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A study of code-switching in four Swedish EFL-classrooms

En studie om codeswitching i fyra svenska B-språksklassrum

Christoffer Jakobsson
Henrik Rydén

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Examinator: Bo Lundahl
Handledare: Björn Sundmark
ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to investigate when and why code-switching occurs and the attitudes towards code-switching among teachers and students in four EFL classrooms in two medium-sized secondary schools. To be able to reach the goals set forth for this study we used classroom observations, student questionnaires and teacher interviews. We managed to get the cooperation of four teachers and four classes of students, two classes of eight graders and two classes of ninth graders.

The previous research on the subject of code-switching has shown both positive and negative sides of its use and existence. Although extensive research has been done on the subject it is far from complete and there are still many interesting aspects left to investigate. The results presented in this study and the opinions raised by the participating teachers and students are in line with the already given results. Our conclusions are that the use of code-switching can be both beneficial and negative in learning/teaching situations.

Keywords:
Code-switching, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), target language, attitudes
PREFACE

This dissertation has been conducted at two medium-sized secondary schools by Henrik Rydén and Christoffer Jakobsson. The text presented in this dissertation has been written collaboratively. The observations, interviews, questionnaires and the transcription of the interviews have also been conducted by both of us.

First of all we would like to thank the participating schools, teachers and students for their support, guidance and the information that they provided for this dissertation. We would also like to extend our gratitude to our supervisor, Björn Sundmark, and examiner, Bo Lundahl, for their support and guidance during the writing of this dissertation.
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1 INTRODUCTION

During our years studying at the School of Education in Malmö we have been placed in different partner schools to observe and practice our teaching skills. During the periods that we have been attending these partner schools an image has become very clear to us; not only English is spoken in the English foreign language (EFL) classroom. Therefore, we want to investigate the reasons why English is not the only language used in the EFL classroom and when the switch of code occurs as well as the attitudes towards the use of code-switching. The syllabus for English clearly states that pupils should strive towards developing their ability to use English in communicative settings. Moreover students ought to develop their oral ability to speak and communicate in various environments to express, describe, explain and motivate their own opinions (Skolverket, 2000). However there is a great deal of Swedish spoken among students and teachers, but all for different reasons. According to the *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics* (Strazny, 2005), the reasons why code-switching occurs are often treated as lists of possible functions for the switching of code.

Classic codeswitching is defined as the alternation between two varieties in the same constituent by speakers who have sufficient proficiency in the two varieties to produce monolingual well-formed utterances in either variety. This implies that speakers have sufficient access to the abstract grammars of the both varieties to use them to structure codeswitching utterances as well. (Myers-Scotton 2001, p. 23)

A crucial question to ask is how to help students to become effective communicators by using formal teaching/learning? And by asking this question the importance of the use of code-switching becomes even more interesting. While some teachers see code-switching as a matter of concern and a sign of deficiency in their students, some recent studies suggest that code-switching plays a major part in the acquisition of a second language and its use might be an important competence when used correctly by speakers of several languages (Halmari, 2004; Simon, 2001). According to *Den Nationella Utvärderingen av Grundskolan 2003, NU03* (Apelgren & Oscarson, 2005), students’ own perceptions of their proficiency in the English language were that it was very high and they were very confident when it came to communicating both orally and in writing. Furthermore, the students stated that they value the knowledge of the English language both in school situations and outside school and as a valuable resource for further studies or work-related situations. The majority of the students who participated in the survey stated that English is fun, interesting and that they were
confident about speaking English in communicative settings both in classroom setting and outside the classroom. However, our own experiences and perceptions of students’ confidence are not the same and the same goes for the teachers that participated in NU03. The image that seems so clear to us about the students’ use of English in the classroom is therefore debatable and that is another reason for us to investigate the when and why of code-switching. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate when and why code-switching occurs and the attitudes towards code-switching among teachers and students in four EFL classrooms at two medium-sized secondary schools.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

As previously mentioned there is extensive research done on code-switching. Both positive and negative aspects of its existence and use have been debated for years and that debate will continue for many years to come. Our interest concerns when and why it occurs in the EFL classroom and the attitudes towards it among students and teachers. The study presented in this essay will take place in four classrooms at two medium-sized Swedish secondary schools with the cooperation of teachers and students at those schools. To be able to achieve our aims the following research questions were formulated:

- When and why is code-switching at two secondary schools by students and teachers?

- What are the attitudes towards code-switching among teachers and students at two secondary schools?
2 BACKGROUND

2.1 What is code-switching?

Myers-Scotton (2001) defines code-switching as the alternation between two or more languages or varieties of a language in the same utterance or dialogue. Code switching is a phenomenon that happens on a daily basis both in schools and outside of the school setting. For some people code switching is as normal as breathing, it comes naturally and without any thought behind it at all. The reason for the commonness of this phenomenon is the internationalization of our societies and our widening of contacts both within our own communities and throughout the world (Brown, 2006).

