

Code-switching uses: the focus on the  
teacher.

Applied analysis in a high school  
context.

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## INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this essay is to investigate and closely examine the role and the functions of code-switching in a very limited and defined environment.

Since code-switching is used in various and different situations, this paper will focus on the classroom context and, primarily, on the teacher's ways of and reasons for using this alternation of different linguistic codes.

Second and fifth year English lessons in an Italian Liceo Linguistico will be recorded, transcribed and, following the methods of Conversational Analysis (CA), "a methodology for the analysis of naturally-occurring spoken interaction [...] which is now applied in a very wide range of professional and academic areas"<sup>1</sup>, some relevant extracts of transcriptions will be examined in order to exemplify the most significant functions of this alternation of codes, keeping in mind the question "why that, in that way, right now"<sup>2</sup> as *modus operandi*.

This article will start with a brief introduction to code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon: its definition, uses and ways of analysis, both from a formal and functional point of view.

It will then describe the school context in which the audio recordings were taken and the conditions under which this research was done.

The core of the paper will, as said above, comment on some relevant passages taken from the transcriptions.

Finally, the article will conclude with some reflections concerning the outcomes deriving from the research and will point to wider and more complex possible fields of investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> Seedhouse P., *Conversation analysis and language learning*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Seedhouse P., *Conversation analysis and language learning*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 3

## CHAPTER 1

### *Code-switching: a definition*

Code-switching may be defined as the passage from one linguistic code to another one within the same discourse or, to be more precise, “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems”<sup>3</sup>.

It is a widely observed phenomenon especially seen in bilingual or multilingual communities, from single family units to huge social groups, which also comes into use in language teaching classes, either in the teachers’ or the students’ discourse.

Despite the fact that it may appear and sound chaotic, disordered and lacking in rules, linguistic and sociolinguistic scholars pointed out that:

La commutazione di codice, e il discorso commutato che ne è il risultato non sono affatto accidenti afunzionali, mescolanze caotiche di pezzi disparati di lingua, bensì hanno una funzione nello svolgimento dell’interazione verbale, sono per lo più dotati di significato interazionale o sociale e sono governati da principi e restrizioni anche linguistiche.<sup>4</sup>

Gumperz (1982) was one of the first to express the idea that code-switching could be seen as a real, specific discourse strategy for bilinguals, remembering that we can use the word “bilingual” to define someone who is able to communicate, to various extents, in a second language<sup>5</sup>. In his book, *Discourse Strategies*, Gumperz also proposes a list of conversational functions code-switching can be related to.

According to him, code-alternation can occur in the form of *quotation* when the speaker directly uses a piece of reported speech in the language it was produced. In case of *addressee specification*, the switch

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<sup>3</sup> Gumperz J.J., *Discourse Strategies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Berruto G., *Fondamenti di sociolinguistica*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1995, p. 217.

<sup>5</sup> See Crystal D., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987.

of language is merely used in order to “direct the message to one of the possible addressees”<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, very often bilingual speakers tend to use code-switching for *interjections* or simple sentence fillers. Together with these three first functions, one of the most widespread is linked to *reiteration*. Which means that a particular message, or a part of it, is repeated and translated into the other linguistic code. This replication can be interpreted from two different perspectives: on the one hand it may be used to clarify the meaning of the message or, on the other hand, it may simply be used to give emphasis and more strength. Furthermore, according to Gumperz’s theories, “another large group of switches consist of qualifying constructions such as sentence and verb complements or predicates following a copula”<sup>7</sup>. This specific function is generally known as *message qualification*. Finally, by shifting from one language to another, the speaker can also underline and express his/her involvement or distance either in connection to the message or the social or cultural group he/she’s referring to.

However, although this list may seem so comprehensive and exhaustive, it is by no means complete since “il catalogo dei valori comunicativi che la commutazione di codice può rivestire e delle circostanze pragmatiche in cui può innestarsi è ampliabile a volontà”<sup>8</sup>.

This consideration is even more relevant when we focus our attention to how code-switching is used in classrooms.

As a matter of fact, most of the studies on code-alternation deals with natural discourse in bilingual or multilingual social contexts and only few of them focus on classroom interaction. Many of these studies<sup>9</sup>, then, analyse bilingual school contexts and not much has been done on code-switching within foreign second language classrooms.

Nevertheless, it is easily understandable that we might expect school code-switching slightly different from that in natural discourse since the languages between which alternation is performed are the native language of the students/teacher and the foreign language that students are expected to gain competence in.

