

# Analysis on Frequency and Attitudes of Using Code-Switching and Code-Mixing of English and Thai

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## ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken at the Faculty of Education in Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University which prescribes English as the medium of instruction for all English major courses. However, it has been observed that this policy has not been fully adhered to. Code-switching (CS) and code-mixing (CM) of English and Thai occur extensively in the instructors' speech in the classroom. This study attempts to highlight the frequency of this communicative behavior, and students' attitude toward CS/CM in the classroom. Self-completed questionnaires and interviews were used as methods of data collection. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed in terms of simple frequency counts and percentage. They were complemented by data from the interviews. The questionnaires were tested for validity and reliability. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of the extent of instructors' CS/CM was 0.96 and the students' attitude toward instructors' CS/CM was 0.98. The finding revealed that instructors frequently code-switched and code-mixed between the two languages in the classroom. The analysis shows that the occurrence of these phenomena was related to the instructors, as well as the students' own linguistic competence, and the purpose of facilitating effective teaching and learning. However, the students' attitudes toward CS/CM were that CS/CM can promote better understanding. However, the students felt that such communicative behavior can off-putting as it does not help in improving their linguistic competence in English. The study raises legitimate concerns of the conflict between the policy and its actual implementation, which has some implications on language development, teacher education and policy assessment.

**Keywords:** Code-switching, Code-mixing, Attitudes, Content and Language Integrated Learning

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## Introduction

At present, most higher learning institutions in Thailand have decreed that the language of instruction in the classroom to be English, which is the most important second language in the country. The motivation behind the move toward using a second language in teaching, or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is important to improve the local students' English language competency as mastery in the language is an asset in seeking employment in the globalized economic world (Mahathir, 2003). In addition, an extensive amount of information is currently available in English, so, it is hoped that the availability of English and more exposure to the language in the classroom can contribute to the students' English language competence, which is the key to access information in a variety of fields and also to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge.

However, the implementation of the CLIL approach in Thailand can pose a problem. Instructors not only have to master content knowledge. They also need to have the ability to use English, which is also their second language, to deliver the content. Students as well, face challenges when English is used as the medium of instruction. CLIL learning is used in classroom instruction in public universities in Thailand. Although English has been prescribed as the medium of instruction, in practice, it has been observed that this policy has not been fully adhered to. A mixed code of English and Thai, the latter being the first language of most instructors and students, is used extensively in most content-based lectures in the classrooms. As a researcher, I would like to explore the extent to which English and Thai are mixed in classroom instructions and also instructors' and students' attitudes toward this communicative behavior. In particular, concerns with students' perspectives of the language

use in the classroom and its impact on their study and language development will be addressed.

The curricular model of CLIL is based on five dimensions relating to culture, environment, language, content and learning (Marsh, Majlers & Hartiata, 2001). The cultural dimension aims at building intercultural knowledge and understanding, therefore, developing students' intercultural communication skills. The environmental dimension aims to prepare students for internationalization, as students, having gone through the CLIL process of learning are supposed to be multilingual. Regarding the language dimension, by exposing the target language in learning, students' competence in the target language should be improved in terms of oral communication skills, multilingual interest and attitudes. On the other hand, the content dimension provides different opportunities in studying the subject content such as the target language terminology. Finally, the learning dimension practices various method and forms of learning which allows students to use individual learning strategies.

## Code-switching (CS) and Code-mixing (CM) in the classroom

In Thailand, few linguists have paid much attention to CS and CM in the classroom. Empirical studies have demonstrated that it is quite difficult to find classroom discourse in a single language. Even in a CLIL setting, other languages understood by the speakers may be used, thus, switching and mixing between the languages are common (Martin 2005, Arthur & Martin, 2006).