The speakers that use code-switching on a daily basis are usually bilingual and therefore able to alternate between different languages or dialects in a communicative setting. The phenomenon can occur in different ways such as substitute words, chunks or whole sentences in order to keep the conversation alive. An example of how code-switching may appear is exemplified by, Heredia & Brown (2006) with the following sentence from a Spanish-English speaker: *I want a motorcycle Verde*, where in this case the speaker has replaced Green with the Spanish equivalent Verde. Why the speaker places the adjective last, can be explained through the interference of Spanish and its rule that the noun must precede the adjective.

According to Brown (2006), speakers use code-switching to compensate their lack of fluency and proficiency in the target language by using their first language to keep a flow during the communication. Heredia & Brown (2005) speak about code-switching as a strategic tool speaker use to overcome gaps and flaws in conversations. Another aspect of their theory is that bilinguals alternate between languages since their proficiency in both languages is not sufficient enough for the task that has been given and therefore they tend to mix the addressed language with their first language. However, one switch can also be explained through a semi-lingualistic view that bilinguals are almost proficient in both languages and therefore the alternation between the person´s two languages can be mixed in a communicative setting.

In the classroom teachers also use code-switching. According to Olcay Sert (2005), code-switching used by teachers, whether conscious or unconscious, has some sort of purpose in
the deliverance of information and meaning. By consciously lowering themselves to the students level of speech, teachers can deliver their information without switching to the L1 of the classroom. According to Accommodation theory, speakers vary their “use of different language varieties to express solidarity with or social distance from their interlocutors” (Mesthrie et al, 2000, p.180). The Accommodation theory states that speakers adapt their language use and strategically vary their language as a tool for communicating in different enviroments (Mesthrie et al, 2000). This shows to the point that students as well as teachers in certain situations choose to adapt their language in order to fit in or to show their status in the current interaction. When the switch is unconscious it might be because the teacher needs to connect with the students on a more personal level and by doing so in the L1 of the classroom a more concerned and personal side of the teacher is conveyed. Switching code to fit the topic is a function of code switching that is widely used in second language learning.

The most common use of this topic-based code-switching is when teaching grammar to second language learners. By switching to the students’ L1, the teacher can build “a bridge from the known (native language) to the unknown (new foreign language content)” (Sert, 2005) and meaning can be discussed and understood at an earlier stage by the learners. In order to reach clarity between teacher and student from the delivered information the use of code switching can be done through a repetitive function. This function has both positive and negative outcomes in the long run since weaker students might wait until the information is given in the repetitive stage in their L1. By waiting until this point and by not paying attention during the first information stage the weaker students might not reach a suitable proficiency of the target language. On the positive side, a student who wishes to learn the target language will listen during the first information stage but might not understand all of it and by listening during the second stage this student can then fill in the information gaps that he/she has.

In the matter of students’ use of code switching Sert (2005) draws on research done by Eldridge (1996) and his functions of code switching for learners. A function that is mentioned is equivalence and it states that a student tends to code switch and “use the native lexical item when he/she has not the competence for using the target language explanation for a particular lexical item” (Sert, 2005). This function of code switching when the proficiency of the learner falters can be seen as a defense mechanism but by using a native lexical item the learner can continue his/her part in the on-going interaction. In some cases students tend to use the function reiteration. When the students receive information in the target language and display
their understanding or lack of understanding of the received information, they tend to repeat it in their L1.

Brown (2006) also brings up what different functions code switching might serve. One is when it “serves a referential function by compensating for the speaker’s lack of knowledge in one language” (Brown, 2006, p.508), it can also be used to include or exclude a listener, it can state that the speaker has a mixed cultural identity by switching from one language to another. In some cases code switching is situational and appears due to “the status of the interlocutor, the setting of the conversation, or the topic of the conversation” (Brown, 2006, p.508). Brown draws on research by Blom and Gumperz (1972) when saying that “code switching is a complex, skilled linguistic strategy used by bilinguals to convey important social meanings above and beyond the referential content of an utterance” (Brown, 2006, p.509).

2.2 When and why does code-switching occur?

According to Franceschini (1998) code-switching appears in settings where two or more languages can be used by the speaker. This clearly happens in Switzerland which has a great diversity of languages such as German, Swiss and Italian.

The way code-switching appears in the EFL classroom differs in comparison to bilinguals who are used to switching code in communicative dialogues, since these speakers use code-switching on a more regular basis because they are often members of multicultural communities and thereby code-switching comes more natural to them (Valdes-Fallis, 1978).

Code-switching is closely connected to speech situations and interpersonal relationships that affect them (Halmari, 2004). Code-switching in the EFL classroom is much more complex to deal with a code-switching between bilinguals in a social setting. This is because the student’s role in the EFL classroom is to use the target language (Simon, 2001). The student’s most common reason for switching to their native language during foreign language studies is that their mastery of the foreign language is not equal to that of their native language or to their teachers’ mastery of the foreign language (Simon, 2001). The switching back to the native
language gives the learner a natural opportunity to retreat to a secure zone of language use when the linguistic level in the classroom exceeds the learner’s competence (Simon, 2001). The learner’s choice of code is closely related to the type of task at hand and the learner’s need to communicate their understanding of the information presented by the teacher in the target language. In a social setting the foreign language is used to convey ideas, debate and for general communication whereas in an EFL classroom the foreign language is used for understanding the target language itself. In other words, in the EFL classroom we are communicating about communication itself (Simon, 2001). Furthermore, learners use their native language to communicate between one another and by doing so they get an understandable response if the other learners have the same or a different perception of the received information. All of this is done so that the learners’ can negotiate meaning in a simplified way and thus help their own learning process (Simon, 2001).