The teachers’ use of code switching is not always performed consciously, this means that the teacher is not always aware of the functions and outcomes of the code switching process. Therefore, in

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<sup>6</sup> Gumperz J.J., *Disourse Strategies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 77

<sup>7</sup> Gumperz J.J., *Disourse Strategies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 79

<sup>8</sup> Berruto G., *Fondamenti di sociolinguistica*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 1995, p. 218.

<sup>9</sup> For example: Martin-Jones M., *Code-switching in the classroom: two decades of research*, in Milroy & Muisken, *One speaker, two languages. Cross disciplinary perspective on code-switching*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

some cases it may be regarded as an automatic and unconscious behaviour. Nevertheless, either conscious or not, it necessarily covers some basic functions which may be beneficial in language learning environments.

Generally speaking, as Anderson<sup>10</sup> and Mattson and Burenhult<sup>11</sup> have pointed out, within foreign language teaching contexts, code-alternation is mainly used for metalinguistic and grammatical purposes, interjections, spontaneous comments and calls to order.

To conclude, as it can be understood from this brief introductory definition, code-switching and its analysis is an incredibly various, complex and multilayered field of analysis; nonetheless, aware of this complexity but not intimidated by it, this brief study will try to find evidence of these functions by directly analysing authentic pieces of teaching interaction.

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<sup>10</sup> Anderson L., *Processi di commutazione di codice nella classe di lingua*, in Ciliberti A., Pugliese R. & Anderson L., *Le lingue in classe: Discorso, apprendimento, socializzazione*, Carocci, Roma 2003, pp 83-87.

<sup>11</sup> Mattsson, A & Burenhult-Mattsson, N., *Code-switching in second language teaching of French*, Working Papers 47, Lund University, 1999, pp. 59-72.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Code-switching: analysis*

One of the most effective and powerful tools used to understand and study code-switching as a linguistic phenomenon and a discourse strategy in given contexts is Conversational Analysis (CA) as, thanks to the highly detailed transcriptions it employs, verbal exchanges can be empirically studied and explored.

However, before illustrating the main criteria through which code-switching in a language teaching class can be examined, it is necessary to underline the two general principles which the alternation of different languages can be related to.

In her essay *Processi di commutazione di codice nella classe di lingua*<sup>12</sup>, Laurie Anderson introduces the two concepts of “principio di precedenza” and “principio di salienza” which can be of great relevance in analysing the general principles underpinning the evolution and the development of a conversational flux in defined groups and situations.

The first concept, which can be translated into “principle of precedence”, is based on the evidence that new pieces of information tend to be processed according to schemes which have already been activated. More simply, it is the general pattern which occurs when a speaker tends to adapt his/her linguistic communicative choices to those of the previous speaker in the interaction. This means that if a speaker talks with another one using a defined linguistic code, the addressee will very likely answer using the same code.

The “principio di salienza”, or “principle of prominence”, on the contrary, is linked to the fact that speakers are inclined to exploit a variety of linguistic resources with the purpose of giving more prominence to limited and defined portions of the discourse. From a comparative point of view, this principle can be considered as complementary to the one of precedence, and it is the reason why speakers may decide to use another linguistic code so as to give particular emphasis to specific parts of their speech.

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson L., *Processi di commutazione di codice nella classe di lingua*, in Ciliberti A., Pugliese R. & Anderson L., *Le lingue in classe: Discorso, apprendimento, socializzazione*, Carocci, Roma 2003, pp 76-77.

Another key concept in approaching a transcription dealing with code-alternation phenomena is the idea of a *matrix language*<sup>13</sup>, which means the predominant tongue in which the conversational exchange is held. The identification of the matrix language which plays the dominant role in relation to the *embedded* one, is the first step which needs to be made in order to contextualise all the other code shifts and their possible meanings.

The analysis then can be done from two different and complementary perspectives: one formal, the other functional<sup>14</sup>.

The main thing which needs to be taken into account from a formal point of view is *where* the shift of code takes place since the passage from one language to the other can happen in different moments and with various forms. Syntactically, it can occur between two different sentences (*interphrasal* code switching) or in the middle of one single sentence (*intraphrasal*) while from a conversational and interactional perspective it can either happen that the same speaker shifts from one code to the other within his/her own speech turn (*intraturn* code-switching) or the change can take place at the beginning of the other speaker's turn (*interturn*).

