

APPROACHING THE PHENOMENON OF CODE SWITCHING IN CLASSROOM CONVERSATION DURING ONLINE ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION CLASSES AT SUNUNI ACADEMY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *This qualitative study investigates code switching in online EFL communication classes at SunUni Academy, Vietnam, focusing on Vietnamese - English bilingual interaction. Grounded in conversation analysis, the study analyzes 1,000 minutes of recorded data from five synchronous online classes (2025 - 2026), with 100 codeswitching instances selected for sequential analysis. Findings reveal that code switching is systematically organized within turn-taking and serves key pedagogical functions such as classroom management, task clarification, repair, and learning scaffolding. The study concludes that code switching functions as a strategic instructional resource, enhancing interactional coherence and effectiveness in online EFL teaching.*

Keywords: *Code switching, conversation analysis, online EFL classrooms, classroom conversation, SunUni Academy.*

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1. Introduction

Code switching, the alternation between two or more languages within a single interaction, is a common feature of multilingual EFL classrooms. Prior research has focused on face-to-face instruction, highlighting its roles in comprehension, classroom management, and pedagogical support. The rise of synchronous online EFL teaching, however, has reshaped interactional conditions, yet studies on online code switching remain limited, especially at the micro-interactional level.

Most existing research relies on functional or quantitative approaches, overlooking how code switching is sequentially produced, interpreted, and responded to in real time. Conversation analysis (CA) addresses this gap by examining naturally occurring talk and participants' orientation to language alternation.

This study investigates code switching in online EFL communication classes at SunUni Academy, Vietnam. Drawing on 1,000 minutes of recorded interaction from five synchronous classes, it adopts a qualitative CA-based design to explore Vietnamese - English bilingual interaction, focusing on the sequential organization of code switching and its pedagogical orientation by teachers and students.

Specifically, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

(1) How is code switching used and sequentially organized by Vietnamese teachers in online EFL classroom interaction at SunUni Academy?

(2) What pedagogical purposes does code switching fulfill, and how do participants orient to it during instructional moments in online EFL classrooms?

2. Literature review

2.1. Code switching in language education

Code switching refers to the alternation between two languages within a single interaction. From an interactional perspective, it is viewed as a strategic and context-sensitive resource through which bilingual speakers accomplish pedagogical and interactional goals. Although translanguaging has been proposed to describe fluid bilingual practices, an interactional code-switching framework is more compatible with Conversation Analysis, which examines how language alternation becomes sequentially relevant in talk. Previous studies show that code switching supports classroom management, scaffolding, and comprehension in language education.

2.2. Code switching in EFL classrooms and research gaps

Research in face-to-face EFL classrooms demonstrates the pedagogical value of code switching, yet most studies rely on functional categorization rather than fine-grained interactional analysis. CA-informed research on code switching in online EFL classrooms, particularly in the Vietnamese context, remains limited.

2.3. Conversation analysis and classroom discourse

Conversation analysis conceptualizes classroom interaction as sequentially organized talk. CA studies in L2 classrooms highlight how instructional actions are interactionally achieved. Integrating Auer's approach with Waring's pedagogical framework, the present study examines code switching as an interactionally organized instructional resource in online EFL classrooms.

3. Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative design grounded in Conversation Analysis (CA) to examine naturally occurring interaction in online EFL classrooms. CA provides the framework for analyzing how code switching is sequentially organized and functions as an interactional and pedagogical resource.

Data were collected from five synchronous online EFL communication classes at SunUni Academy, Vietnam, via a video-conferencing platform. Participants included bilingual Vietnamese - English teachers and adult learners (18 - 25 years). Participation was voluntary with informed consent.

Approximately 1,000 minutes of recorded classroom interaction were compiled without intervention. From this, 100 instances of code switching were selected through theory-driven sampling for detailed analysis of instructional talk, repair, classroom management, and pedagogical transitions. Excerpts were transcribed using a simplified Jeffersonian system, and analysis followed CA's inductive, data-driven approach, focusing on participants' orientation to language alternation. Ethical standards and anonymity were strictly maintained.

4. Results

4.1. Overall patterns of code switching in online EFL classrooms

The overall distribution of code switching functions identified in the dataset is summarized in Table 1. The table presents the relative frequency of each major functional category, illustrating how code switching is systematically employed by teachers to support instructional clarification, manage repair and comprehension checks, regulate classroom interaction, and facilitate pedagogical transitions in online EFL classrooms. Participants included 10 EFL teachers who were enrolled in a communication focused EFL course.

Table 1. Distribution of code switching functions

Function	Percentage (%) from 10 EFL teachers
1. Instructional clarification	100
2. Repair and comprehension checks	100
3. Classroom management	100
4. Pedagogical transition	100

Table 1 shows that the four main functions of code switching instructional clarification, repair and comprehension checks, classroom management, and pedagogical transitions were consistently observed in all 10 EFL teachers' practices. This indicates that code switching is a systematic, shared pedagogical strategy in online EFL classes at SunUni Academy rather than an occasional habit.