2.3 Confidence of speaking

The purpose and role of learning English in school concerns pupils’ aptitude to use English in different settings and develop a versatile ability to communicate and gain linguistic competence (Skolverket, 2000). The National agency of education carried out an evaluation named NU03 (Apelgren & Oscarson, 2005), in which they evaluated what pupils learn at the compulsory with the focus on year 5 and year 9, and what they expect to be taught through the goals set forth in the curriculum. One of the main concerns about pupils’ confidence of speaking English was that pupils’ confidence in year 5 about speaking during class has decreased and that more then 10 percent of all year 5 pupils do not reach the grade for pass which is concerning. Many of the pupils answered that their problem with communicating in English was that they felt embarrassed of speaking in class, and many had experienced performance anxiety and thought that everything had to be perfect in terms of speaking in class. However, pupils in the lower classes (year 1-3) experience no concerns about speaking English and their anxiety of making mistakes when speaking does not seem to appear until pupils reach the age of 10. The reasons why pupils at this age do not feel anxiety of speaking has to do with that during the first years of encountering a new language pupils play with the language by using their senses, so called multi sensory learning. This means that they use all
their senses in the process of learning a new language such as motion exercises, rhythm and vocals.

Furthermore the study NU03 shows that pupils’ and teachers’ have different views on the classroom climate. According to the pupils who participated in NU03 the EFL classroom climate is messy and loud, while the teachers think that the climate in the classroom is good. This shows that the pupils and the teachers perception of the learning climate is looked upon differently and that this can or may have influences on the speaking activities in the classroom and that it leads to pupils willingness and confidence of speaking decreases (Apelgren & Oscarson, 2005). The students in year 9 that participated in the study and did not gain a pass had low confidence and self image when it came to speaking English. One reason for this is that their use of English only involved what they learned in school which makes their use of English restricted to classroom situations (Apelgren & Oscarson, 2005).
3 METHODOLOGY

The data used in this dissertation was obtained through an investigation in two Swedish secondary schools of medium size, one of them situated in a medium-size town and the other in a smaller town. To get as much information as possible and to make a good base for discussion we used several means of information gathering: observations, questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires and observations involved students at the concerned schools while the interviews only involved teachers.

3.1 Participants

For this study we managed to get hold of four classes of students to participate in the observations and questionnaires. They were divided into two classes of eighth grade students and two classes of ninth grade students from two different schools. The number of participating students was 87 for the questionnaires and 90 for the observations. The smaller number for the questionnaires is because there were 3 students absent in one of the ninth grade classes during the lesson in which the questionnaires were conducted.

For the interviews we managed to get hold of four teachers, two at each school. They are all teachers of English but their second subjects vary from P.E, French, German to Swedish. There are differences in teaching methods among the participating teachers but their main focus is to promote a communicative setting and help their students become fluent in the use of the English language. Three of the teachers have Swedish as their mother tongue, while the fourth teacher is a native of Finland and has Swedish as her second language. Teachers one and two are male while teachers three and four are female.

To anonymize the participants we have chosen not to name the different schools, only the grades eight (8) and nine (9), and the interviewed teachers have been named teacher 1-4. For the observations the results will be presented only as a total number but the results from the questionnaires after the grade that they have and then a total result. This has been done so that there can be no form of comparison between the schools since that is not the aim of this study.
3.2 Ethical considerations

All participants in this study are anonymous and they were informed about that before participating in any of the elements of the project. Prior to performing our investigations we sought and gained approval from the principals of the schools, as well as the teachers of the concerned classes. Furthermore the participants were informed of the aims of the project, that participation was voluntary and completely anonymous and that the retrieved information would only be used in this dissertation (Johansson & Svedner, 2006).

3.3 Observations

To be able to find a good base for our study we started out with observations, but before doing so we read up on observation literature and discussed what the aim of the observations was. A series of focus points were then written down to match our research questions (appendix 1) (Johansson & Svedner, 2006). Four classes were chosen to be observed, two at each school. To get a broader picture we chose to observe grade 8 and grade 9 students, one class from each school. The total number of participants was 90 students. These were all students of two of the teachers that would be involved in the upcoming interviews. A total of two lessons per class were observed and we only observed lessons which had communication in the form of spoken English as the main objective.

The observations were divided between the writers of this essay so that each writer covered two classes, one performing the observations in school A and the other in school B. While doing the observations we only took the role of observer to step away from the role as teacher and get another point of view of the situation (Hatch, 2002). When observing we strived to focus on the points that were to lead the study forward. These were, observing when students code-switch, when teacher code-switch and why these events occur. Other things could have been observed and more notes could have been made but the decision was taken to keep the volume of information to a size which would be manageable and could be properly processed (Johansson & Svedner, 2006). After concluding the observation process and evaluating the results the study continued with questionnaires for the students and interviews with the teachers who had volunteered to assist with the completion of this study.
3.4 Questionnaires

After reviewing the results of the observations a number of questions were produced and put together to a questionnaire (appendix 2). For this part of the study a total of 87 students participated. The questionnaire contained seven questions, some single-answer questions and some multiple-choice questions. To make it easier for the participants, the questionnaire was written in Swedish and the answers were given in Swedish so that there would be no misunderstandings due to lack of knowledge of English. The reason for using this method was so that the study in a simple way could retrieve the opinions of several students on the questions raised in this essay (Johansson & Svedner, 2006).

