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Higher education English as Foreign Language (EFL) instructors' Code-switching (CS) practices in Ethiopia: patterns and functions in focus

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Received: 03 January 2024; Revised: 11 April 2024; Accepted: 25 April 2024

Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate higher education EFL instructors' code-switching patterns and functions. The data were gathered through classroom observations, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews. The study was conducted at Mekelle University, and the participants were instructors of the Department of English Language and Literature. A descriptive research design (case study) and a mixed research method were used. A total of 24 lessons lasting 2400 minutes were recorded, and six instructors participated in the interviews. This sample size was taken based on Singh's sample size determination. The study shows that the instructors' CS frequencies increased as the students' class year that they were teaching increased. The instructors of all class years employed inter-sentential CS more dominantly. The inter-sentential pattern of CS that the instructors were employing in the different class years has many functions in the EFL classes. CS helps the teaching and learning of English if it is handled properly. However, the instructors' use of CS had to decrease as the students' class year went up and when the students' EFL performance improved. The instructors' overuse of CS diminishes students' exposure to the target language and their practice of the English language in classes where English is a foreign language. Therefore, the instructors' CS patterns and functions should vary depending on their students' class years. In short, the instructors should re-evaluate their CS practices and employ them depending on their students' CS desires and class years. Finally, it is recommended that instructors use CS as a teaching strategy in EFL classrooms, but they should regulate its deployment when teaching students in different class years.

Keywords: Higher Education, EFL, Instructors, Code-switching, Patterns, Functions

Introduction

English is a global language. All forms of interaction (economic, political, etc.) between countries across the world are made using the English language. This indicates that it is a language of international relations, be it diplomacy, business, investment, tourism, academia, and so on (MOSHE, 2013). English has a vital role in the development of a country. Due to this, the need to learn it is increasing constantly.

The English language is taught as a subject starting from the first grade, and more importantly, it serves as a medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher education institutions in Ethiopia (HPR, 2019; Tirussew et al., 2017). Apart from the education sector, English is used as a language of work in the majority of international organisations. These and other uses of the English language show its significance in this country.

As stated in Article 4 of the revised higher education proclamation, one of the objectives of the higher education institutions is to prepare sufficient knowledgeable, skilled, and attitudinally mature graduates in relevant disciplines with competence to support national development that can make the country internationally competitive (HPR, 2019). In Ethiopian universities, whatever field of specialisation a student joins, he or she takes at least two English language courses, namely Communicative English Language Skills and Basic Writing Skills (MOSHE, 2013). Besides, all graduate students, including continuing and distance graduate students are prior to starting their courses of study, given diagnostic tests to determine their levels of preparation in the areas of academic English (Addis Ababa University, 2021). These are some of the focuses given to the teaching of the English language.

Bearing the status or place of the language in academic and social settings in mind, and the high demand for qualified English professionals in the country, the Department of English Language and Literature has been and is training students to be skilled English professionals. The general objective of the programme is to train English language professionals who use English in their day-to-day activities—in translation, interpretation, editing, public relations, and other communication-related jobs (MOE, 2021; MOSHE, 2013). On completion of the programme, the minimum competence expected of the students who have taken the English courses is to be accurate and fluent in English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). To achieve the objective of the programme, teachers use different strategies of teaching. One of the various

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teaching strategies is the use of code-switching. CS is the use of the mother tongue in EFL classes (Atkinson, 1987).

During the grammar translation method, CS in EFL classes was regarded as a tool to help the teaching and learning of the English language (Kavari, 2014). However, this good attitude towards CS didn't last long. The next methods of English language teaching, such as the direct method, the audio-lingual method, and the communicative language teaching methods, tend to ban the students' native language in the EFL/ESL classes. During these approaches to language teaching, students and/or teachers who code-switch were regarded as guilty and lazy (Bhooth et al., 2014; Mart, 2013).

Krashen (1985) states that for students who learn EFL, it is the classroom alone that exposes them to the target language. So, CS in EFL classes is prohibiting the students' exposure to the target language. Because of this, the use of students' native language, or CS, in the EFL classroom was treated as taboo (Atkinson, 1987), a source of guilt (Auerbach, 1993), a symptom of teachers' weakness to teach properly (Cook, 2002), and a waste of time (Krashen, 1985). Nation (2003) also warns that CS in the EFL classroom reduces the amount of input and the opportunity for practice for the target language. As a result, the English-only approach has been influential and often assumed to be the hallmark of good language teaching around the world (Atkinson, 1993).