Milroy and Musyken (1995, p. 7) define code-switching as "the alternative used by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation". The term CS/CM is used to describe any kind of language alternation between the two languages, The CS/CM may be discourse-related or participant-related. For example, Ariffin (2009) in her study of content-based lectures

found that CS/CM served some functions, such as signaling topic change, giving and clarifying explanations, enacting social relationships and aggravating and mitigating messages. The ESL classrooms, CS/CM of English and the first language can also be found. While Merrit et al. (1992) found that CS/CM between English and the mother tongue in three Kenyan primary schools occurred when teachers wanted to reformulate information, bring new content information, attract students' attention and substitute words. Canagarajah (1995) reported on the micro and macro functions of CS/CM in Sri Lankan ESL classrooms. The former includes classroom management and content transmission, and the latter includes social issues outside the classroom that may have implications on education.

### Attitudes toward Code-switching (CS) and Code-mixing (CM)

Luna and Paracchio (2005) claimed attitudes toward CS/CM as the extent to which individuals perceive CS/CM to be a desirable practice. Although in some

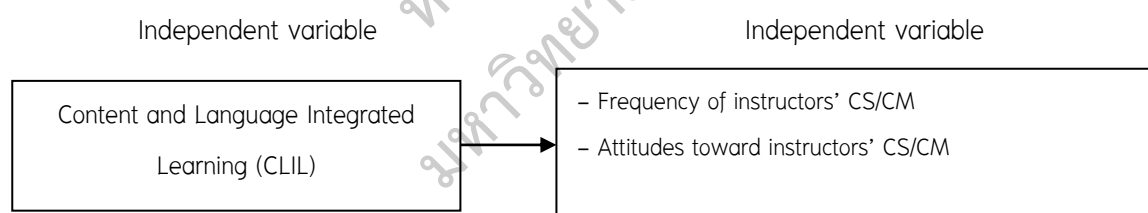
communities CS/CM has been the norm rather than the exception (Grosjean 1982), studies have shown that there are varying attitudes toward this communicative behavior (Gumperz, 1982). For example, Sanchez (in Cheng & Butler 1989, p. 298) argued that CS/CM could "take away the purity of the language" and Poplack (1980, p. 592) felt that it is "a verbal skill requiring a large degree of competence in more than one language, rather than a defect arising from insufficient knowledge of one or the other".

As Thailand is now a member of the AEC, it is considering the use of English as a language for teaching and learning, especially in classes in universities. This study attempts to explore teachers' attitudes in order to discover more appropriate ways to use CS/CM.

### Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the frequency of instructors' CS/CM in the classroom.
2. To analyze the students' attitudes toward CS/CM in the classroom.

### Conceptual Framework of the Study



Conceptual framework of research

### Research questions

This study was conducted on the basis of the following research questions:

1. To what extent does CS/CM exist in the language of instruction?
2. What are the students' attitudes toward CS/CM in the classroom context?

### Research Methodology

#### 1. Research Sample

The research was conducted with the samples selected from 48 fourth year students in the Faculty of Education from Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University were purposively selected as a part in the study and consented to the data collection and analysis.

## 2. Research Instrument

The research instrument for this study were questionnaire and interview. The questionnaires items were adapted from EL Fiki's (1999) work on CS/CM in a university context and other researchers' works on language attitude (Gibbons 1983; Gardner & Macintyre, 1991). The extent to which CS/CM occur in the instructors' discourse showed the Coefficient of Cronbach was 0.96 and the students' attitude toward instructors' CS/CM with the Coefficient of Cronbach was 0.98. Interviews were conducted to complement the questionnaires data.

## 3. Data Collection

The questionnaire was distributed to 48 fourth year students during their normal class session, in which they were given clear instructions and explanations for filling out the questionnaires and then the questionnaires were collected.

## 4. Data Analysis

Information on students' perception on the frequency of instructors' CS/CM behavior while delivering lectures, and attitudes toward the language situation in the classroom were gleaned using self-completed questionnaires and interviews.

Instructors were also interviewed gain insights on their language use in the classroom. The interviews were conducted informally and did not utilize structured interviews, they covered the focus of the study, that is, the instructors' language use and the underlying factors of the use.

Data from the questionnaires were analyzed in terms of simple frequency counts and percentage. They were complemented by data from the interviews. The questionnaires were evaluated for validity and reliability.