3.5 Interviews

After completing the observations and questionnaires the study focused on interviewing the volunteering teachers. A series of questions were formulated to find out the teachers’ opinions concerning code-switching in the classroom (appendix 3). To get as much out of the interviews as possible we chose to keep them as informal as possible and tried to create a conversational situation in which the interviewees would feel comfortable and elaborate their answers even more. The interviews were conducted in Swedish after consulting with the participating teachers about which language they preferred to be interviewed in. Their reasons for choosing to be interviewed in Swedish were that they felt that it would feel more natural since the interviews would take place between speakers of Swedish. The interviews were recorded so that it would be easier to go back and review them again and again during the process of writing the essay (Johansson & Svedner, 2006).

Prior to the interviews the teachers received the questions that would be asked so that they could review them and comment on them before the interview sessions. They were also asked if they approved of being recorded and none of them disapproved. During the interviews they did not show any signs of inconvenience due to being recorded. The interviews ran smoothly and without any time-pressure or disturbances. The lengths of the interviews were approximately 20 minutes each.
4 RESULTS

The following sections report the findings of the classroom observations as well as the questionnaires and interviews. The findings are presented with the research question that they coincide with. They are presented after the school at which they were collected since our goal is to examine when and why code-switching occurs and not to compare the different schools.

4.1 When and why code-switching is used by students and teachers?

The following paragraphs deal with the first research question of when and why code-switching appears in the EFL-classroom, both among students and teachers.

4.1.1 Observations

In this section we present the results of the classroom observations. The observation schedule used is attached as appendix 1. Some examples of code-switching were also written down during the observations.

During the eight lessons in four different classes (two lessons per class) that were observed students used Swedish a total of 223 times divided into five different criteria of code-switching. During the same eight observed lessons the participating teachers used Swedish a total of twelve times, divided into two different criteria of code-switching.

The first five criteria of code-switching that were observed had to do with students’ use of Swedish during EFL lessons.

The first criterion that was observed was when a student talked Swedish to the teacher about a lesson-related matter. A lesson-related matter in this case is something that has to do with an on-going task, a previous task or an up-coming task during the lesson that was observed. A total of 30 code-switching occurrences related to this criterion. An example of one of those conversations is given in (1).
(1) S: Jag förstår inte uppgiften.

T: What is it that you don’t understand about the assignment?

S: Allt.

In this case the student did not seem to be in the mood for speaking English at all after realizing that the task was hard to understand and stayed with speaking Swedish for the rest of the lesson (only 7 minutes remained at this point), perhaps as a sign of defiance to the teacher.

The second criterion observed was when a student talked Swedish to the teacher about a non-lesson related matter. A non-lesson related matter is something that has no relevance to the on-going lesson and can be anything from problems in other subjects, something that happened during a break or a discussion about something that took place outside of school. There was a total of 23 such code-switching occurrences.

The third criterion observed was when a student talked Swedish to another student about a lesson-related matter. There was a total of 42 such code-switching occurrences.

The fourth criterion observed was when a student talked Swedish to another student about a non-lesson related matter. This criterion had the highest number of code-switching occurrences with a total of 93 occurrences during eight lessons.

The fifth criterion observed was when a student spoke Swedish as a substitute for an English word or sentence. This would then be a sign of either insufficient vocabulary or a student who was not willing to put in enough effort. The total of such code-switching occurrences was 35. An example of this is given in (2).

(2) S: Sorry, I am late.

T: So, why are you late for class again?

S: I was at the tandläkare.

T: You mean the dentist.

S: Ja, tandläkaren.

In this case the student did not respond with the English word for tandläkare but instead the student repeated the Swedish word as a form of confirmation of understanding what the teacher had said.
The last two observation criteria are about the teachers’ code-switching during the observed lessons.

The sixth observation criterion was when a teacher spoke Swedish to student/students about a non-lesson related matter. During the eight observed lessons this only occurred seven times and three of those times the teacher realized his/her mistake and switched back to English in the middle of the conversation.

The seventh and last observation criterion was when a teacher spoke Swedish to a student or a number of students about a lesson-related matter. This code-switching criterion was only fulfilled five times during the eight observed lessons and only when students did not fully understand the task at hand.

The general impression after performing the observations was that the students used Swedish to greater extent during lessons when they could have used English or saved their conversations until the lessons were over. Both the observed teachers set the tone for each lesson by starting them off in English and holding on to it for most of the time.

4.1.2 Questionnaires

In the following paragraphs we present the results of the questionnaire (appendix 2) answered by the participating students that coincide with the research question about when and why code-switching appears. The results for question one and question six are not presented in percentages but instead by the number of students who responded to the alternatives of the questions, while the results of questions two and seven are presented in percentages. The first figure deals with the students’ choice of code during the EFL lessons. The second figure deals with the teachers’ choice of code during the EFL lessons according to the students. The results in the figures are divided after the participating grades, presenting the eight grade students’ results first, the ninth grade students’ next and the total result last. In grade eight there were 45 students that participated and in year nine we had 42 students who participated.