Contrary to this, Blackman (2014); Timor (2012) and Song (2009) stated that CS in the EFL/ESL classroom facilitates target language learning. They added that the use of only the target language is unfashionable in the 21st century of language learning and impractical in the actual classroom. Littlewood and Yu (2011) identified that there is still a lack of agreement on whether the students' native language has a place in the English classroom or, if it does, what that role is.

In the context of Ethiopia, many private schools forbid the use of the mother tongue both in the EFL classroom and throughout the school compound, even at the elementary levels of education ("Use English all the time"). The use of any local language other than English in the school compound (in the classroom, playground, cafeteria, and staffroom) is strictly forbidden and leads both teachers and students to punishment" (Gibson School Systems, 2011:4). As we can understand from this, let alone CS in the EFL classes and using it as a medium of instruction, the

students' mother tongue is not allowed to enter the school gate. The country's education and training policy states, "Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in their mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages" (MOE, 1994:23). Though the policy neither condemns nor endorses CS in the EFL classroom, it allows students to be taught using their mother tongue in non-English subjects.

In spite of the fact that the country's policy and the private schools' actual practices are different, many parents and students are seen favouring private schools over government schools for various reasons. Contrary to the private schools, in the government schools, the mother tongue is used not only in the school compound and other subjects (as a medium of instruction) but also in the EFL classes (Tirussew et al., 2017). This indicates that there are two opposite practices regarding the use of the mother tongue in EFL classrooms: one that allows the use of L1 (first language) and another that condemns its usage.

Not having one opinion on how to address it has made it even more confusing to the students to either use it or not as they come through different teachers who either encourage or prohibit it (Dereje and Abiy, 2015). Cook and Sert (2005) stated that the use of CS in EFL classes shouldn't be oversimplified if the students and the teacher share the same mother tongue. What about if the students and the teacher have varied L1? This might be a gap that the former researchers have not investigated.

Blackman (2014); Sert (2005) and Alenezi (2010) stated that the functions of CS and the factors for doing so in the EFL classroom vary depending on various factors. Therefore, as the students and/or instructors were multilingual and were at a higher level, their practice of CS and the functions of CS could be different from the research conducted so far. It seems that the studies conducted so far did not address English major EFL instructors CS practices at the university level, which needs a thorough assessment.

Though many studies have been conducted on the use of the mother tongue, the researchers of this study believe that the researchers listed below and others may not look at CS patterns and functions. Dereje and Abiy (2015) and Abiy and Mohamed (2010) studied the use of Amharic in teaching English at schools. Jemal (2012) also explored the use of the Oromo language in the EFL classrooms of Jimma Teachers College. Nigatu (2013) tried to explore the use of L1 (Hadiyyisa language) in English classes in elementary schools in Hadiya Zone.

This study differs from the above research in many ways. For one thing, this study was conducted at the university level, where the aforementioned studies were at different levels of education, which were from elementary to college level. Secondly, the previous research was conducted on the proportion of L1 to English, the attitude of students, and the attitude of teachers. This study, however, was conducted on instructors' CS patterns and functions. Besides, the instructors' who participated in this study spoke Amharic as a second language, not as their first language. In EFL classes at Ethiopian universities where the students are multilingual, it is very common to see instructors CS from and into Amharic. However, the studies conducted so far did not address the instructors CS frequencies, patterns, and functions.

In the Ethiopian context, though English is the medium of instruction beginning in secondary schools, many students are poor at using English even at universities (Tirussew et al., 2017). In such cases, the avoidance of the students' L1 in the EFL classes, which Song (2009) calls a monolingual approach', is impractical (Timor, 2012; Song, 2009). Previous studies on CS suggested further research be conducted at higher levels of education. For example, Yinager and Boersma (2018), who conducted students' attitudes towards CS in an English-medium content classroom, recommend university instructors' CS behaviours be studied. Therefore, this research is conducted to fill the gap that the former researchers did not cover and address the following research questions:

- What proportion of Amharic to English do higher education EFL instructors employ?
- What CS patterns do higher education EFL instructors use more dominantly?
- For what functions do higher-education EFL instructors code-switch more frequently?

Materials and methods

Study institution

The study took place at Mekelle University, one of the 47 Ethiopian government higher education institutions, which was established in 1993. The university's English Language and Literature Department had 50 Ethiopian EFL instructors and three batches of students with one section each. Each section was taking six English major courses, which were delivered by six different EFL-specialised instructors.

