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**Code-switching in Second Language Learning**

**Introduction**

Several questions surface when we consider that English Language Learners in ESL classes code-switch throughout their second language learning process. Why does this code-switching occur? In what contexts do they find themselves code-switching? Do they even realize that they are doing it? For someone with an interest in teaching English as a Second language, the next logical questions pertain to the students themselves. Are there advantages or disadvantages to code-switching? Is it possible for teachers to use their students’ code-switching to help them learn their new language? If this is the case, how can they do so? The intention of this study is to research the ways in which students learning a second language code-switch, both consciously and subconsciously, between their first and second languages and the ways in which this affects them both socially and linguistically in the classroom. In addition, it expects to serve as a supplement to existing studies by inspecting both the manner in which second language learners code-switch throughout their second language acquisition and the possibility that teachers of these students can utilize their students’ first language to help them in learning their second.

Before we can understand the nature of code-switching, we must first understand the population of students that we are studying: second language learners. A second language learner is anyone who is learning a language other than their native language. In the United States, those who are learning English are most often considered within the literature on second language learners, although other languages are taught in this country. In school-age children, English
language learners represent the fastest growing segment of the population. Between 1979 and 2003 the percentage of English language learners between the ages of 5 and 17 years increased by 124%. Although the states of California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Illinois have historically been the hot spots for English Language Learners (ELLs) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, there has been an increase in students moving to other areas of the country, most notably the heartland of the United States (Flynn and Hill, 2005). According to a 2008 publication by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the foreign-born population in the U.S. has tripled over the last thirty years, with 14 million immigrants arriving to this country in the 1990s and another 14 million expected to arrive by the end of 2010. NCTE describes the ELL population as a diverse group of students speaking various amounts of English and an assortment of other languages. They state that 57 percent of today’s adolescent ELLs were actually born in the U.S., while the other 43 percent were born abroad, a statistic that may surprise those unfamiliar with the field. Some are considered Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) and have gaps in their educational careers that cause them to struggle in school. Others require Special Education classes, but this is not due to their lack of English, as students that are native English speakers may also require these resources. English language learners must be treated as a group as heterogeneous as they are, and they cannot have their individual needs ignored based on their native language or home country (Squire 2008).

Second language learning is a field that has inspired much research, but it still lacks empirically tested theories and many gaps in knowledge and unanswered questions exist. It is important to first understand the theories behind first language acquisition, the most notable of which are accredited to Noam Chomsky, who first proposed the concept of a Universal Grammar (UG), or the innate ability of humans to learn language. UG is the idea that “knowledge of a
language does not consist of rules as such but of underlying principles from which individual rules are derived,” (Cook, 2007, p 9). What this means is that ingrained into the mind of nearly every person is a system that takes linguistic input and determines the rules of the input language based on various restrictions and freedoms regarding that language. From these rules, a person can then decipher whether or not an utterance in said language is grammatical or not. This theory gives way to theories on second-language acquisition, such as those of Krashen (1981), a professor at the University of Southern California. He proposes that the ways that people acquire their second language are similar to the ways in which they acquire their first, and that acquisition and learning of a language are two entirely different processes. His “Monitor Theory” argues that there is a mental filter that contains the “rules” of the speakers’ second language and determines what utterances the speaker can and cannot produce (p3).

Teaching a second language is another topic with many researched theories. In the past, there were many teachers that believed that the most effective way to teach a second language was through rote exercises, memorization, and repetition within the classroom, as will be discussed later. Krashen (1981), on the other hand, argues that education through this type of “artificial” instruction leads to a lack of true understanding of the rules of a language (p.40). Later theorists, such as Cook (1999), a professor at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom, argues that teachers can “exploit” the learner’s L1 in order to help them understand their L2 and that second language learners must be looked at differently than monolingual speakers, since there are different cognitive processes involved with speaking a second language than with that of a first language ( p. 185) The current project hopes to contribute to these existing studies by further exploring how students code-switch through their second language learning process to see if it is helpful or harmful to their language learning.
1: About the Learner

Before discussing the theories and concepts behind code switching, second language acquisition, and the ways in which they interact in second language learners, it is important to first understand each idea individually. This section will discuss the concepts and vocabulary necessary for understanding the ways in which those concepts interact within the second language learner and throughout their education and acquisition of their second language.

1.1 Bilinguals

One must begin with defining the idea of a bilingual person. In countries such as the United States, where many people speak only one language, English, bilingualism is often considered to be limited to only a select group of people. However, Wei (2000) claims that as many as one in three people worldwide can technically be considered “bilingual” (p.6) But what does the term bilingual mean? Is it limited to those who can speak two languages with equal fluency or that have known two languages since birth? Is it limited to those who can listen, speak, read, and write in two languages, or can those who have lesser competence in some of the language skills also be considered bilingual? Do we classify those who speak dialects of a standard language? Do we include individuals who can understand a language but not produce it? It is clear that the definition of bilingualism is not concrete and thus needs to be defined further than simply an individual that speaks two languages.

Bilingual individuals may have acquired their second language at any point throughout the course of their lifetime, and they can be categorized in this parameter. Wei has multiple definitions for the different types of bilinguals, including those that are based upon when the second language was acquired. “Compound bilinguals” acquired their two languages at the same time. “Early bilinguals” are those that acquired their second language early in their childhood.
“Late bilinguals” are those that acquired their second language later than childhood (Wei, 2000 pp.6-7). The current project will examine students who are acquiring or learning a second language during their school-age years (5-18) after already attaining mastery of their first language, or native language. It will also examine students acquiring their second language at the college level (18 years and over). These students would then be considered “successive bilinguals” or “consecutive bilinguals,” since the study of their second language succeeds their first chronologically (Wei, 2000, p 6). Otto (2006) also considers successive bilinguals to be anyone learning their second language after the age of three, so the majority of school-aged children fit into that category,