Regarding the results of question one, here presented in figure 1, which was about the students’ choice of code (English/Swedish) during the lessons, there are some differences between the eight grade and ninth grade students. The eight grade students have a smaller
amount of students who say that they use mostly Swedish during lessons than the ninth grade students. The number of students who responded to alternative one and three in the question is the same amount for both grades. The eight grade students have a higher amount of students who use mostly English during the lessons whereas the ninth grade students have a higher amount of students who use only English in the EFL classroom.

![Figure 1. The students' choice of code (English/Swedish) during EFL lessons](image)

Question two concerns the question of when and why the students use Swedish during the lessons. This is a multiple-choice question and some answers were more frequent than others. The results are presented in percentages depending on the response ratio.

For alternative one, which was that they talked with classmates about the task at hand, the eight grade students had a response rate of 33 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 31 %. For alternative two, which was that they talked to classmates about non-lesson related matters, the eight grade students had a response rate of 62 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 69 %. For alternative three, which was that they talked to the teacher about the task at hand, the eight grade students had a response rate of 18 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 17 %. Alternative four, which was that they talked to their teacher about non-lesson related matters, the eight grade students had a response rate
of 22 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 21 %. For alternative five, which was that they switched codes due to not knowing an English word, the eight grade students had a response rate of 51 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 76 %. Alternative six, which was when they discussed grammar, the eight grade students had a response rate of 13 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 7 %. For alternative seven, which was that they felt stressed, the eight grade students had a response rate of 33 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 17 %. For alternative eight, which was that they wanted to convey emotions or opinions, the eight grade students had a response rate of 9 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 14 %.

![Figure 2. The teachers' choice of code during EFL lessons according to the students](image)

When it comes to the results of question six, here presented in figure 2, they deal with the students’ perceptions of their teachers’ choice of code (English/Swedish) during the EFL lessons. No students chose alternatives one or three, but one student chose alternative two, stating that the concerned teacher mostly spoke Swedish and sometimes English during the lessons. This does not concur with the rest of the students’ opinions in either grade. The eight graders perceived that their teachers speak mostly English and sometimes Swedish during the lessons whereas the ninth grade teachers perceived that their teachers speak only English during the lessons. The total result shows that the students’ perception of their teachers’
choice of code during the EFL lessons is that they speak mostly English and sometimes Swedish during the lessons.

Question seven, deals with the students’ perceptions of when and why their teachers switch code during the EFL lessons, this is also a multiple choice question and the results are presented in percentages depending on the response ratio. Alternative one is about the teacher giving instructions for a task, the eight grade students had a response rate of 11 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 0 %. Alternative two is about the teacher explaining something again in Swedish when someone did not understand the instructions in English, the eight grade students had a response rate of 53 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 57 %. Alternative three was that the teacher wanted order in the classroom, the eight grade students had a response rate of 38 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 17 %. Alternative four was that the teacher explained grammar in Swedish, the eight grade students had a response rate of 64 % and the ninth grade students had a response rate of 43 %. Alternative five was that the teacher spoke Swedish for any other reason then the ones previously stated the eight grade students had a response rate of 0 % and the ninth grade students also had a response rate of 0 %.

4.1.3 Interviews

In this part we present the answers received during the interviews, the questions (appendix 3) are divided up after the research question that they belong to. Here we present questions two, three, six and seven.

The second question the interviewed teachers’ responded to was, do you code-switch in the classroom? The third question deals with the question when and why code-switching occurs. All the interviewed teachers answered that they sometimes switch codes during the EFL lessons and that the main occurrence when they switch code is during grammar instruction. Teacher 1 explained why he switches code because it is easier for all students to understand and that it is difficult for the students to comprehend grammar instructions in English. Teacher 2 agreed and went on to explain that it is more of a practical matter and it is time consuming to use English when explaining grammar. Moreover teacher 2 explains that nowadays there are no lessons that are strictly grammar-based and that grammar is not such a dominant part as it used to be. Besides the previously mentioned examples, teachers 1, 3 and 4
use code-switching when they explain unfamiliar or complicated words or when they start up
new projects. The reasons for this are to make all students and especially the weak students
understand the given instructions or lexical meanings. However, all the interviewed teachers
agreed that all other activities during the EFL lessons should be in English and English only.
The Sixth question concerned to what extent their students code-switched during English
lessons. According to teachers 1 and 4, some students use code-switching and some do not
and those who do, do it because they are unwilling to use English during the lessons. The last
part of the two previous teachers’ answers was confirmed by teachers 2 and 3 who also said
that they have students who either use only English or only Swedish during the lessons. This
is unacceptable according to all four teachers.