## Finding and Discussion

The research questions focus on the study were:

1) the extent to which CS/CM occur in the instructors' discourse and 2) the students' attitude toward instructors' CS/CM. The analysis of the data is reported and discussed under these topics.

The extent of CS/CM in the Instructors' Discourse. The data are reported separately for each individual lecture as every lecture was unique in terms of its content and the background of the participants. These variables can contribute toward the CS/CM occurrence in the interactional setting.

The analysis of the data shows a clear pattern of language use by the instructors. It seems that the extent to which CS/CM occurred in the instructor's discourse depended first on the instructors' competence in English, and second on the students' competence in English. The follow tables show the students' perceptions on the frequency of their instructors' CS/CM in the classroom.

Table 1 The Extent of Instructors' CS/CM

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Mixing English and Thai is a common phenomenon in the lectures I have attended in this institution.	21 44%	15 31%	12 25%	–
2. The instructors' main language when delivering lectures is always English.	3 6%	8 17%	17 35%	20 42%
3. The instructors frequently mixes Thai with English in their lectures.	23 48%	16 33%	8 17%	1 2%
4. The instructors usually maintain the English terminology but use Thai to give further explanation.	28 58%	14 29%	6 13%	–
5. The instructors do not have any difficulty in delivering lectures in English.	3 6%	9 19%	16 33%	20 42%
6. The instructors always switch to Thai when we do not understand the lectures.	15 31%	19 40%	14 29%	–

The Coefficient of Cronbach was 0.96

The data reveal a clear use of instructors' language use in the classroom. More than half of the students claimed that the use of both Thai and English for classroom instruction was a frequent practice in the institution. In fact, the interview data reveal that the mixture of Thai and English was quite common in most of the lectures they attended, and that they barely realized the occurrence during the lessons. Some even claimed that it is expected since the mixing of both languages in communication is common among bilingual speakers in any context of communication

The analysis also reveals that the amount of CS/CM in classroom was largely related to the instructors' and students' English Language competence. The data show that these lecturers normally maintained English terminology and technical words related to the topics taught. The students also claimed that English was used when these lecturers read directly from the notes or the power point presentation. However, when it came to elaboration

and explanation of the concepts, they tended to code-switch to Thai or code-mix both English and Thai.

However, some of the students also admitted that the proficient instructors insisted in delivering their lectures in English and encouraged students to improve their English Language competence in order to cope with any language difficulties they might face. This is clearly reflected in the low frequency of CS/CM by proficient instructors. However, it is very important to note that instructors' own proficiency level could not account for the actual language use in the context of interaction. It is found that even the proficient instructors were not able to maintain their speech in English and have to resort to Thai because they needed to accommodate students who were not competent in English. This is reflected in Table 1 that despite their proficiency in English, the proficient instructors frequently mixed Thai and English in their speech when they perceived students were not able to understand the lectures in English.

Interviews with the instructors reveal that they were aware of the institutional language policy. However, their language choice and use were largely determined by their own competence in English and their students. This had led to their CS/CM behavior in the classroom instruction. The less proficient instructors normally use both Thai and English in their lectures. However, they would maintain the referential items in English as these were the key words that students needed to know for the concepts learnt. On the other hand, the more proficient instructors either gave explanation in English

first or then translated it into Thai when needed, or straight away mixed both languages in their explanation. However, like the less proficient instructors, they also maintained the referential items in English. These claims concur with the students' perceptions on the language use in the classroom.

Students' Attitudes toward Instructors' CS/CM behavior in the classroom. These attitudes were largely influenced by the students' English Language competence. Their views are summarized in Table 2

Table 2: Students' Attitude toward Instructors' CS/CM

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I would like the instructors to minimize their use of Thai in their lectures.	21 44%	14 29%	10 21%	3 6%
2. I would prefer the instructors to use only English in their lectures.	19 40%	13 27%	10 21%	6 12%
3. I need the instructors to use both Thai and English in their lectures.	2 4%	7 15%	21 44%	18 37%
4. I feel challenged when the instructors use English in their lectures.	7 15%	18 37%	21 44%	2 4%
5. I feel frustrated when the instructors use both Thai and English during their lectures.	19 40%	14 29%	12 25%	3 6%
6. The instructors are mixing of Thai and English is not a problem to me.	3 6%	20 42%	10 21%	15 31%
7. When the instructors mix Thai and English in their lectures, I turn out.	13 27%	21 44%	5 10%	9 19%