There are other ways of categorizing bilinguals aside from the point in life at which they acquired their second language, such as the speaker’s proficiency in their second language. According to Wei (2000), a “balanced bilingual”, or an “equilingual”, is one whose master of their two languages is roughly equivalent. If the mastery of both of these languages is at a native or near-native level, then they would be considered to be a “maximum bilingual.” A “dominant bilingual” has a higher level of proficiency in one of their languages and uses that language significantly more than the other (p6-7). Wei (2000), states that in this respect, a “minimal bilingual” is one who has very little knowledge of their second language, perhaps knowing only a few words or phrases. Someone that is in the early stages of bilingualism, whose second language is still not yet fully developed, would be called an “incipient bilingual,” while an “ascendant bilingual” is one whose knowledge of their second language is developing due to the increased use of that language(p.6-7). If a minimal bilingual is found on one end of the language development spectrum, then a “dormant bilingual” is one whose second language is more dominant than their first, which could occur if they emigrated to a country where the population
does not speak their first language and have very little opportunity to use it, would be the other extreme (Wei, 2000, p.6-7). This study examines the learning patterns of bilinguals at all levels of English language acquisition, from those learning their first words of English to those that appear to have almost full mastery of the language.

1.2 Language Alternation

Any learner of a second language will display language alternation, whereby the speaker, quite simply, switches which language they use. This alternation could be between two languages that they know equally well or between their native language and a language that they are in the process of learning. As Grosjean (1982) points out, any speaker of any language is equipped with many different ways of expressing the same thought or idea. A speaker of English asking for a glass of water could say “I want a drink of water; give me some water; I’m thirsty; water, please; could I please have a drink of water; would it be possible to have a drink of water; it’s really hot in here; and so on,” (p.127). He goes on to describe the four main reasons that monolingual speakers switch between registers, or manners of speaking. First, there is the setting and situation in which the speaker finds him or herself. Grosjean (1982) asserts that one is likely to speak more formally when giving a lecture to a group of scholars than at a party with friends. Second, the characteristics of the people participating in the interaction have an effect on the way the interaction takes place. Sometimes without realizing it, we place other people in categories based on their age, sex, or occupation and based on our roles in relation to each other. A conversation between a husband and wife or two close friends will most likely be more familiar or intimate than a conversation between a student and a professor (Grosjean, 1982, pp 127-128). A third factor influencing register choice is the topic of conversation, as a discussion of nuclear physics is likely to be very different than one about football in terms of vocabulary
and formality. Finally, there is the function that the interaction is serving. A conversation full of “small talk” or routine exchanges such as “please” and “thank you” will take on a much lighter tone than one that is meant to offer an apology. We see here a very complex organizational structure of the choice in the type of language an individual must make on a conversation-by-conversation basis. These are choices made by only a monolingual speaking to another monolingual speaker of the same language (Grosjean, 1982, pp 127-128).

Individuals that speak more than one language must also make language choices on a conversation-by-conversation basis. They will find themselves in the same situation as monolinguals when it comes to language choice, but with the added complexity of having to choose a language in addition to a register in which to communicate. They may even have to change language and register, depending on to whom they are speaking. Language choice has been defined as “who speaks what language to whom and when,” (Fishman, 1965, p 88). Two bilingual people that speak the same two languages have the option of choosing either language. In addition, it is also possible for conversation between people with control over two different languages to use both languages throughout their discourse. They could speak in their native language, which in this paper will be called $L1$; they could speak in their second language, which in this paper will be called $L2$; or they could speak in a combination of the two languages. There are several different types of language alternation, including code-switching, where the speaker changes languages at sentence boundaries, code-mixing, where the speaker changes languages within a sentence, and borrowing, where the speaker changes languages for only one word or phrase within the sentence (Grosjean, 1982, p.145-146). For the purpose of this study, we will use code-switching as a blanket term to cover all three of these definitions because it is an older and more recognizable term.
In what contexts do these forms of language alternation occur? In the case of students still learning and trying to master their L2, it may be difficult to say if they have full control over their language alternation or not, since they do not yet have full control over both of their languages. However, bilinguals who have full control and faculty over both of their languages (or all of them, if there are more than two), be they children or adults, almost always have complete control and awareness of both the fact that they are alternating their language use and the reasons why. These individuals must consider the same factors in register choice as monolinguals as well as additional factors that determine their language choice. Just as with monolinguals, it is important for bilingual speakers to consider who the participants are, and, more importantly, which languages they speak and with what level of proficiency. If they do not consider these additional factors, they take the risk of not only offending their conversation partner by using the wrong register but of not being able to communicate at all because the other person cannot understand them. Grosjean (1982) gives several examples of this, as we will discuss below. If a bilingual Spanish and English speaker were speaking to a native English speaker that had studied some Spanish in high school but was not proficient, it would not make sense for them to try to speak to that person in Spanish, because even if their partner know some words of the language, they would still not be able to fully understand. A second factor is the situation in which the speakers find themselves. A bilingual speaker speaking with their bilingual husband or wife will be much more comfortable code-switching than if he or she were speaking in a more formal situation, such as with their bilingual employer (135-145).

Grosjean (1982) discusses a third factor: the content of discourse. If a bilingual speaker of French and English had attended college in France for a physics degree, he or she might be able to talk about complex physics concepts only in French, since he or she may not have learned
the English terms necessary to discuss them in English. Finally, the function of the interaction has an effect on which language the bilingual speaker chooses to use. Offering an apology or asking a request of someone that prefers to speak in Portuguese rather than their second language, Spanish, would be best done in Portuguese. On the other hand, two bilingual German-English parents talking about a sensitive subject within earshot of their monolingual English-speaking children would most likely prefer to have their discussion in German. Speakers might also switch languages because the base language, or the one that they are primarily communicating in, might not have the capacity to express what they want to say in a single word or a succinct phrase, while their L2 does. Alternatively, that base language may actually have a word that expresses the idea that they are looking to express, but the speaker may not know it or may find it easier to access the word in the L2 (pp 135-145).