Question number seven deals with the teachers’ perceptions of when their students switch
codes. According to teacher 4, one of the main occurrences when her students switch codes is
when they have a lot to say and feel stressed. She then either lets them say it in Swedish or in
a simplified form of English. The advice that teacher 4 gives to her classes is that it is better to
try to say things in English and maybe get them wrong than to stay silent or constantly use
Swedish. All four teachers agreed that the main occurrence when their students switch code
during the EFL lessons is when they talk to their peers about things that they consider not
having anything to do with the on-going lesson. Teacher 1 said that the composition of the
groups also plays a role if the students use Swedish or English during lessons. According to
him, an environment of students that is not supportive can make for a greater number of code-
switching situations due to fear of failure in the eyes of their peers. This statement was
confirmed by the other teachers who also stressed the significance of group composition and
the effect it has on students’ willingness to speak English during lessons. The advice given by
all four teachers concerned the creation of groups that represent the same level of English so
that the students can support each other and help promote a positive and supportive learning
environment.

4.2 Teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards code-switching

The following paragraphs deals with the second research question regarding the attitudes
towards code-switching among teachers’ and students’.
4.2.1 Questionnaires

This part presents the results of the questionnaire questions (appendix 2) that fall under this research question. Here we present the results of questions three (figure 3), four (figure 4) and five (figure 5) in the form of bar charts which will give the number of answers for each alternative of the questions.

The results of question three are presented in figure 3, which deals with the students’ perceptions of what their English teachers think about the choice of code in the EFL classroom. In both eighth and ninth grade there was a very strong unity in believing that they should only talk English during the lessons. This was confirmed by the total result. Only a small number of students perceived that they should talk English most of the lesson but Swedish is accepted sometimes. The number of students who believed so is higher in eighth grade than in ninth grade. No students thought that their teachers accept the use of Swedish during the lessons.

![Figure 3. What the students’ perceive that their English teachers think about the choice of code in the EFL classroom](image)

Question four here presented in figure 4, deals with what the students think of the language use in the EFL classroom. Alternative one, that they should be encouraged to speak more English had a medium number of answers both among the eight and ninth grade students, with a slightly higher number in the ninth grade. The number of students who agreed with
alternative two, that they should be allowed to speak more Swedish during the lessons was rather low in both grades with a few more respondents among the eight grade students. Alternative three which is that the students are satisfied with the current situation of language use was high in both grades with a small difference between the eight and ninth grade students where the eight grade students had a higher number of correlating students. The total result showed that the students were satisfied with the current situation but almost a third of the students felt that they should be encouraged to speak more English during the lessons.

![Figure 4. What the students’ think about the language use in the classroom](image)

The results of question five here presented in figure 5, deal with the students’ perceptions of how they thought that they would learn English the best. A high number of the eight graders thought that some switching to Swedish would help their learning process, whereas the ninth graders have low number of students who think that using Swedish would help their learning process. Both in the eight and ninth grade there was a high amount of students (62 of 87), who believed that only speaking English during the EFL lessons would help their learning process.
The number of students who agreed with this alternative was higher in the ninth grade.

![Bar chart showing student preferences for learning English.](image)

*Figure 5. Which way the students’ think that they will learn English the best*

### 4.2.2 Interviews

In this part we present the answers received during the interviews, the questions (appendix 3) are divided up after the research question that they belong to. Here we present questions one, four and five which deal with attitudes towards code-switching among teachers and students.

Question number one deals with the teachers’ opinions about code-switching. All four teachers agreed that code-switching is not preferable in the EFL classroom and that English should be the only language used. Teacher 2 thought that the use of code-switching is absurd and not acceptable in a learning situation and that English is used too seldom as a target language. But at the same time he admitted to having to accept the use of code-switching in grammar instruction. Teacher 3 stated that code-switching can be a usable tool, but only if used correctly and for no longer period of time. Teachers 1 and 4 did not like the use of code-switching but also admitted to its necessity. Teacher 4 stated that for her code-switching is confusing since she is fluent in three languages and that her thoughts have to agree with the language being spoken. So according to teacher 4 you first have to start thinking in a language before switching your spoken language or errors may occur at a higher frequency. This statement was confirmed by teachers 1 and 2 who also thought that thinking in a language
while speaking in another makes for inconvenient situations and for students who have low self-esteem this is not a suitable way of conducting learning situations in the EFL classroom.

Question four deals with the teachers’ thoughts about whether their use of English or Swedish in the EFL classroom has any effect on their students’ use of the two languages during lessons. All four teachers said that their choice of language definitely has an effect on their students’ choice of language. As teachers 1 and 4 said, the more English they use, the more English their students use. This was confirmed by teachers 2 and 3, who also said that it can be a long way to go before all of the students in a class/group understand the importance of using English during English lessons. Another matter that all four teachers agreed on was group compositions. When groups are mixed there will be some code-switching but if the groups are formed depending on student proficiency then it is easier for the teachers to plan and execute lessons in a way that code-switching will not occur. Teacher 1 said that completing an entire lesson and only using English is very hard as long as the groups are as mixed as they are now. Teacher 2 stated that the effort in telling his students to only use English during lessons often pays off in the end when the students finally realize the benefits of using the target language consistently.

Question five deals with the teachers’ perceptions of the positives or negatives that come with using code-switching during lessons. All of the teachers agreed that the most positive thing with code-switching is during the situations when they teach grammar. Teacher 1 said that it has a positive effect when it helps getting the entire class/group to understand instructions. The other teachers agreed.