The Coefficient of Cronbach was 0.98

The analysis of the data indicates that the students' attitude toward Instructors' CS/CM felt that the use of Thai should be minimized as students should be more exposed to the English Language since most references are available in that language. Thus, switching from English to Thai to solve comprehension problems did

not seem to be a long-term solution for less proficient students. Comprehension problems might occur during self-study. These students also claimed that any input received in English can prepare them not only for self-study, but also for their future career. It is very interesting that the students claimed that the

instructors' language of instruction can help them develop their English Language competence to enable them cope in their field of study. They further argued that if the instructors used mixed languages to explain a concept, the explanation would be devoid of the correct structure. In other words, they had not been provided with or exposed to the correct model of explaining the concepts in English. Thus, they certainly would face difficulties in the examinations where all answers are required to be written in English. They further argued that understanding the concept would not be adequate if they were not able to give the answers in the correct way. In contrast, the students felt that both instructors should both on meaning and structure when delivering their lectures.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study has established that CS/CM of English and Thai is a communicative behavior in the classrooms despite the overt language policy of the use of English as the medium of instruction in Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University. The report on the speakers' actual language use and their attitude toward the language(s) used is important in determining whether to support or counterbalance the existing linguistic policy and regulation. The finding is particularly useful in understanding the extent to which the speakers adhere to the policy.

Although attitudes toward language cannot be easily measured, the study has several significant implications on language use in the classroom domain. As observed by Ariffin (2007), any regulation set by any language policy does not hinder language creativity and personal choice of the speakers in their context of interaction. This is because attitudes toward languages are 'invisible societal pressure' that interact with 'visible' plans organized by policy makers (Kachru, 1987). The information gleaned from this study on whether these two forces agree or

not can help to set further plans in treating any conflicts that may exist.

As reported by the findings, the occurrence of CS/CM is largely due to the linguistic competence of the participants in the interactional setting. It is found that instructors' English Language skills are usually not sufficient enough to conduct the task of delivering in language. Students' English Language skill as well are not sufficient enough to manage the curriculum. Thus, the linguistic incompetence of both the instructors and students need to be addressed. The finding reveals an urgent need for the instructors to improve their English competence skills. A series of development courses on English Language proficiency and communication skills in English could be developed to help these instructors improve their delivery skills in the classroom. As for students, EAP and ESP courses need to be developed so that they are better prepared for the language demands of their study.

The finding of the study also suggests that there should be a clear assessment toward the implementation of the study. The common and continuous practice of CS/CM in the classrooms imply that the implementation of the policy has neither been truly or assessed. It cannot be assumed that speakers would just comply with any policy trusted on them. So, if the policy is to be sustained, for the benefits of learning and linguistic development of the students and professionalism of the instructors, there should be continuous and continual assessment of the policy.

### Conclusion

This study has provided clear findings of the actual implementation of the institutional language policy on the medium of instruction in the classroom. CS/CM in both Thai and English emerged as the instructors'

code choice in the classroom instruction. Such language behavior seems not to only have undermined the role of English as the stipulated medium of instruction, but also underestimated the speech behavior of bilinguals. There exists a conflict between the language policy and the actual use of English and Thai in the classroom.

There is also an indication that both instructors and students are not linguistically equipped to support the policy. Lack of English Language competence both on the parts of instructors and students has been claimed as the major motivating factor for the CS/CM occurrence. This certainly has a significant implication

on their English Language development skills. Most importantly, the findings have served as a basis for any language training needs for the instructors to enable them to teach effectively using English as the medium of instruction.

As implied by the students' response, the language of teaching can affect the process of learning and acquiring knowledge. Thus, there seems to be an important need for the instructors to pay more attention to the language used in delivering the content of their lectures to benefit learning.

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