There are also times when the bilingual speaker does not put so much effort into deciding which language to use. If a speaker is in a situation where they know that they will be understood no matter which language or combination of languages they use, they are much more likely to code-mix as they speak. According to Grosjean (1982), code-mixing “takes place subconsciously; speakers are often quite unaware that they are switching from one language to another. Their main concern is with communicating a message or intent, and they know that the other person will understand them whether they use one or two languages,” (p.149). Crystal (1987) has also shown that when bilingual speakers are upset, confused, or tired, they are more likely to code-switch, even if their listener is not a speaker of the language to which they have code-switched. This is why new students may be observed to code-switch into their native language even if they don’t know that anyone can understand them: they are simply code-switching out of nervousness or because they feel uncomfortable.
1.3 Factors influencing Second –Language Learning

Before a speaker can begin to code-switch between two languages, they must first adequately master them. While language acquisition is something that is neither fully understood nor can be fully discussed in this thesis, it is important to understand second-language learning is not something that occurs in the course of a week, a month, or even a year. Fully acquiring a second language can take several years, despite the fact that many students are able to communicate enough to get by within a relatively short period of time. This is similar to first language acquisition in that it can take several years for the language to be mastered. However, there are other factors involved with second-language acquisition than can have a great affect on the student’s ability to acquire their second language, as we will now discuss.

A primary factor in the second-language acquisition process is the age of the learner. It is generally though that there exists a “critical period” of twelve years of age by which a speaker is much more likely to acquire a language (Birdsong, 1999). After this time, it is thought to become much more difficult for the speaker to learn a second language. Peregoy & Boyle (2008) write that another factor that can influence the student’s ability to acquire a second language is what their native language is and what the language they are trying to acquire is. It is much easier to acquire a language that is similar in terms of phonology or syntax to one’s first language, especially if they are of the same language family. This is why it would be much easier for a speaker of a Romance language, such as Spanish, to learn another Romance language, such as Italian, than for them to learn a Slavic language, such as Russian. A third factor is the learner’s motivation to acquire the second language. If the learner is an immigrant to or a refugee in a country that speaks a different language then they do and acquisition is necessary for daily life, they will be much more motivated than an American high school student trying to learn
Spanish in order to pass a test or fulfill a foreign language requirement. Finally, there is the critical factor of the speaker’s aptitude for learning. If the student has a learning disability or some kind of mental handicap, it may make it difficult for them to master a first language, let alone a second.

2: About Language Instruction

2.1 Theories of Second Language Acquisition

There is still much debate and research to be done within the field of Linguistics about the theories behind Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Gass (1995) claims these theories are important to understand for this study because “language teaching during the past 50 years or so has relied heavily on linguistic theories of learning” (p7). She states that there are several contradicting theories of SLA. First, she describes Universal Grammar-based SLA, which the Second Language Learner (SLL) utilizes principles of UG by considering the rules that they have derived for their first language and adjusting them to fit their new language (Gass, 1995, p.7). As was mentioned earlier in this study, the theory behind UG is that “all language consists of a set of abstract principles that characterize core grammars of all natural languages,” and that this knowledge is innate in all humans (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p 121). UG defines the limits of each language possible in human speech, which means that it allows humans to specify rules that their own language follows. This means that language learning is essentially understanding the rules of a particular language, as well as learning its vocabulary. According to Gass & Selinker (1994), this makes learning a second language possible, because learners are “equipped with an innate mechanism that constrains possible grammar formation,” (p.121). This is also known as the “poverty of the stimulus” argument which advocates that positive evidence, or the input that the SLL receives, is not enough to provide all of the information necessary for the SLL to fully
understand the rules of their new language. Therefore, there must be an underlying, innate system through which language is processed in the human brain (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p.122).

Though useful, this can lead to an incorrect transfer of rules from a learner’s native language to their L2. For example, if their native language is French, they will assume that a sentence such as “she always eats potatoes” is incorrect in English because it is incorrect in French until they are taught differently (Gass, 1995, p8). In order for SLLs to understand the rules of their new language, they must be given some type of evidence if the rules that they understand for their native language are applicable or not. If a learner is given “positive evidence,” then they are receiving an example of how to correctly phrase a thought through the mere act of hearing a speaker of that language produce it grammatically in that language. Gass, (1994) asserts that if they are given “negative evidence,” then they are being told either directly or indirectly that a phrase that they have uttered is incorrect and ungrammatical in the target language. It is important for SLLs to receive both positive and negative evidence in their new language, so that they can both have models of correct grammar and be informed when their own productions are incorrect (p8).

Another derivative of the theory of Universal Grammar in Second Language Acquisition is Krashen’s Monitor Theory. As discussed earlier, Krashen stresses that there is an important difference between conscious second language learning and unconscious second language acquisition, and that acquisition is far more important (Krashen, 1981 p1). Krashen (1981) suggests that second language acquisition is a process similar to that of first language acquisition in children. Just as with a child acquiring their first language, “error correction and explicit teaching of rules are not relevant to language acquisition, but caretakers and native speakers can modify their utterances addressed to acquirers to help them understand, and these utterances,
called “comprehensible input,” are thought to help the acquisition process (p1). In his opinion, classroom instruction is only helpful if the learner has no other source of comprehensible input, which would ideally be as much exposure to and interaction with as many speakers of the language being learned as possible. He believes that explicit language instruction can help, but that its only real function is to supply comprehensible input to those that wouldn’t have access to it outside of a classroom, such as students studying a language that is not natively spoken in their country. However, to those students that have regular access to comprehensible input from outside sources, explicit language instruction does rather little to assist in the acquisition of the second language being learned.