When it comes to negative effects of code-switching, teacher 4 mentioned all of those things that confuse the students and make it harder for the students to follow what is going on during the lessons. Teachers 2 and 3 said that the most important thing is the communication between teacher and student as well as student and student. It is negative when code-switching makes communication more difficult. However, teacher 2 also stated that code-switching should not be promoted. The constant use of English during English lessons is the goal of his teaching philosophy and should be the goal of all teachers of English. According to teacher 2, the use of everyday items or everyday events should be used more in the teaching of English so that the students can see the relevance of the use of English as a target language at an earlier stage in their learning process. This is something that teacher 4 agreed with and is
an idea that she definitely supports. When the students see the use of English as a means of gaining a grade in a subject and its use is only restricted to the classroom setting, the students are not able to develop their language to its full potential.
5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate when and why code-switching occurs and the attitudes towards code-switching among teachers and students in four EFL-classrooms in two medium-sized secondary schools. There were a lot of aspects to cover in the project and the amount of time for completing all of the research was limited due to lack of availability of the participating students and teachers.

5.1 When and why is code-switching used?

The participating students showed no signs of reluctance when answering the questionnaires and none of them complained about the questions that they were asked. The same goes for the participating teachers who responded to all of our questions without any hesitation and gave honest answers. Besides providing us with their answers and opinions on the matters raised in this study, two of the teachers also gave us feedback about what has been highlighted during the process of writing the dissertation.

The investigation into when and why code-switching occurs in EFL classrooms gave us several things to think about. The observations showed that the main occurrence when students’ switched codes during lessons was when they talked to their peers about non-lesson related matters, this occurred 93 times during our observations. This was confirmed by the answers received in the teacher interviews as well as the results from the questionnaire. The questionnaire question concerning this matter showed that 62 % of the eight graders and 69 % of the ninth graders admitted that their main reason for switching codes was to talk to peers about non-lesson related matters. The findings are confirmed by Simon (2001); Halmari (2004) who say that (see section 2.2) switching back to the native language provides the learner a natural opportunity to retreat to a secure zone of language use and that the functions of code-switching have a close connection to the speech situations and interpersonal relationships that affect them.

The second most frequent occurrence of code-switching among students according to the observations was when they talked to one or more of their peers about the task at hand. This
happened a total of 42 times during our observations. This was something that the teachers did not find acceptable since the target language, should be the only language spoken during the lessons. The student questionnaire gave us a result that showed that 33% of the eight graders and 31% of the ninth graders answered in line with what the observations had showed. This is also confirmed by previous research which says that (see section 2.2) learners use their native language to communicate between one another and by doing so they get an understandable response if the other learners have the same or another perception of the received information. All of this is done so that the learners in a simplified way can negotiate meaning and help their own learning process (Simon 2001). According to Sert (2005), this function has both positive and negative effects in the long run, especially for weaker learners who may refrain from using English at all due to fear of making mistakes in front of their peers.

The teachers’ choice of code is another matter which was investigated and the observations gave us the image that the teachers very seldom switched codes. The observed teachers switched codes 12 times during the eight observed lessons. Five of those occurrences were when explaining tasks again to students who did not understand or needed further guidance and seven times about non-lesson related matters. The students’ perceptions of their teachers’ choice of code is that when they teach the eight grade students they speak mostly English and sometimes Swedish during the lessons. However, in the ninth graders the main perception is that the teachers only speak English. So far the results are somewhat contradictory. The teacher interviews confirmed our own image that the teachers were reluctant to use Swedish during the lessons and only did so in cases when a student needed more instructions or did not fully understand a task. According to Sert (2005) a teacher’s code-switching (see section 2.1), serves some sort of purpose in the deliverance of information and meaning. The most common use of code switching is when teaching grammar. By switching to the students’ L1, the teacher can build “a bridge from known (native language) to unknown (new foreign language content)” Sert, (2005) and meaning can be discussed and understood at an earlier stage by the learners. In order to reach clarity between teacher and student from the delivered information the use of code switching can be done through a repetitive function. This statement from Sert is confirmed in the answers given during the interviews where the teachers unanimously state that their main reason for switching codes was to facilitate the students’ understanding of grammar. Besides the opportunity to gain a broader understanding
among the students this was done to save time, since it is easier for second language learners to understand grammar in their mother tongue.

Besides the above given results the students also switch codes when their knowledge of the English language or their resolve when it comes to speaking English falters. This is shown both in the observations and in the interviews as well as in previous research. Sert (2005) (see section 2.1) states that students tend to code switch and “use the native lexical item when he/she has not the competence for using the target language explanation for a particular lexical item” (Sert, 2005). This function of code switching when the proficiency of the learner falters can be seen as a defensive mechanism but by using a native lexical item the learner can continue his/her part in the on-going interaction. Simon (2001) explains (see section 2.2) that the learner’s choice of code is closely related to the type of task at hand and the learner’s need to in a safe way communicate their understanding of the information presented by the teacher in the target language.