Study design

A descriptive research design (case study) was used in this study (Cohen, 2000). Since this study was intended to investigate the practice of instructors' CS (frequency, pattern, and function) in the EFL classes, the descriptive research design was found to be the most suitable to obtain the pertinent and valid information needed to achieve the specified objectives.

Methods of data collection and analysis

Prior to the actual research, a pilot study was conducted at the English Language and Literature Department of Axum University. Almost all of the English language courses for English major students at the university level have three credits per week. The programmes were arranged in such a way that the two credits were taught consecutively, with no interruption between them and the other credit on another day. One credit is 50 minutes. From each class year, one course was chosen using simple random sampling, and the one credit hour of this course was observed for three weeks. So a total of nine lessons, which consist of 450 minutes, were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The teachers who were observed in the classroom (three teachers) were interviewed.

In order to check the face and content validity of the classroom observation check list items and the interview questions, they were given to two experts in test and measurement and to three Assistant Professors of ELT who had experience teaching English for more than eight years. Based on these teachers' comments, some questions were deleted while others were modified and added. Accordingly, the piloted items with some modifications were used for the main study's data collection.

The aim of conducting a pilot study is to check the reliability (dependability) and validity of the data-gathering instruments (Cohen et al., 2007; Singh, 2007; Cohen, 2000). Consistent results were depicted during the classroom observation audio record transcriptions, which aligned with the results of the observation check list and the interview. Therefore, the data-gathering instruments were reliable and valid. In the pilot study, instructors of all classes employed CS excessively. That practice was high among second- and third-year instructors. It was also found that the instructors code-switched at inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching levels. Finally, the results displayed that the instructors of all class years used CS for curriculum access, classroom management, and social (inter-personal) relation functions.

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Data were collected through classroom observation (audio recording) and a semi-structured interview. Six instructors who were teaching six different courses, two instructors from each batch, were observed for a month because, if the observation was conducted for a few days, the instructors could hide their actual behaviour of CS (Dornyei, 2007). The instructors were chosen using a simple random sampling technique.

While this study was being conducted, the students from all batches were taking six courses per semester. One semester is four months (16 weeks). This indicates that 48 hours are allotted for one course. Two courses from each batch were selected using simple random sampling techniques so as to avoid bias, and the courses were observed for one month (four weeks). In other words, six instructors, who were selected using simple random sampling, were observed. This shows that almost 8 hours (17%) of the courses were observed and recorded. The audio record was conducted to reveal the proportion of Amharic to English, the patterns, and the functions of CS. This sample represents the whole hours of the course, as Sing (2007) suggests 10–20% to be taken for generalising large samples. Therefore, four lessons (100 minutes per lesson) for each course of all batches, with a total of 24 lessons or 2400 minutes, were observed, recorded, and transcribed.

This method of data gathering tool (the observation) was used since it provides an opportunity for the researchers of the study to identify the proportion of Amharic to English, the patterns of CS employed, and the possible functions of CS employed by the instructors in the classroom (Singh, 2007). In this method, the observers neither manipulated nor stimulated their subjects. Because of this, the activities in the classroom were observed as they were presented without any interruption from the observers. The purpose of the one-month observation was to pay attention when the instructors code-switched while using it in the classroom. The observation was conducted four times with the six teachers. A one-month classroom observation took place first, and then the interviews continued. These procedures were used for two reasons. First, the participants could hide their actual behaviour if they were well informed of what the study was about. Secondly, the interview questions were asked based on what had been observed in the classroom. Therefore, the interview was used as a follow-up for the classroom observation.

The results obtained through the aforementioned data gathering tools were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. To

illustrate it more, after the audio recording was transcribed in verbatim, extracts were taken, coded thematically, and discussed to show what patterns of CS were used and to indicate the functions they were used for. Again, the utterances were categorised as Amharic and English, using a word as a counting unit. Next to tallying the verbatim transcription into the above-listed categories, they were converted into percentages. This helps to express and quantify how much percent of Amharic to English was used in the EFL classes, the dominant CS patterns employed, and the functions that Amharic was used for.

Results and discussion

Instructors' CS Frequency

The instructors who were teaching the three batches were using Amharic in the EFL classes. The details of the instructors' use of Amharic in the EFL classes are presented in the following Table.