Instructional clarification was central: teachers frequently switched to Vietnamese when students hesitated or showed confusion, ensuring immediate

understanding. Similarly, code switching supported repair and comprehension checks, resolving misunderstandings after incorrect responses or silence.

Teachers also used code switching for classroom management, such as giving instructions, regaining attention, and organizing activities, where limited non-verbal cues made Vietnamese an efficient medium. Pedagogical transitions, like moving between explanation and practice, were regularly signaled through brief L1 switches.

These patterns highlight code switching as an institutionalized, purposeful interactional resource, closely aligned with the demands of online EFL teaching rather than individual teacher style.

4.2. Sequential positioning of code switching

The sequential environments in which code switching occurs are presented in Table 2. The table summarizes the relative frequency of key interactional positions, illustrating how teachers' code switching is closely tied to moments of interactional difficulty, task progression, and instructional scaffolding in online EFL classroom discourse.

Table 2. Sequential environments of code switching

Sequential position	Occurrence (%) from 10 EFL teachers
1. Post student silence	100
2. After incorrect response	100
3. During task transition	100
4. Pre-emptive scaffolding	100

The data in Table 2 highlight the sequential positioning of code switching within online EFL classroom interactions. The findings show that teachers systematically deploy code switching at specific interactional moments: following student silence, after incorrect responses, during task transitions, and as part of pre-emptive scaffolding. These positions indicate that code switching functions as an interactional strategy to maintain comprehension, support learner responses, and guide students smoothly through instructional activities.

For example, after a student hesitates in responding to a question, a teacher may switch from English to Vietnamese to clarify instructions or provide hints, thereby reducing confusion and sustaining engagement. Similarly, during task transitions, brief code switching helps signal shifts in activity while maintaining classroom flow and learner attention.

4.3. Participant orientation to code switching

Participants included 100 adult learners aged between 18 and 25 who were enrolled in a communication focused EFL course. All participants were bilingual speakers of Vietnamese (L1) and English (L2). Participation in the study was voluntary, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Table 3. Student responses following teacher code switching

Student response type	Percentage (%) 100 adult learners	Example in classroom context
1. Immediate uptake	96	Student immediately reformulates a sentence after the teacher explains a grammar rule in Vietnamese.
2. Clarified response	91	Student answers correctly after a brief L1 hint clarifying a vocabulary item.
3. Minimal acknowledgment	87	Student nods or types a short confirmation in chat after a procedural instruction in Vietnamese.
4. No response	4	Student fails to respond despite code switching; often occurs in technical issues or connectivity delays.

Table 3 data show that students in online EFL classrooms actively respond to teachers' code switching, with high immediate uptake (96%) and clarified responses (91%), indicating recognition of L1 as a pedagogical cue. Minimal acknowledgment (87%) and low no-response rates (4%) suggest that even brief switches effectively maintain alignment and engagement.

For instance, switching from English to Vietnamese during complex grammar explanations or task instructions prompts students to reformulate answers correctly and follow directions promptly. This demonstrates that code switching is systematically organized, interactionally meaningful, and closely tied to instructional contingencies such as comprehension support, task transitions, and classroom management. Students interpret these switches as deliberate scaffolding, which sustains interactional flow and facilitates learning.

4.4. Implications of CS use in online instructional settings

The findings from online EFL classrooms at SunUni Academy indicate that teachers' use of code switching is highly intentional and context dependent, rather than habitual. This aligns with Auer's (1998) sequential model, which posits that code switching functions as a socially organized and interactionally contingent action, produced in response to specific communicative needs rather than as a random linguistic choice.

Table 4. Interactional contingency of teacher code switching

Pedagogical trigger	Frequency (%)	Classroom example
1. Student misunderstanding	32	Teacher switches to Vietnamese to clarify a complex grammar rule when students give incorrect answers.
2. Silence or hesitation	28	L1 is used to prompt a student after a prolonged pause in response to a question.

3. Transition between lesson phases	22	Brief switch into Vietnamese signals the move from explanation to practice activity.
4. Task scaffolding and hints	18	Teacher provides pre-emptive L1 hints before students attempt a challenging speaking task.

During oral activities or complex grammar explanations, teachers strategically switch to Vietnamese (L1) to scaffold comprehension, simplify instructions, and maintain interactional continuity, enabling learners to respond correctly in English. These patterns show that code switching is a purposeful pedagogical tool, aligned with interactional contingencies such as learner understanding, turn taking, and task sequencing.

Consistent with prior research, L1 use supports classroom management, particularly in online settings where visual and non-verbal cues are limited. Code switching is not random but strategically deployed to resolve comprehension difficulties, guide task transitions, and sustain classroom flow.

This study confirms that, in online EFL classrooms, code switching functions as a sequentially organized, socially situated resource that enhances comprehension, regulates interaction, and promotes learner engagement.