This is a differing theory than that suggested by Gass and Selinker, in that Krashen is asserting that only positive evidence is necessary for language acquisition, whereas Gass and Selinker insist that it is not enough. On the other hand, Krashen (1981) asserts that conscious language learning is in fact helped along by error correction and explicit explanation of the rules of the grammar of the language, but that “conscious learning is available to the performer only as a Monitor,” which helps in determining the speaker’s utterances once they have learned the rules of their new language (p2). He goes on to explain that the Monitor can only be effective under certain conditions: that the speaker have enough time to process their message, that the speaker be focused on conveying their message correctly, and that the speaker have a clear enough understanding of the rule that he or she is attempting to apply. Since these three conditions are often difficult to find together at the same time, he insists that conscious language learning is a difficult concept to apply to real-time performance (Krashen, 1981, p.3).

In addition to the cognitive processes of second language acquisition, there is a developmental process to Second Language Acquisition. Grosjean (1982) examines the research
of Fillmore (1976), which suggests that there exist three different stages of language acquisition in children in natural environments. According to Fillmore (1976), the child first develops social relationships with native speakers of their target language, engaging in “interactional” rather than “informational” activities. Next, the child will focus on actually communicating with the native speakers, and finally, they will determine if their utterances are correct or incorrect (Grosjean, 1982, p. 195-196). In addition, Fillmore identifies five cognitive and three social strategies that second language learners utilize until they have full control of their second language. These include strategies such as using formulaic expressions and giving the impression that they can understand the language to encourage further communication until the language is actually understood (Grosjean, 1982, p 196).

This theory is still considered valid today, as more modern experts still make a distinction between the type of language used for basic social interaction and the types of language necessary for academic reasons. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) define “Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)” as “language skills needed for social conversation purposes,” and “Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)” as “formal language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, used for academic learning,” (p. 63). According to them, students may demonstrate BICS within a relatively short period, between six months and two years of their arrival in a new country. This means that they can communicate well enough to perform everyday tasks and negotiate meanings within their language. However, it can take five or more years before CALP develops and they are able to demonstrate the same academic competence in speaking and writing as their native-speaking peers (Peregoy and Boyle, 2008, p 63-64). In a pedagogical setting, this means that although students may appear to understand their new language after a few months of study in their new country, as they may be
communicating confidently or competently with their peers and teachers, they most likely have yet to develop a deeper understanding of the language such that they will be able to perform on par with their classmates, so teachers cannot expect this of them.

2.2 Schools of Thought on Methodology

Over the past three decades or so, there has been much research on code-switching in the classroom across various fields and throughout an assortment of countries. Martin-Jones (1995) states that the 1970s was a time when educators and linguists focused much time on recording and documenting how much time SLLs L1 and L2 were used in order to determine how affective bilingual education was on the language development of child SLLs (p 92). She claims that at that time, it was believed that when teachers aimed to use both the L1 and the L2 in equal amounts, then it would actually be detrimental to the child’s development of their first language, because the time that could have been spent on advancing the child’s first language development was instead spent on beginning the child’s second language development (94). Though research was initiated on this topic in the 1970s, with the focus being on the different forms of bilingual education in order to determine the pros and cons of each, there were not significant breakthroughs until the 1980s. At this point, researchers decided to take a more linguistic approach to their research rather than a statistical approach (Martin-Jones, 1995, p.92).

When exploring initial researchers of the 1980s, Martin-Jones cites Milk (1981, 1982) and Guthrie (1984) as head runners of the linguistic research approach. Milk (1981) argued that in a classroom where two languages are being learned simultaneously and spoken for an equal amount of time, one will be relegated to a lower status language, while the other becomes a higher status language, which creates what is known as diglossia within the classroom. This phenomenon can also be seen in more recent works, such as Kim Potowski’s 2007 work,
Language and Identity in a Dual Immersion School. In this study, Potowski examined the effect of bilingual education on both English L1 speakers learning Spanish as an L2 and Spanish L1 speakers learning English as an L2. She found that in this situation, English became the language with the higher status while Spanish became the language with the lower status. English was most generally used for academic activities, which Spanish was most generally used for off-task, non-academic activities. As such, the English development of both the English L1 students and the Spanish L1 students flourished, while the Spanish development of both the English L1 students and the Spanish L1 students suffered.

Research such as this has lead to various prescribed teaching methods. In addition to theories such as Krashen’s, which we discussed earlier, there are direct methods of teaching language that do involve explicit instruction rather than simply input. H Douglas Brown (1980), describes several such methods in his book Principles of Language Learning and Teaching, the most noteworthy being the Direct Method, the Grammar-Translation Method, and the Audio-lingual Method (pp. 240-242). The Direct Method is a means of teaching in which the lesson is conducted entirely in the target language, or the language that the students are trying to learn and without any translation into the native language, their first language. This method is relatable to Krashen’s approach to second language learning, and has been used as far back in the past as the 1880s (Brown, 1980, p 240). The Grammar-Translation method, on the other hand, places an emphasis on reading comprehension, grammar study, and translation, with almost no emphasis placed in the aural or spoken aspect of language. This method was considered to be somewhat economical, as it approached foreign language learning in a pedagogical way that teachers hoped would be efficient. Finally, Brown (1980) discusses the Audio-lingual method, by which the foreign language teacher focused on having his or her students mimic and memorize, rather than
translate. Here there is an emphasis on dialogues, drilling of rules, and correct pronunciation. This method was quite widespread for a significant amount of time, but further research proved it to be altogether ineffective at actually teaching language (p 240).