Table 1. The proportion of Amharic and English language words uttered by instructors in the different class years

Class Year	Instructors	Lessons	English Words		Amharic Words		Total Words	
			#	%	#	%	#	%
1st Year	Instructor 1	Lesson 1	2085	100	0	0	2085	100
		Lesson 2	1816	97.9	38	2.1	1854	100
		Lesson 3	1886	99.1	17	0.9	1903	100
		Lesson 4	2096	97.5	53	2.5	2149	100
	Instructor 2	Lesson 1	1395	76.9	418	23.1	1813	100
		Lesson 2	1849	87.1	274	12.9	2123	100
		Lesson 3	1564	80.2	386	19.8	1950	100
		Lesson 4	1575	75.6	509	24.4	2084	100
		Total	14,266	89.3	1,695	10.7	15,961	100
2nd Year	Instructor 1	Lesson 1	1825	76.3	568	23.7	2393	100
		Lesson 2	1503	76.1	473	23.9	1976	100
		Lesson 3	2487	79.5	641	20.5	3128	100
		Lesson 4	1974	74.7	669	25.3	2643	100
	Instructor 2	Lesson 1	1508	75.5	490	24.5	1998	100
		Lesson 2	2536	78.5	695	21.5	3231	100
		Lesson 3	1776	74.3	613	25.7	2389	100
		Lesson 4	2231	75.2	734	24.8	2965	100
	Total		15,840	76.4	4,883	23.6	20,723	100
3rd Year		Lesson 1	1413	68.1	661	31.9	2074	100

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	Instructor 1	Lesson 2	1333	68.3	620	31.7	1953	100
		Lesson 3	1576	69.1	705	30.9	2281	100
		Lesson 4	1234	67.5	593	32.5	1827	100
	Instructor 2	Lesson 1	1811	72.9	672	27.1	2483	100
		Lesson 2	1261	71.1	513	28.9	1774	100
		Lesson 3	2224	76.6	680	23.4	2904	100
		Lesson 4	1365	65.2	727	34.8	2092	100
		Total	12,217	70.3	5,171	29.7	17,388	100

The instructors, who were teaching first-year students, delivered 15961 words throughout the eight observed class sessions. Among these, 14266 (89.3%) of them were English words, while the remaining 1695 (10.7%) were Amharic words. With regard to the instructors who were teaching second-year students, they spoke 20723 words. From these words, 15840 (76.4%) were English, and the other 4883 (23.6%) were Amharic. As far as the instructors who were teaching third-year students are concerned, it was found that they uttered 17388 words. This was the sum of 12217 (70.3%) English words and 5171 (29.7%) Amharic words. This analysis implies that the instructors were using Amharic excessively, which could impede the learners' exposure to the foreign language.

The data obtained through the instructors' interviews indicated that using Amharic, which is less than ten percent, facilitates the learning process, while its greater usage diminishes the learners' exposure to the target language and increases the learners' dependency on the native language (Kayaoglu, 2012; Macaro, 2001).

Extract 1

"*The students English language performance is poor. Therefore, using Amharic up to ten percent helps the students understand the lesson better*." Year 2; Instructor A

Extract 2

"*It is difficult to tell you in percent. Some students are good in both languages, and others are poor in both languages. By the way, using up to ten percent is harming the students' exposure to English because it is only in the classroom that they get English*." Year 3; Instructor B

Extract 3

"*In my opinion, Amharic should not be used as much as possible because there are students who do not listen to Amharic. If not, up to five percent is welcome*." Year 1; Instructor A

As scholars like Kayaoglu (2012); Littlewood and Yu (2011) and Macaro (2001), and reported, the use of above 10% of L1 in foreign language learning is excessive. Using these scholars' recommendations as a cutoff, the amount of Amharic used by instructors of second- and third-year students was excessive. As stated above, excessive use of L1 (the use of more than 10% L1) in the EFL classroom hinders the students' learning and exposure to English.

All in all, the instructors who were teaching first-year students used less Amharic (which was appropriate) than the instructors of second- and third-year students. Moreover, the third-year instructors code-switched more frequently than the first- and second-year instructors, which is beyond expectation because the instructors' CS has to decrease as the students' class year increases. This is because the students' target language competence is believed to have improved as their class year increased.

Instructors' *CS Patterns*

It was found that instructors were using inter-sentential CS, intra-sentential CS, and tag switching in all class years in a varied amount, as depicted through the 24 observed class lessons for each class year. The details are provided below.

