explain unclear instructions and for inter-personal relations. Here are some examples taken from the semi-structured interviews.

> *Student 2: Why we attend classes is mainly to learn. So, the use of Amharic in the English classes should be to help better understand English. Sometimes we also should use Amharic to clarify instructions that we are unable to understand it and for jokes.*
> *Student 7: Students should use Amharic in the English classes when they learn vocabulary and grammar. We also should use Amharic to talk jokes when we got tired.*

In a nut shell, results of the classroom observation audio record and the semi-structured interviews study disclosed that students of all class years code-switched from and into Amharic in the EFL classes for curriculum access functions more dominantly. Among the different types of curriculum access functions of CS, the dominant function that students employed Amharic in the EFL classes was found to be asking and responding questions.

The findings of this study are similar with the findings of other researchers that were conducted at national and international levels at different times. Jemal (2012) investigated the different functions of code-switching employed by college students of the different class years. He found that the students used code-switching more of for asking and responding questions. Kibrom (2016) and Nigatu (2013) also reported the same finding at high school and elementary schools respectively. At an international level, Ferguson (2003), Yletyinen (2004), and Blackman (2014) found that students code-switched for asking and responding questions and for checking comprehension more dominantly which Blackman (2014) classified them as code-switching for curriculum access though they found the students were code-switching for many functions with a limited amount.

Finally, the researchers of this study believe that Amharic is likely to be employed especially at lower grade levels and poor English language performance to aid learners' understanding of English through explaining new words and difficult concepts since learners' may have difficulty of understanding English language, so they may use Amharic as their reference point. However, the students' practice of Amharic in the EFL classes in the study area could be judged to be relatively excess and inappropriate which may in turn impede learning of English language. The principle, thus, should be use English where possible and learners' native language where necessary as noted by (Mahsain, 2014) instead of teaching English in L1 throughout the whole lesson.

4. CONCLUSION

This research was conducted to investigate if the amount of CS varies from one grade level to another grade level and to unveil the different functions of CS used by students of the different grade levels. The results show that the students' CS was increasing as their grade level increased. However, the students' CS has to decrease as their grade level increased. The use of Amharic by second year and third year students was found to be excessive. The use of more than 10% of the native language in the EFL classes at university level is unexpected since the students are believed to have good command of the target language (English). Besides, these students are going to be English language teachers after two years or one year. If they excessively use Amharic today, they will do it the same with their students tomorrow. This endangers the teaching and learning of EFL. In classes where English is taught as foreign language, it is only the classroom that exposes the students to the target language. Therefore, an overuse of native language reduces students' exposure to the target language and limits their opportunity of practicing English.

Regarding the patterns of CS, students of all batches were using intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag switching with different amounts. First year students were employing intra-sentential CS more while both second year and third year students were using intra-sentential CS more dominantly. Students who are fluent in two or more languages use inter-sentential CS more while students who are less fluent in both languages apply intra-sentential CS. First year students are assumed to be less fluent both in Amharic and English languages compared to second year and third year students. That is why first year students used intra-sentential CS more while second year and third year students employ inter-sentential CS more dominantly. This indicates that the pattern of CS that students employ has a relationship with the students' fluency in the native language and target language.

As far as the students' CS functions is concerned, students of all class years were using Amharic for interpersonal relations, classroom management, and curriculum access. However, students of all grade levels were CS more dominantly for curriculum access. This indicates that CS has many benefits at all grade levels. Therefore, CS is a helpful tool in learning English language. A limited use of students' native language plays a number of pedagogical and psychological roles. However, an excessive use of it reduces the students' exposure to the target language and the opportunity to practice it. On top of this, an overuse of CS, increases students' dependency on the native language and reduces the learners' confidence.

The pedagogical implication of this study is that a planned use of CS enhances learning, helps students express themselves better, helps teachers to avoid misunderstandings in any part of delivering lesson content. Besides, teachers might overcome many problems related with classroom discipline or clarify their message in a better way using Amharic. The results of this study might also provide an insight to the debate of using L1 versus target language in the FL classrooms. It makes theoretical and practical sense for the teachers to switch to L1 in FL classrooms as well as for the students.

Based on the findings and conclusions arrived, it is recommended that concerned bodies of the education and training policy designers and other concerned bodies of the Ministry of Education have to clearly indicate the use of CS in the education and training policy and in the higher education proclamation. Besides, the Ministry of Education has to prepare workshops regarding the cautious use of CS and its drawbacks if it is used excessively. Finally, researchers, methodologists, and education experts have to conduct further research on this area at different settings.

One of the limitations of this study is that it did not investigate the attitudes of the teachers and students towards the employment of CS in the classroom. Such an investigation would draw further conclusions as to whether the participants view code switching as advantageous or disadvantageous or whether their attitudes towards code switching match with their practices or avoidance of switching to their native language. One more limitation of the present study is that it does not investigate if there is any relationship between the students' CS and their English language performance which requires further research.

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