Today’s methodologies are generally based in meeting certain standards set by state education departments. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) write that in modern methodologies, teachers must use the curriculum standards set by the state to plan their instruction and assess their students’ learning. This helps educators set high and uniform expectations for their students while still allowing them to modify their lessons to the individual students’ needs (p.75). They also advocate for Differential Instruction, whereby teachers make it a point to acknowledge differences in students’ languages, proficiency levels, and abilities and use these differences to create a productive learning experience for all of their students. This type of instruction calls for ongoing assessment of students’ progress with regard to the curriculum and is effective because it takes into account the many possible learner differences that a teacher may encounter within his or her classroom. Another method that Peregoy & Boyle (2008) describe is Content-Based Instruction. This method involves using the target language as a medium of instruction to teach language through content simultaneously. Content Based Instruction is reminiscent of both Krashen’s recommended methods of instruction and the Direct Method used in the 1980s, and the target language is often paired with visuals, realia, or other non-verbal cues in order to convey the meaning to the students (p.79). According to them, research has shown that this type of instruction is effective in teaching second languages, but will not allow its students to attain a native-like level of proficiency. Therefore, they advocate for the use of explicit instruction, whereby the teacher focuses the lesson on vocabulary or grammar in order to help the students better understand it. Finally, Peregoy & Boyle (2008) explain the concept of Shadowed
Instruction, which is also similar to the Direct Method and to Content Based Instruction in that allows for modification to ensure that all students understand the material. This method is especially helpful for mainstream content area teachers that have ELLs in their classroom, as it allows them to teach their classes as they normally would with only a few modifications to ensure their ELLs’ comprehension (p. 79).

3: The Interface of Code-switching and Instruction

Now that we have an understanding about the nature of bilingualism and code-switching and about the history of teaching methodologies for bilinguals, we can examine the ways in which it comes to play within the classroom. Here, we will look at how code-switching manifests itself in several different classrooms as well as look at some of the author’s own field observations in classes where English as a Second Language (ESL) was being taught.

3.1 Code-switching in the Classroom

Within the classroom, code-switching can occur for several different reasons and in several different contexts. Marilyn Martin-Jones (1995), who examined two studies carried out by Zentella (1981) and Lin (1988, 1990) in bilingual classrooms, found several causes of code-switching within the classroom setting. These studies established that code-switching by the teacher from the L2, which was English in these studies, into the L1, which was either Spanish or Chinese, occurred for very specific reasons: to establish understanding, to make asides, or to define situations as being a formal lesson or an informal conversation (Martin-Jones, 1995, p. 95). In cases such as these, code-switching can be seen as a tool which teachers can use to help students understand the direction of a lesson or to establish authority.

Another study carried out by Martin-Jones (1995) examined the existence of bilingual teacher aides within the classrooms of monolingual teachers. This study observed inner-city
primary schools in England that had bilingual teacher assistants who spoke South Asian languages such as Panjabi or Gujarati (p. 101). Upon their observations, they discovered that in these classrooms, the bilingual aide’s roles included working with small groups of children that spoke that language or working alongside the monolingual classroom teacher to translate for the students learning English. The bilingual aide would code-switch according to the needs of the students and the native languages of the students. Martin-Jones (1995) notes that if the bilingual students all spoke the same language, the aide would use that language when addressing the group. However, if the group contained some students that spoke another language, the aide would address the group in the language which the most students spoke and then assist the students that spoke a different language separately (p. 103). Martin-Jones (1995) also observed that although the bilingual teaching assistants were described as working “alongside” the monolingual classroom instructors, they were consistently considered to be merely support staff with little to no potential for career development (p. 105). The observations made by Martin-Jones with regard to dual-language use in the classroom are consistent with those made by other researchers such as Potowski (2007) in that when two languages are present in the classroom, one language will either overtly or covertly be established as the dominant language, with the other language used almost exclusively to support it.

Potowski (2007) also examined classrooms where two languages, Spanish and English, were being used. In her study, she determined that English, which became the dominant language of the classroom, was used among the students for almost all “on-task” activities, which is how she categorized conversation directly related to the task at hand. “Off-task” activities, which Potowski classified as any conversation having nothing to do with the assigned task, tended to be conducted in Spanish, while “management” activities, defined as being used to
manage the completion of an on-task activity, were conducted in English (p.67). In addition, Potowski (2007) writes that the students used only English to discuss subjects such as television, music and movies and to engage in activities such as fighting or teasing. In fact, she writes that “most instances of peer Spanish appeared not to carry out any authentic communicative function” (p.77). These observations are interesting because in the classrooms that she observed, Spanish and English were intended to be treated as equal languages that were used for the same amounts of time and for the same purposes, which is much unlike the intentions of an ordinary second-language learning classroom. Despite these intentions, English still became the dominant language and Spanish still became a language that was given a lower status and was used mostly for the purpose of supporting English.

In my own field observations for my ESL teaching methods classes, I observed many of the same patterns of language use as described in these works. Many of the teachers that I observed were unable to speak their students’ native languages, and even if they were able to they chose not to. Learning English was the obvious goal in these classrooms, so English was the language in which class was conducted and which the students were encouraged to speak with each other. However, some teachers that had beginners or newcomer students in their classrooms would allow more advanced students to mentor them or be their buddy. These students would be allowed to and encouraged to code-switch with the less advanced students throughout the lesson in order to translate the lesson or explain key terms to the new students. Though it was rare, I did also observe some teachers using the students’ L1 themselves as a means of defining a vocabulary word or helping them to understand an important point of the lesson. For example, one teacher I observed was helping prepare her students for a state exam in Social Studies, so her students were studying early American history. If a student had the vocabulary knowledge in
their L1, in this case Spanish, the teacher would use the Spanish word in the definition of the English so that the student would have a concrete concept on which to anchor their understanding of the vocabulary.

3.2 To Code-switch or Not to Code-Switch?

In cases such as the ones studied above, code-switching can be seen as a useful tool for communication and understanding with one’s students. Some researchers see code-switching as a means to student comprehension. Martin Jones (1995) even states that it is “impossible to compile a comprehensive inventory of the functions of code-switching,” (p. 99). Cook (1991) also implies that code-switching can be used within the classroom in order to help emerging bilingual students understand the course material. He writes that “when the teacher knows the language of the students, the classroom itself is often a code-switching situation,” suggesting that the lesson can be conducted in either the students’ L1 or L2, depending on which is most appropriate for the topic at hand and which the students will best understand. He even describes code-switching within the classroom as “inevitable” if the students and the teacher share the same languages (pp. 66-67).