Table 2. The occurrence of the patterns of CS employed by instructors in class in the different batches

Class Year	Instructors	Inter sentential CS		Intra sentential CS		Tag switching		Total	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1st Year	Instructor 1	3	27.3	6	54.5	2	18.2	11	100
	Instructor 2	9	69.2	4	30.8	0	0	13	100
	Total	12	50.0	10	41.7	2	8.3	24	100
2nd Year	Instructor 1	31	64.6	17	35.4	0	0	48	100
	Instructor 2	23	65.7	8	22.9	4	11.4	35	100
	Total	54	65.1	25	30.1	4	4.8	83	100
3rd Year	Instructor 1	37	62.7	18	30.5	4	6.8	59	100
	Instructor 2	58	77.3	15	20.0	2	2.7	75	100
	Total	95	70.9	33	24.6	6	4.5	134	100

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As indicated in the above table, the instructors who were teaching in their first year uttered 24 patterns of CS. The table also shows that there were 83 and 134 CS patterns among the second- and third-year instructors, respectively. The finding disclosed that the dominant pattern for all class-year instructors was inter-sentential CS, with 50%, 65.1%, and 70.9% for first-year, second-year, and third-year instructors, respectively. Tag switching was the less frequently employed pattern of CS by all instructors. Of all class-year instructors, third-year instructors used a small amount of tag switching (4.5%), followed by second-year (4.8%) and first-year (8.3%) instructors with a small variation. As it can be seen from the above percentages, the teachers of all class years employed all patterns of CS, though the dominant one was inter-sentential CS. In line with this finding, Rezvani and Rasekh (2011) found inter-sentential CS to be far outweighed by intra-sentential CS, which was in turn more than tag-switching. They explained that the higher frequency of occurrence for inter-sentential CS can be attributed to instructors' intentions of giving clearer instruction and eliciting more responses. They added that inter-sentential CS is used to sustain students' interest and encourage their participation, though it is mostly practiced unintentionally as a habit.

Similarly, Farooq and Umer (2013) found that instructors use more inter-sentential CS than the other patterns of CS. They also recommend instructors use intra-sentential CS. They expressed their fear that intra-sentential CS students are not exposed long enough to any one language, and then it would be difficult for the students to derive the grammatical, semantic, and lexical rules of both languages. Thus, with the resolution of these issues, both instructors and students can establish classroom discourse in accordance with the requirements of the EFL learning paradigms. The instructors are assumed to have good command of both languages. If one is fluently bilingual, he or she produces more inter-sentential CS as he or she is not aware of which language he or she is using because Dereje and Abiy (2015) and Bista (2010) reported that inter-sentential CS is used unconsciously. Similar to this, the instructors in the interview reported that they rarely used Amharic. The classroom observation, however, revealed that they used it excessively. This indicates that they were not aware of whether they were CS or not. This could be one of the reasons why the instructors employed inter-sentential CS more dominantly.

Here are some examples of the different patterns of CS employed by the instructors.

Extract 4: Student: የተወሰነውን ምክርያሎህ። ማን ኣልጨረስኩትም። (Taken from lesson 1 year 1)

Translation*:* I have tried some of it, but I haven't completed it.

Instructor: So. ግማሹን የሰራችሁ አጃቹሁን አውጡ ማለት ነበረብኝ?

Translation: So. Should I have asked if there are students who have done it in part?

This is student-induced CS employed by the instructor. As the instructor used the English word "so," which has no function in the Amharic sentence he used, it is tag switching.

Extract 5: Instructor: በሜድየቫል period የነበሩ ገፀ ባህርያት act የሚያደርጉት ታማኝ በመሆን፣ ለሰዎች ክብር በመስጠት እና ግዴታዎቻቸውን በመወጣት ነበር። (Taken from year 3, lesson 1)

Translation: Characters of the mediaeval period literature acted as being loyal, honouring, and performing their duty.

This is an example of intra-sentential CS performed by the instructor. He used some English words in the Amharic sentence.

Extract 6*: Instructor: If there was no printing press, how would literary works is presented? ማተምያ ካልነበረ ሰነ ፅሑፉ በምን ይቀርብ ነበር ታድያ? በእጅ እየተፀፈ ነበር ወደ ህዝቡ የሚቀርበው ማለት ነው?* (Taken from year 3, lesson 2)

Translation: …if there were no printing press, how would the literary works be presented? Was it written by hand and presented to the public?