In general, it is also advisable to consider *who* is shifting into another language (teacher/student, in the case of classroom interaction) even though this essay is primarily focused on the role and the linguistic performances of the teacher.

In addition to these principles, *how much* language is used in the shift is another relevant element to examine. Indeed, the amount of second language used in a code-shifted situation can vary remarkably, from a single word (*nonce borrowing*), a whole syntagm (*constituent insertion*) to a more extended piece of discourse.

Finally, as many scholars<sup>15</sup> have pointed out, another interesting element to focus on is the way the shift is performed, *how* it is reached. In general, two antithetical structures have been identified, called respectively *flagged* and *smooth*. According to the definition of "flagged shifting", speakers tend to mark and signal the change in language with evident discourse signs such as pauses, hesitations, metalinguistic indications or different intonation in order to alert the other receiver of the coming code-alternation. On the contrary,

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on the concept of matrix and embedded languages see: Myers-Scotton C., *A lexically based model of code-switching*, in Milroy & Muisken, *One speaker, two languages. Cross disciplinary perspective on code-switching*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp 235-239.

<sup>14</sup> For this general scheme of analysis, consult L. Anderson's handout *Co-costruzione e interazione in L2: il ruolo del code-switching*, scuola estiva DILM, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> In particular: Poplack S. & Sankoff D., *Code-switching*, in Ammon U., Dittmar N., Mattheier K.J., *Sociolinguistics/Soziolinguistik*, II vol., de Gruyter, Berlin, 1988, 1174-80

“smooth code-shifting” doesn’t include any of this set of warning elements, and so the passage from one language to the other is much more fluent.

Moving from a formal to a functional perspective, the context and the social, cultural and behavioural rules of the environment in which the alternation takes place gain more and more relevance.

As a matter of fact, as has already been hinted at, unveiling the deep reasons and functions of code-switching can be very difficult. However, in general, we can say that its main communicative uses seem to be linked to phatic strategies or pragmatic ones. In addition, code-switching may also be seen as a particularly powerful strategy of production whether it used as a filler for those who are unable to express themselves perfectly in the target language or as a way to convey more direct and understandable indications and explanations.

To conclude, this brief outline shows the methodology through which the transcriptions recorded and presented in this essay will be analysed and studied in order to clarify how and why teachers uses code-alternation in the classrooms.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Context, materials and method of investigation.*

This present essay focuses on code-switching by analysing a series of recordings of classroom interactions between a teacher and Italian students of English as a second language.

The recordings involve two classes, a second and a fifth year, in an Italian Liceo Linguistico (the private Liceo Malpighi in Bologna) and their teacher.

The distinctive feature of this school in its English teaching policy is the fact that all the students, before starting their first year, must sit for an English examination test which evaluates their knowledge and level of the language. After that, in relation to their results, students are divided into three levels, beginners, intermediate and advanced and they will all follow three different kinds of lessons, with different teachers according to the level they belong to. This levelled-based system is carried out only for the first two years. After that, the unity of each class, independently from the level of the students, is put back together for the remaining three years.

According to the teachers, this particular method was adopted for various reasons. In fact, even though all the students use the same book and cover, more or less, the same programme from a grammatical point of view, a deeper and stronger attention to the linguistic gaps and problems of each group is the main focus of the teachers in the different levels. The primary aim is to teach students in relation to their knowledge and level of the target language, adopting different strategies. In doing so, according to the team of English teachers who adopted this peculiar teaching style, students with an elementary knowledge of the language are not demotivated by the presence of other skilful peers, on the contrary, gradually and more or less uniformly, they are able to improve in a less competitive and stressful scholastic environment. At the same time, competent students can maintain their good proficiency avoiding the boredom of excessively elementary lessons and activities. Both students and teachers are satisfied with the results and the teaching climate deriving from this methodological choice.

As it has already been hinted at, two different kinds of lessons with different classes will be recorded and examined in order to obtain a larger spectrum of the uses and functions of the code-switching phenomenon.

Second year class was chosen for its variety of activities and didactic teaching goals. As a matter of fact, by teaching a whole set of different aspects of the language, from pure grammar to listening comprehension, from writing production to spontaneous oral interaction, the teacher faces a incredible range of situations. This constant interaction between students and teacher, even though predominantly teacher led, could be the perfect situation in which the use of code-alternation may be of great importance and utility.