However, there are many that are of the belief that the only way for students to learn a new language is for them to be totally immersed in it. For example, Peregoy and Boyle (2008), as discussed earlier, are proponents of several different types of instruction that focus on total immersion, declaring that when a student is placed in a situation such as this they will acquire their new language based solely on their inherent need to communicate (p. 59). Others, such as Bernache, Galinat and Jiminez (2005) also endorse sheltered instruction by having an ESL teacher “push in” to the content classroom to provide extra support for ESL students while still immersing them in English (pp. 67-73). The reasoning behind attitudes towards second language
learning and teaching that only endorse full immersion in the second language stem from research dating back to the 1800s, as Brown (1980) showed us with the Audio-lingual, Direct, and Grammar-Translation methods. As of the present time, the official policy of many districts and ESL programs is to fully immerse the students in English unless the class has been set aside as a bilingual classroom. However, in my observations, many teachers allowed code-switching between the students regardless and code-switched with the students themselves if they were able to.

3.3 Opinion/Residual Questions

After compiling so much research on the subject of code-switching in second language learning, it has become clear that there are many different and varying opinions about whether or not code-switching is beneficial to students. Though there are many proponents of English-only immersion for students learning English as their second language, it would appear based on research, observations in ESL classrooms, and my own experience with second language learning that code-switching can definitely be beneficial to students, especially those still in the beginning stages of language learning. Students that have little experience with English can benefit from having the teacher translate new vocabulary terms into their native language, if possible, or from having a buddy in class to help them understand.

Though we have examined many experts’ opinions on the subject matter, we still have left some residual questions about code-switching in second language learning, namely questions about the students themselves and how they see their code-switching. Is it possible that the students, those that are actually experiencing all of these theories on second language learning put into practice, disagree with all of the research done on the subject? Is it possible that they believe their code-switching to be detrimental to their learning or that they are embarrassed of it?
Is it possible that they are not even aware of their own language use? It is clear that, though we have learned much from researching the expert opinions of those working in the field, we must still examine the thoughts of the students that must learn according to the theories of these experts.

4: Survey and Analysis

4.1 Survey Design

After compiling so much research on the subject of ELLs code-switching as they learn English, it seemed appropriate to explore how ELLs in the actual classroom viewed their own code-switching, both in terms of what they thought their habits were and how they felt about it. To do so, I administered a survey to several English as a Second Language Classes, which can be found in the appendix. The purpose of this survey was twofold: to explore how authentic ELLs felt about their language usage and to compile enough data to compare these feelings to those opinions discussed in the literature on the subject.

The survey was designed such that the students would be answering three types of questions: questions to find out their demographics, questions to examine their motivation to learn a second language, and questions to quantify their language use.

The first three questions were asked to determine the demographics of the students in order to better understand the population of students surveyed. These questions were rather straightforward, asking what the students’ native languages were, their current age, and the age at which they began learning English.

The next eight questions were asked in order to look at the students’ motivation for learning their second language. As was mentioned in previous chapters, the motivations of language learners can vary greatly and has a strong influence on how well the student will learn
the language. First, the students were asked outright how important it was for them to learn a second language, namely English, on a scale of one to five in order for them to show exactly how much they wanted to learn. Next, they were asked how important it was to them, on a scale of one to five, that they be able to use both of their languages in the classroom. This question would help determine how important the students found it to continue learning their first language in the classroom. Next, the students were asked how they felt about using two languages. This question did not have a scale; the students were asked to fill in their own answers. This would allow them to show their attitudes towards bilingualism and code-switching. The students were also asked to rate, on a scale of one to five, how difficult they found it to learn English. This question also shows motivation as the more difficult a student finds a language to learn, the less motivated they will be to learn it.

The next two questions also asked the students to come up with their own answers, this time to questions asking them the purposes for which they use their first and second languages in the classroom. These questions would be used to show the reasons behind the students’ code-switching. The students were also asked questions to show the type of language learning environment their ESL classes were, in two questions that asked if they were ever reprimanded by their instructor or discouraged by their peers for using two languages. These questions were designed to show the language attitude in their learning environment, which can also have an effect on their motivation to learn their second language as well as retain their first language.

There were two qualitative questions asked of the students in order to get an understanding of their language use and the frequency of their code-switching both inside and outside the classroom. The first of these asked how often the students used both of their languages in the classroom on a scale of one to five, with one being “less than once per week”
and five being “multiple times per class.” The second asked how often the students used both of their languages with their peers on the same scale.

The survey was administered to a total of 83 students, 69 on the college level and 14 on the high school level. To administer the survey, I went to each classroom, gave the students the surveys, and collected them, a process which took about ten minutes per class.

Demographics

On the college level, all 69 surveys were given to students enrolled in English as a Second Language classes at Stony Brook University ranging in proficiency level from beginners to advanced learners. Of them, 55 listed Chinese as their native language (79.7%), 12 listed Korean (17.3%), 1 listed Bengali (1.4%), and 2 listed Spanish (2.8%), which can be seen in Figure 1 below. One of the students listed both Korean and Spanish as their native language, which is why this particular data yields a total of 70.

![Native Language- University Students](image)

Figure 1

The ages of these students ranged from 17 to 29. Of the students, 33 were between the ages of 17 and 19 (47.8%), 25 were between the ages of 20 and 22 (36.2%), 9 were between the ages of 23 and 25 (13%), and 2 were between the ages of 28 and 29 (2.8%) as can be seen in Figure 2 below.
The age that a student begins learning their second language is also an important factor in their language acquisition. These students began learning English from between the ages of 4 and 18. Of these, 6 began between the ages of 4 and 6 (8.6%), 16 between the ages of 7 and 9 (23.1%), 20 between the ages of 10 and 12 (28.9%), 21 between the ages of 13 and 15 (30.4%), and 9 between the ages of 16 and 18 (13%) as can be seen in Figure 3 below.