In this case, the instructor used one clause in English and two clauses in Amharic, which is an example of inter-sentential CS.

Instructors' CS Functions

The following table depicts the different types of CS functions employed by instructors in the different class years of students.

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Table 3. Instructors' functions of Amharic usage in the EFL class and their proportion across the three class years

SN	Functions of Amharic language Use		1st Year Instructor		2nd Year Instructor		3rd Year Instructor		TOTAL	
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1	Interpersonal Relations	To talk about personal experiences	1	2.4	6	4.6	3	1.4	10	2.6
		To tell jokes	4	9.8	26	20	10	4.6	40	10.2
		To talk about issues not related to the lessons	2	4.9	5	3.9	8	3.6	15	3.8
Total			7	17.1	37	28.5	21	9.6	65	16.6
2	Classroom Management	To direct a message to one or more addressees	6	14.6	3	2.3	20	9.1	29	7.4
		For topic change or introducing a new topic	0	0	0	0	3	1.4	3	0.8
		To talk about course policies, announcements, homework, exams, assignments, and instructions	3	7.3	23	17.7	35	15.9	61	15.6
		To motivate students to participate	0	0	1	0.8	14	6.4	15	3.8
		To discipline students	0	0	4	3.1	8	3.6	12	3.1
		To organize where students sit	0	0	0	0	6	2.7	6	1.5
		To check attendance	3	7.3	5	3.9	0	0	8	2.1
		To praise correct answers	1	2.4	7	5.4	11	5	19	4.9
Total			13	31.6	43	33.2	97	44.1	153	39.2
3	Curriculum Access	To give example	7	17.1	22	16.9	12	5.5	41	10.5
		To explain difficult concepts	4	9.8	7	5.4	2	0.9	13	3.3
		To check comprehension	0	0	2	1.5	7	3.2	9	2.3
		To explain grammar rules	1	2.4	0	0	20	9.1	21	5.4
		To give the meaning of new vocabulary	0	0	1	0.8	3	1.4	4	1
		To ask and/or respond questions	3	7.3	6	4.6	1	0.5	10	2.6
		To ask for clarification	0	0	1	0.8	3	1.4	4	1
		To give feedback or comments	4	9.8	0	0	16	7.3	20	5.1
		To emphasize	2	4.9	11	8.5	38	17.3	51	13
Total			21	51.3	50	38.5	102	46.6	173	44.2
Grand total			41	100	130	100	220	100	391	100

The above table displayed those instructors of all class years code-switched from and into Amharic language in the EFL classes for interpersonal relations, classroom management, and curriculum access functions. Among these three functions of CS, instructors of all class years code-switched for curriculum access functions more dominantly, with 51.3%, 38.5%, and 46.6%

for first-year, second-year, and third-year instructors, respectively. The next CS functions that were employed by instructors of all class year students were classroom management, with 31.6%, 33.2%, and 44.1% for first-year, second-year, and third-year instructors, respectively. The percentages show that though there was a difference in the amount of use of CS among instructors of the different batches, they all used it for curriculum access functions more in their EFL classes.

Among the different types of interpersonal relations in CS, instructors of all class years used more Amharic in the EFL classes for joking, with 9.8%, 20%, and 4.6% for first-year, second-year, and third-year instructors, respectively. With regard to the classroom management functions of CS, the instructors who were teaching first-year students used more Amharic for directing messages to one or more participants (14.6%), while both second- and third-year instructors code-switched for talking about course policies, announcements, homework, exams, assignments, and instructions (17.7% and 15.9%, respectively). The interpersonal function of CS has a lot of categories. Among these categories, instructors all through the years used Amharic more for joking functions. The percentages indicate that instructors of second-year students used one-fifth of the interpersonal relations for joking functions. The classroom management function, as well, has many sub-functions. As it is vividly put in the percentages above, the instructors used CS to explain course policies and assessment issues and to direct a message to one or more learners among the different sub-functions of classroom management.

As far as the curriculum access functions of CS are concerned, instructors of first- and second-year students code-switched more for giving examples (17.1% and 16.9%, respectively), while third-year students' instructor code-switched more for emphasising (17.3%). As it can be seen in Table 3 above, the curriculum access function has many sub-functions. The percentages revealed that among these different sub-functions, the instructors used Amharic mostly for giving examples and for emphasising a point.

Here are examples of the instructors' CS for curriculum access, classroom management, and interpersonal relations, respectively, taken from the classroom record.