On the contrary, the fifth year class displays a whole different teaching context. First of all, the student are primarily taught English literature, secondly, they are supposed to have a better knowledge of the language than their second year mates. The data analysis of the recordings will be used in order to verify if and how the use and the functions of code-switching varies in this particular class environment.

To facilitate the understanding of the framework in which the research was conducted, a better detailed portrait of each class will be provided.

Second year students belong to the advanced group and the overall level of English is very good in relation to their age to the extent that many of them sat for the PET examination obtaining excellent results. They all are Italian. The class is for most of the part composed of girls but nonetheless it is quite lively and sometimes difficult to be kept under control.

The fifth class is, similarly to the previously described one, mainly composed of girls. Since the division into levels of knowledge is no longer present from the third year on, the general level of English is extremely various and diverse, ranging from students with an excellent grasp of the language to others who still display some uncertainties and doubts. Differently from their second year colleagues, this class, despite the fact that at first look may seem extremely calm and peaceful, is quite difficult to be stimulated and involved in the activities and in the subject.

Moving our focus on the teacher, it is necessarily to explain that this research will focus on one single teacher, the same one for both classes. This choice was made in order to avoid a misleading and incorrect approach to the whole analysis of the data. As a matter of fact, focusing on the same teacher, the final evaluation of the uses of code-switching will be more coherent than another one focusing on different teachers in different teaching contexts.

Moreover, the teacher was kept unaware of the real aim of the research. In fact, he was told that the focus of the recordings was on the way lessons were held and conducted from a merely didactic point

of view. The reason for this intentional omission was to preserve the natural teaching behaviour of the teacher. Despite the fact that some studies demonstrate that external presences in the classrooms (observers, video-cameras etc) affect only the first minutes of the lesson and then tend to be forgotten, being the topic of code-alternation a very delicate one, it was decided to elude any possible risk of an unnatural, excessively controlled and artificially all-held-in-English conduct of the teacher during his lesson.

From the point of view of the tapings, a small recorder was the main instrument used in the research. It was placed on the teacher's desk so as to tape-record the whole interaction without being too intrusive. The researcher sat at the back of the classroom, behind the student, as silent and neutral as possible, taking notes of the most relevant passages from the point of view of code alternation. Secondly, the recordings were transcribed following the conventional rules of transcription taken from Gavioli/Mansfield (1990)<sup>16</sup> and analysed.

The following chapter will display the most significant passages and exchanges in an attempt to exemplify some of the basic functions of code-alternation.

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<sup>16</sup> Gavioli L. & Mansfield G., *The PIXI Corpora*, Clueb, Bologna, 1990.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Data analysis*

The analysis of the transcriptions displayed many and various example of code-alternation. In order to facilitate the general comprehension, this chapter will be subdivided into parts, each one focusing on a single function identified in the verbal interactions. The transcription will be followed by some brief observations analysing the purpose of the code-switched portion of speech and the way it was performed.

#### 1) Affective Functions: approvals/calls to order/reproaches

Extract A (second class):

C: [confusion]

I: ▲Ok + Now + plea:se listen to me++ I'm writing the homework for next Friday on the blackboard+ ok? ◀

C: [confusion]

A1: For tomorrow? [addressed to the teacher]

A2: eh? + tomorrow?

I: No++ ehi everybody+ the homework is for next Friday++ do you understand?

A1: ah

C: [confusion]

I: ▲ok +stop+[deep sigh] **ZITTI TUTTI!**++ ok+ ◀ [end of confusion] ok+ perfect+ on the blackboard you have the homework for Friday++ ok?

A3: o::k

C: [general assent]

Extract B (fifth class, an individual oral test in English literature):

I: Ok +now+ can you tell what you know about the rhyme of the ancient marinere?

A1: yea ++well++ the rhyme of the ancient marinere is a++ work by Samuel T. Coleridge + which ++ who was a member of ++the earlier ++class of poets of romantic period ++ehm ++well+ I can tell about the plot++

I: ok+ go on

A1: It's the story of a marinere who+ during a trip on boat he kills a+ an albatross and then he get cursed and he will+ live some fantastic and horrific adventure in order to purify his soul from his sin of +having killed the albatross

I: Ok+ tell me something about the+ publication of this work

A1: well++ fist of all it is a++ a ballad+ a ballad is a form of poetry

I: ▲poetry+ yea ◀+ and when was it published?

A1: where?

I: When + and where

A1: it was published in+ England ++ ehm + in 1798 in the Lyrical Ballads.