On the high school level, the 14 surveys were given to the ESL students at Sachem North High School in Lake Ronkonkoma, NY. These students also ranged in proficiency from beginner to advanced. Though these students were much smaller in number than the university students,
they had a much greater variety of linguistic background. Of these students, three listed French/Haitian Creole (22.4%), three listed Spanish (22.4%) two listed Thai as their native language (14.2%), two listed Chinese (14.2%), two listed Urdu (14.2%), one listed Turkish (7.1%), and one listed Bengali (7.1%) as can be seen in Figure 4 below.

![Native Language- High School Students](image)

**Figure 4**

These students ranged in age from 15 to 18. Of the students, four of them were age 15 (28.5%), four were age 16 (28.5%), two were age 17 (11.7%), and three were age 18 (21.4%), as can be seen in figure 5 below.

![Current Age- High School Students](image)

**Figure 5**

The Sachem students began learning English from an age range of infancy to 14 years of age. One student reported that they started learning English at less than a year old (7.1%), four
students reported starting to learn between the ages of four and six (28.5%), four between the ages of nine and eleven (28.5%), and two at the age of 14 (14.2%), which is shown in Figure 6 below.

![Second Language Learning Age- High School Students](image)

**Figure 6**

**4.2 Survey Results**

The answers that the students provided were analyzed quantitatively, with the answers to each question being either strictly counted or categorized and then counted, as can be seen below.

**Motivation**

The students were asked to rate the importance of learning their second language on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “not important” and 5 being “very important.” To this, no Stony Brook students answered with a 1 or a 2. Four students answered 3, “moderately important,” 12 answered 4, and an overwhelming 53 students answered that learning English was 5, “very important.” This is shown in Figure 7, below.
The high school students’ responses were much more skewed: no students answered with a 1, 2, or 3. Two students chose 4, and 12 chose 5, as shown in Figure 8 below.

The students were also asked how important it was for them to use both of their languages in class. To this, 3 university students answered 1, “not important,” 10 students answered 2, 19 students answered 3, “moderately important,” 18 answered 4, and 19 answered 5, “very important.” See Figure 9 below.
The high school students’ responses were similar: one student chose 1, one chose 2, three chose 3, two chose 4, and seven chose 5, as shown in Figure 10 below.

Next, the students were asked how they felt about using two languages, to which they were able to provide their own responses. The responses were then categorized as being positive, negative, or neutral/mixed. To this question, there were 42 positive responses from the university students, with students writing that they felt “great,” “cool,” or “smart” because of their ability to speak two languages. There were 14 negative responses, with students writing that they felt “awkward,” “confused,” or that they “hated” their second language. Eight students responded with a neutral or mixed feeling, with such as “It’s fine.” Five students did not respond
to the question or their responses did not answer the question. See Figure 11 below.

![Feelings Towards Using Two Languages - University Students](image)

Figure 11

The high school students’ responses were overwhelmingly positive. Twelve of them answered with positive responses, writing that they felt “good,” “special,” or “helpful.” Two students did not respond and there were no negative responses, which can be seen in Figure 12 below.

![Feelings Towards Using Two Languages - High School Students](image)

Figure 12

The next two questions concerned the purposes for which the students used each of their languages in the classroom. These questions also asked the students to provide their own written responses. The responses to question 7, “For what purpose do you use your first language in the classroom?” were sorted into six categories: Communication with native speakers of that
language, Translation, Comfort, Exclusion, No use, and No response. Some students wrote more than one of these answers. Forty-two students Stony Brook students wrote that they use their first language in the classroom for communication and twenty wrote that they used it for translation purposes. Three wrote that they are more comfortable using their first language, one wrote that they don’t use their first language at all, and one wrote that they use it to “talk secret” and exclude others from their conversations. Seven students did not answer the question. See Figure 13 below.

The Sachem North students’ responses were a bit sparse for this question, but nine students wrote that they used their first language for translation, three for communication with native English speakers, and one wrote that they never use their first language. Two students did not respond to the question, as seen in Figure 14 below.
The responses to question eight, “For what purpose do you use your second language in the classroom,” were sorted into four categories: for academic purposes, to improve their English skills, to communicate with the instructor or other native English speakers, and no response. Twenty-three university students responded with answers that fell into the “Academic” category, 19 with answers that fell into the “Improvement” category, 23 with answers that fell into the “Communication” category, and eight students did not give responses, as shown in Figure 15 below.
To this question, ten high school students provided answers that fell into the “Academic” category, one that fell into the “Improvement” category, one that fell into the “Communication” category, and three with no response. See Figure 16 below.

![Second Language Purpose- High School Students](image)

**Figure 16**

Another question designed to test the students’ motivation asked them how difficult, on a scale of one to five, they thought it was to learn English. To this, 2 Stony Brook students responded 1, “not difficult,” (2.8%), 3 students responded 2 (4.3%), 40 responded 3, or “moderately difficult,” (57.9%), 23 responded 4 (33.3%), and 6 responded 5, or “very difficult” (8.6%). See Figure 17 below.

![Difficulty of Learning English- University Students](image)

**Figure 17**
The twelve high school students’ responses were such that three chose 1 (25%), one chose 2 (8.3%), five chose 3 (41.6%), two chose 4 (16.6%), and one chose 5 (8.3%), as shown in Figure 18 below.

![Difficulty of Learning English- High School Students](image)

Figure 18

The next two questions that the students were asked were used to determine the type of language learning environment their classrooms were. The students were asked if they were ever reprimanded or discouraged by either their instructors or their peers for using two languages, or code-switching. To this, 20 Stony Brook students answered that they did get reprimanded by their instructor, while 46 wrote that they did not and three said that they sometimes did. To the second question, 14 students wrote that they did feel discouraged by their peers for using two languages, while 48 said they did not and seven said they sometimes did. See Figure 19 below.

![Reprimands from Instructors- University Students](image)
The Sachem North students, on the other hand, had responses in the completely opposite direction. Thirteen of them answered that they did not ever feel discouraged by their instructor, and one wrote that they sometimes did, as can be seen in Figure 20 below.