Extract 7: Instructor: *ዝም አስኪ በዩ አንቺ። ከፈለግሽ አብረሻት ሂጂ።*

Translation: Keep quiet! If you need it, you can go out with her.

This is a CS employed by the instructor, who was teaching for the first year. He used CS to manage the student who was talking when her friend was leaving the class.

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Extract 8: Instructor: *እሺ! ምን እንዳልኩ እስኪ ንገሩኝ?*

Translation: Ok! Can you tell me what I said?

This CS was uttered by the instructor, who was teaching second year. He used this computer when he finished his lesson. He used Amharic to check whether the students understood what he told them, which is a curriculum access function of CS.

Extract 9: Instructor: *በጣም ወሳኝ ስለነበረ ነው፤ ይቅርታ። ምንም ማድረግ አልችልም።*

Translation: It was a vital issue, sorry. I can do nothing.

The instructor, who was teaching third-year students, used this CS for interpersonal relations, which is talking about personal issues. He used this CS when his phone rang and went out to reply.

All in all, the instructors of all batches were found to employ CS for curriculum access functions more dominantly. The second dominant function of CS was reported to be classroom management. On top of this, the data obtained from the classroom observation show that among the classroom management functions, the instructors' CS was found to be high for talking about course policies, announcements, homework, exams, assignments, and instructions.

Consistent with these findings, Auerbach (1993), and Cameron (2001) suggest instructors use L1 for curriculum access functions more dominantly since the purpose of teaching and learning is to develop students understanding of the target language, though it is possible to use it for classroom management and interpersonal relations, which facilitate the learners' target language.

Conclusions

This study was conducted to investigate English major university instructors' CS practices. The study uncovered that the instructors code-switched excessively. Surprisingly, the instructors' CS usage increased as the students' class year increased. Though CS is an asset in foreign language teaching and learning, an overuse of it (>10%) is an obstacle to foreign language learning. Unless CS is used judiciously, it reduces learners' target language exposure and increases learners' dependency on L1 while learning a foreign language. On top of this, the instructors' use of CS has to be kept to a minimum when the students' class year goes up. Therefore, the instructors should re-examine their CS practices and understand the pros and cons of their excessive usage. As there might be students who know little or no Amharic, the instructors should consider these students while CS from and into Amharic.

The pattern of CS to be used has to vary depending on the learners' target language competency and class year. The use of a similar CS pattern in all batches seems implausible. At a high level, inter-sentential CS is advisable. At lower and intermediate levels, however, the deployment of intra-sentential CS facilitates the teaching and learning process of foreign languages. The instructors' inter-sentential pattern of CS usage to all class years, which this study divulged, lacks a pattern of CS for whom to use it. So, since students of all class years are expected to have different knowledge and performance of the L1 (Amharic) and the target language (English), the instructors' CS patterns should not be the same for the three different class years.

CS is used for interpersonal relations, classroom management, and curriculum access functions. All of these functions of CS were utilised in all class years, though the dominant one was curriculum access. Instructors, however, should be flexible with regard to the functional use of CS. First-year students, for example, might have difficulty socialising with their classmates and instructors. In such cases, the instructors have to use CS for interpersonal relations since this function plays an important role in the teaching and learning process. Research shows that first-year students drop out of their learning due to tensions and anxiety that arise from a lack of interpersonal relations and difficulty communicating using the country's lingua franca. Therefore, the instructors' CS functional usage should be based on their students' limitations and desires.

This study has apparently gained useful insights into the frequencies, patterns, and functions of CS employed by instructors in EFL teaching and learning at one of the Ethiopian government higher education institutions. This study has also contributed to the body of knowledge on foreign language learning pedagogy. However, there might be a need for further research into what is practiced at other government universities and private universities where the students have different linguistic backgrounds and English language competencies.

Further research on students' CS proportion, patterns, and functions needs to be conducted. Finally, instructors are recommended to use CS as a teaching strategy, but they should regulate its deployment (when, to what extent, and for what purposes to use it) as its disadvantages are greater than its advantages when used excessively.

Acknowledgements

The researchers of this study thank Adigrat University and Addis Ababa University for funding this research project. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Adigrat University's

Department of Journalism and Communication for providing us with the recorders that we used to record the classroom observation audio records.

Data availability

The data that supports the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Funding

This research work was funded by Addis Ababa University and Adigrat University.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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