I: ▲Ok◀+ that's ok+ **basta così** ++ **bravo Andrea** (5) Now ++ Enrico + please [another student is questioned...]

Despite the fact that these two examples can, at first look, seem quite different for function and use, they can be interpreted as belonging to the same macro category linked to an affective function and employ of the code-alternation. No matter if the use of code switching is connected with reproaches, calls to order or used to express sympathies, the native language (in our case Italian) is used by the teacher with an emotional involvement, both from a positive or negative perspective.

In extract A, code-alternation (underlined in bold) is used affectively in the sense that the teacher shows anger and frustration recurring to the common mother tongue. This choice can be variously interpreted. From one side it can be seen as an instinctive and unconscious reaction as it is normal and easier to use the native language in order to express sudden reactions with a high emotional participation. From the other side, in this way the reproach expressed in Italian stresses the fact that the utterance is seriously meant and expected to be obeyed.

From the analytical point of view, it is necessary to specify that in this case the matrix language, which means the predominant communicative code, is English and, from time to time, the teacher switches to Italian. In the example the shift is pre-signalled by a deep sigh and some pauses. Using the technical words introduced in chapter 2, it is possible to define the alternation as a flagged, intraturn, intraphrasal form of code-switching.

Extract B is not so different from the previous one but in this case the communicative flux in the matrix language (English) is interrupted by the insertion of two constituents in Italian used to express

appreciation. What is peculiar here is the fact that the affective connotation of the linguistic switch is reinforced by the fact that the teacher expresses sympathies and appreciation in Italian and then continues with English as soon as the focus is back on the main task: questioning another student. It is as if the brief approval conveyed in Italian was a short, relaxed pause in a formal context of teacher/student interaction. In addition to that, the constituent “basta così” can also be interpreted, following the division proposed by Gumperz<sup>17</sup>, as a reiterative form of the previous “that’s ok”, or as sort of middle step before the final approval in Italian. However, once again the shift takes place within the same speech turn of the teacher but, a part from a short pause, it is not as signalled as the one in the other extract.

## 2) Facilitate the comprehension I

### Extract C (second class)

A1: [reading a written passage on the text book] They crossed the open sea to Ceylon and reached the west coast of ++Ain +India

I: ▲ India ◀

A1: India++ and on the last stage of their journey+ the family was robbed of most of their gold

I: ▲ Ok ◀ Marco+ please+ stop for a moment++ What’s the meaning of+ robbed? (3) Any suggestions? ++no?(3)

C: [General signs for “no idea”]

I: We::ll it’s when++ mmm+ you take something from someone else without permission++ a thief does it ++ ok? (4) mmm + For example ++when you go to the bank with a: + gun [miming the scene]++

A2: Rubare?

A3: Fare una rapina?

I: well++ that’s it!+ **derubare, rubare, rapinare** mmm+in his case **furono derubati** ++ok?+

This example introduces a different general use of code-switching: alternation as a useful and powerful teaching tool. In this particular case, the teacher wants to make sure that the meaning of the verb “to rob” is well known by the class. Actually it isn’t. In these cases, a teacher has a whole set of possible solutions in order to provide the right meaning. Having said that the level of this second year class is

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 2

quite high, it appears clear that an easy, immediate translation was probably not the best way to interact with them. In fact, that's why the teacher tries to convey the Italian correspondent by paraphrasing the meaning, even by miming it. The technique is fully successful: the class got it. It is only in a second moment that the teacher shifts to Italian in order to deepen the level of the linguistic awareness. Three different and valid translations of the verb are provided and then the perfect correspondent of the verbal form used in text they are reading is suggested. The way the Italian portion of spoken language is embedded and performed orally shows no sign of hesitation or other elements marking the shift. The whole usage is extremely smooth, fluent and natural.

Code-alternation is used here as a tool to facilitate the comprehension and a way to improve lexical awareness. This is highly important for a positive, productive management of the class activities. No matter if it is used to clarify the meaning of a single word, an expression, a command or the aim of exercise, the use of the native language can help student to better follow what the teacher is trying to convey.