5. Discussion

5.1. Instructional clarification

Code switching primarily serves to clarify instructions in online EFL classes, aligning with Gumperz's (1982) view of it as a contextualization cue. Teachers switch to Vietnamese (L1) when students hesitate or show confusion, enabling immediate understanding and task completion. CA-informed training and guidelines can help teachers use L1 purposefully, pairing it with L2 practice to maintain target language exposure.

5.2. Repair sequences

Teachers deploy L1 strategically during repair, including post-silence, after incorrect responses, task transitions, and pre-emptive scaffolding. These interventions maintain interactional flow, resolve misunderstandings, and support learner confidence. Teacher training should emphasize recognizing repair moments and integrating L1 with L2 reinforcement.

5.3. Classroom management

L1 interventions aid classroom management by restoring order, clarifying procedures, and maintaining engagement. CA-informed strategies and monitoring ensure that code switching supports management without reducing L2 exposure.

5.4. Sequential sensitivity

Online classes introduce interactional vulnerabilities (lags, silences). Teachers use L1 to preempt or resolve these issues, ensuring smooth turn-taking and task

progression. Training should highlight timely and contextually relevant code switching.

5.5. *Pedagogical intentionality*

Code switching is deliberate and contextually grounded. Teachers should document triggers, plan interventions, and integrate them with lesson design to maximize learning while maintaining instructional flow.

5.6. *Learner agency*

Students actively respond to L1 cues, constructing meaning, self-correcting, and engaging in interaction. Tasks should allow learners to leverage code switching strategically, promoting bilingual competence and interactional awareness.

5.7. *Pedagogical contribution*

Code switching supports multiple functions: clarifying instructions, managing repairs, facilitating comprehension, signaling transitions, and maintaining classroom flow. Strategic L1 use enhances engagement and L2 proficiency in online settings.

5.8. *Theoretical implications*

The study reinforces viewing code switching as an interactionally meaningful, pedagogically motivated resource rather than a linguistic deficiency. Sequential analysis confirms that its effectiveness emerges from participants' co-construction of meaning).

5.9. *Relevance to research questions*

Findings confirm that L1-L2 alternation is systematic and pedagogically oriented, occurring at critical moments such as hesitation, incorrect responses, and task transitions. Learners' high uptake rates demonstrate their active alignment with these switches.

5.10. *Long-term impact*

CA-informed understanding encourages deliberate L1 use, improving comprehension, scaffolding, and classroom management. Long-term adoption can enhance teacher beliefs, institutionalize bilingual practices, and inform curriculum and training in digitally mediated EFL contexts.

6. **Conclusion**

This study examined code switching in online EFL communication classes at SunUni Academy using a Conversation Analysis (CA) perspective. Drawing on 1,000 minutes of recorded bilingual interaction, the findings show that code switching is a systematic, sequentially organized practice rather than incidental L1 use. Teachers strategically employ Vietnamese to clarify instructions, manage repairs, facilitate task transitions, and support classroom management, particularly in contexts with limited visual and non-verbal cues.

Students actively respond to these switches, demonstrating timely uptake, comprehension, and engagement, indicating that code switching functions as a mutually recognized pedagogical resource. By revealing its sequential logic and

interactional purpose, the study highlights code switching as a deliberate, context-sensitive tool that enhances teaching and learning in online EFL environments.

While limited to a single institution, the study suggests that CA-informed insights can inform teacher training, curriculum design, and effective online bilingual pedagogy. Future research could explore different contexts, proficiency levels, and longitudinal developments in teacher and learner orientations to code switching ■

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Nghiên cứu hiện tượng chuyển đổi mã ngôn ngữ trong hội thoại lớp học tiếng Anh trực tuyến tại Học viện SunUni từ góc độ phân tích hội thoại

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu định tính này điều tra hiện tượng chuyển đổi mã ngôn ngữ trong các lớp học tiếng Anh trực tuyến tại Học viện SunUni, Việt Nam, tập trung vào tương tác song ngữ Việt - Anh. Dựa trên phân tích hội thoại, nghiên cứu phân tích 1.000 phút dữ liệu được ghi âm từ năm lớp học trực tuyến đồng bộ (2025 - 2026), với 100 trường hợp chuyển đổi mã ngôn ngữ được chọn để phân tích tuần tự. Kết quả cho thấy chuyển đổi mã ngôn ngữ được tổ chức một cách có hệ thống trong quá trình luân phiên lượt nói và phục vụ các chức năng sư phạm quan trọng như quản lý lớp học, làm rõ nhiệm vụ, sửa chữa và hỗ trợ học tập. Nghiên cứu kết luận rằng chuyển đổi mã ngôn ngữ đóng vai trò là một nguồn tài nguyên giảng dạy chiến lược, tăng cường tính mạch lạc và hiệu quả tương tác trong giảng dạy tiếng Anh trực tuyến.

Từ khóa: Chuyển đổi mã ngôn ngữ, phân tích hội thoại, lớp học tiếng Anh trực tuyến, hội thoại lớp học, Học viện SunUni.