When asked if they felt discouraged by their peers for using two languages, 14 university students wrote "yes," an overwhelming 48 wrote "no," and seven wrote "sometimes." See Figure 21.
To this question, the Sachem North students also responded overwhelmingly with “No.” Thirteen of them wrote that they never felt discouraged by their peers for using two languages, and one wrote that they sometimes did.

The final questions on the survey asked the students how often, on a scale of one to five, they used both of their languages in the classroom and with their peers. The university students’ reports show that in the classroom, seven of them use two languages less than once a week, seven do so about once per week, 20 do so multiple times per week, 14 do so about once per class, and 19 do so multiple times per class. With their peers, on the other hand, three students reported that they use two languages less than once a week, six that they do so about once per week, 20 that they do so multiple times per week, thirteen that they do so about once per class, and twenty-three that they do so multiple times per class. See Figure 22 below.

![Figure 22](image)

The high school students’ self-reports showed that in the classroom, two of them use both languages less than once per week, one of them about once per week, six of them multiple times per week, one of them about once per class, and four of them multiple times per class. With their peers, one of them reported using both languages less than once per week, one reported about once per week, six with multiple times per week, none with about once per class, and six with
multiple times per class, as shown in Figure 23 below.

![Dual-Language Use- High School Students](image)

**Figure 23**

4.3 Summary

The population of students surveyed for this study was diverse in both their age range and their native language. Overall, the students surveyed seemed to view their code-switching positively using words such as “cool” or “great” to describe it. A smaller percent seemed to view it in a negative light. With regard to the purposes for which they use their L1 within the classroom, most of them stated that they use it for translation or for communication, both of which are conducive to second language learning. They also seem to believe that using two languages is important because to them, English is moderately difficult, yet important to learn.

The students surveyed also appear to be using two languages within the classroom quite frequently, with most students stating that they do so several times within a class period and very often with their peers. This alone shows that there is a legitimate place for code-switching in the classroom, at least in the classes surveyed. Furthermore, based on survey responses indicating that the code-switching that did arise was primarily for academic and translation purposes, we
can reasonably conclude that instructors recognize that code-switching has a useful purpose when it fits the communicative goals of the classroom.

**Conclusion**

The goals of this study were to examine code-switching in second language learning, as well as the reasons behind it and the contexts in which it occurs. In addition, it sought to explore whether this code-switching was a benefit or a hindrance to second language learners’ acquisition of their new language and to see if teachers of these students would possibly be able to use this code-switching in order to assist their students in their learning of their new language, which was generally considered English for the purpose of this study.

First, the study examined the learners, that is to say bilinguals, by defining them as any individual that speaks more than one language. Though there may be different stages of bilingualism and levels of proficiency that a learner may have with their second language, it is important to include all individuals with the capacity to communicate in two languages as bilingual. Next, the study looked at different forms of language alternation, that is, how bilinguals switch back and forth between their languages, with whom, and in what contexts. We also looked at different factors that influence second language learning, including age, native language, and motivation to learn the second language.

Different theories of second-language acquisition were explored, including those based on Chomsky’s Universal Grammar Theory and Krashen’s Monitor Theory and Fillmore’s stages of language acquisition. In addition, different schools of thought on teaching methodology were discussed, such as studies by Milk and Potowski on language diglossia and Brown’s descriptions of methodologies including the Direct, Grammar-Translation, and Audio-lingual Methods. More
modern methodologies were suggested, such as Differential or Content-Based instruction, as recommended by Peregoy and Boyle.

The third section of the study delved into the interface of code-switching and instruction by looking at two case studies done by Martin-Jones and Potowski. In addition, it included input from the author’s own field observations. This section established the different reasons that code-switching can occur in the classroom as well as gave input from various sources as to whether or not code-switching should be utilized in the classroom. However, we were left with residual questions, which lead us to the survey section of the study.

For the survey, the author polled 83 students of various ages and linguistic backgrounds about their language use and their attitudes towards using two languages, or code-switching. The survey revealed several key points: that the students find English moderately difficult to learn, that they find it very important to learn, that they code-switch quite frequently throughout their class periods for the purposes of translation and communication with their classmates, and that their instructors are generally not reprimanding or discouraging them from code-switching within class.

Based on much research and on conclusions drawn from the survey administered, it would appear as though code-switching is a useful tool for both students and teachers alike. Though many claim that in order to acquire a second language one must be completely immersed in it, teachers might consider using the students’ abilities to code-switch to their advantage, especially when working with beginners. The author hopes that this study will benefit both those working in the field of second language teaching and their students so that they might view code-switching as means of transferring knowledge from L1 to L2, especially in terms of syntax and vocabulary. Further research that could be done on the topic might include further exploring
specific code-switching incidences within second language learning classrooms or performing a comparative study of the proficiency of second language learners in a classroom that allows code-switching as opposed to a classroom that does not. A survey could also be administered in order to determine teachers’ attitudes towards code-switching to supplement the data already gathered about students’ attitudes. On the whole, code-switching in second language learning is a field in which there is much more exploration to be done, but it is the hope of the author that teachers in this field will soon be better able to use their students’ code-switching as a learning and teaching tool.
Appendix: Survey

ESL Survey

1. What is your native language? ________________________

2. At what age did you begin learning your second language? ______

3. How old are you now?_______

4. How important is it to you that you learn a second language?
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   not important  moderately important  very important

5. How important is it to you that you use both of your languages in the classroom?
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   not important  moderately important  very important

6. How do you feel about using two languages?

7. For what purpose do you use your first language in the classroom?

8. For what purpose do you use your second language in the classroom?

9. How difficult do you think it is to learn English?
   
   1  2  3  4  5
   not difficult  moderately difficult  very difficult
10. Do you ever get reprimanded or discouraged by your instructor for using two languages?

11. Do you ever feel discouraged by your peers for using two languages?

12. How often do you use both of your languages in the classroom?

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13. How often do you use both of your languages with your peers?

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References