### 3) Facilitate the comprehension II / Linguistic Insecurity/ Repetitive Function

#### Extract D (second class)

I: No++ok+ pay attention+ please+ you don't remember the passive+ the passive (4) ok+look here+ the object becomes the subject and the subject is++**the complemento d'agente o causa efficiente**++ok+ Paul eats the cake++the+cake is eaten+++what do you need?+

A1: by

A2: ▲by◀

I: Ok+ by **introduce il complemento**+ the ca:ke is eaten BY Paul++ **sogetto+ complemento d'agente++ oggetto + soggetto** ++[indicating the scheme on the blackboard]

This extract is probably the most complex and various one, displaying different functions all at once.

First, one of the most common uses of code-switching in the teacher perspective, especially with beginner or intermediate students, is linked to grammar explanations. As suggested above, grammar instructions are usually carried out in the students' mother tongue,

while conversation and other class interactions are performed in the target language. In the above extract, the situation is more similar to a syncretism: some of the explanations are in English, or at least the teacher starts in English, but then ends using Italian. A probable explanation for this is the fact that the proficiency of the students may not be developed enough to include terms necessary in the grammar discourse. As a matter of fact, the teacher shifts to Italian for the first time in order to express the idea of “complemento d’agente” which is quite a technical, specific linguistic item.

However, it can also be argued that, instead of a metalinguistic use of code-alternation, this shift can be seen as a compensating strategy used by the teacher in order to hide a possible linguistic insecurity or doubt. Actually, it can be. Linguistic lack of confidence in the speaker may constitute a possible cause for shifting from one code to another one, more comfortable for the speaker, no matter if student or teacher.

The second time the teacher employs Italian is for a different reason. It is obviously always linked to the general function of facilitating the understanding, but in this case the teacher repeats in Italian what has already, partially in English, partially in Italian, been explained. The repetitive value and function of code-switching must not be underestimated: teachers use it all the time in order to underline important things or convey the same message in the native language for clarity.

From the formal point of view, the first shift from one code to the other one is deeply marked by two long pauses, one before and the other immediately after the insertion of the Italian syntagm. While in this case the matrix language was still English (this probably explains the deep marking of the alternation), in the second part of the teacher’s explanation, the portions in Italian are performed in a more natural and soft way. The reason for that may be that the new matrix language here is no longer English but Italian, and the target language appears only in the form of a linguistic example.

## CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the paper, the functions of code switching in foreign language classrooms were presented with a focus on the teacher's perspective. As previously seen, the reported extracts of teaching interaction displayed that code alternation is primarily used in clearly recognizable contexts with specific purposes.

Extract A and B gave two practical demonstrations of the various affective uses code-switching may be related to, from spontaneous expression of emotions and appreciation in discourse with students to firm and more effective reproaches and calls to order.

Extract C displayed another function, no longer linked to the mere management or interaction with the class/students, but closely related to one of the main purposes of teaching: transmit knowledge and information. The native linguistic code can therefore be of great utility in order to clarify the meaning of words, expressions and orders.

In this perspective, extract D showed a deeper expansion of this function, where the L1 becomes a tool for metalinguistic and grammatical discourses.

The same piece of conversation hinted at another possible use of code-alternation which is not only peculiar of the teacher category but it can be seen in all L2 speakers at different levels: compensation. When linguistic uncertainties threaten the regular flux of the speech, appealing to the native linguistic code appears to be most widespread and instinctive way to proceed in order to try to express what the speaker wants.

Finally, code-switching can be a good device to underline the importance of a particular piece of information, whether it is a grammar rule, a name or an order. The repetition of a single part of the discourse in the native language highlights its importance in relation to the rest of the speech.

In relation to what has been said until now, even though many teachers still show a slight suspiciousness towards the benefits of code-alternation in teaching a foreign language, code-switching may be considered as a useful strategy in classroom interaction, especially if the aim is to make meanings clear and to transfer the knowledge to students in an efficient way.

In conclusion, while the aim of this little research was to identify the most common uses of code-alternation limiting the field to the central figure of the teacher, there would be many more paths to investigate in the area of code-switching in foreign languages teaching contexts.

For further research, then, it would be of great interest analysing how the teacher's use and employ of his/her native language in these kinds of school environments is modified and adapted in relation to the linguistic level of the students. Is there any connection between the level of foreign language possessed by the students and the amount of code-switching exploited by the teacher? Or is the way a teacher uses code-alternation more or less fixed and personal, independently from the knowledge of his/her addressees? Does a teacher modify his/her usage of code-alternation in a conscious and intentional way or not?

It is undoubted that all these questions, and the possible researches which could spring out from them, would be relevant and useful in order to better understand the way the teacher/student interaction develops and to improve the teaching approach of the educators.

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