5.2 What are the attitudes towards code-switching?

The second research question that was presented in the beginning of this dissertation dealt with students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards code-switching. Here we began by asking the students about their teachers’ thoughts about the language use in the classroom. The results from the questionnaires reinforced the perception that we had since finishing the classroom observations, namely that the teachers want their students to speak English during the lessons. The majority of the participating students said so but there was a small amount of students who thought that their teachers might accept a little bit of Swedish during the lessons. The teachers gave us very similar answers, they wanted their students to speak English during the lessons and if there was some word or sentence that they were unsure of if they should try to express it in a simpler form or in other words. Swedish should only be used as a last resort. Following the previous question we went on asking the students what they thought of the language use in the classroom. Some students thought that they should be encouraged to speak more English. Very few students thought that they should be allowed to speak more Swedish while most of the students considered the current situation acceptable. The current situation as explained before was that English is the only accepted language in the classroom.
except for in extreme situations when Swedish might be the last and only resort for some students to make themselves understood. The teachers’ opinions when it comes to the matter of code-switching were quite clear: in most cases it is not accepted but at times code-switching is a necessary means to an end. One of those rare occasions is when teaching grammar, another is when a student or a couple of students do not understand the instructions given and clarification is necessary. Teacher 2 thought that the use of code-switching is not acceptable in a learning situation and that English is used too seldom. Teacher 3 stated that code-switching can be a usable tool, but only if used correctly and for no longer period of time. Teachers 1 and 4 did not like the use of code-switching but also admitted to its necessity. Teacher 4 went on by saying that in her case code-switching is confusing since she is fluent in three languages and the reasons for her confusion was that her thoughts needed to agree with the language spoken. Teachers 1 and 2 agreed and said that thinking in a language while speaking in another makes for inconvenient situations and for students who have low self-esteem this is not a suitable way of conducting learning situations. These thoughts were confirmed by many of the pupils who participated in NU03 who answered that their problem with communicating in English was that they felt embarrassed about speaking in class, and many had performance anxiety and thought that everything had to be perfect in terms of speaking in class (Apelgren & Oscarson, 2005).

We then asked the teachers if they thought that their choice of code during the lessons affected the students’ choice of code and the students’ willingness to use the target language. All four teachers said that their choice of language definitely has an effect on their students’ choice of language. Teachers 1 and 4 said that the more English they use, the more English their students use. This was confirmed by teachers 2 and 3, who also said that it can take long before all of the students in a class/group understand how important it is to use English during English lessons. Another matter that all four teachers agreed on is group compositions. In groups with mixed abilities, there will be more code-switching, but if when forming the groups are formed according to the students’ language abilities, code-switching will occur less frequently. The matter of group composition and the teachers’ effect on the students’ willingness to use the target language has also been discussed in the research. According to accommodation theory (see section 2.1), speakers adapt their language use and strategically vary their language as a tool for communicating in different environments (Mesthrie et al, 2000). This shows to the point that students as well as teachers in certain situations choose to adapt their language in order to fit in or to show their status in the current interaction. When
the switch is unconscious it might be because the teacher needs to connect with the students on a more personal level and by doing so in the L1 of the classroom a more concerned and personal side of the teacher is conveyed. Switching codes to fit the topic is a function of code switching that is widely used in second language learning. The pupils who participated in NU03 described the EFL classroom climate to be messy and loud, while the teachers thought that the climate in the classroom was good. Pupils’ and the teachers’ perceptions of the learning climate can be looked upon differently and this may influence the speaking activities in the classroom and the pupils’ willingness and confidence to speak (Lundberg & Oscarson, 2008). The answers of the interviewed teachers for this study were in line with what the students in NU03 expressed.

Furthermore, the majority of the participating students in this study believed that they would become more proficient in the English language if they had to use the target language all of the time. This was supported by the teachers who promoted the constant use of English during lessons and who stressed the importance of daring to use the language even when the students’ knowledge was low. They still confessed to its necessity. Teacher 1 said that code-switching had a positive effect when it helped getting the entire class/group to understand instructions. The other teachers also agreed with this statement. Concerning the negative effects of code-switching, teacher 4 mentioned all of those things that confuse the students and that make it harder for the students to follow what is happening during the lessons. Teachers 2 and 3 said that the most important thing is the communication between teacher and student as well as student and student. It is negative when code-switching makes that communication more difficult. According to teacher 2, everyday items or events should be used more often in the teaching of English so that the students can see the relevance of using English as a target language at an earlier stage in their learning process. Teacher 4 agreed. The students that participated in NU03 (Lundberg & Oscarson, 2008) also considered the use of current affairs and the incorporation of their interests as useful vehicle for gaining a greater understanding and proficiency of the English language.

Our results and our understanding of the research literature show that the use of code-switching has both positive and negative sides. Its use can help a student gain a greater understanding of the language while at the same time making it harder for another student to gain the same understanding.
6 CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that code-switching during EFL lessons mostly occur when students converse with their peers about non-lesson related things. It also occurs when they talk to their peers about a current task and when their knowledge and willingness falters. These occurrences were confirmed in the answers given by their teachers. The teachers stated that their main reason for switching codes was when teaching/explaining grammar and that code-switching was unacceptable during lessons although they also admitted to its necessity. The students’ perceptions of this did not concur with what the teachers said. They claimed that their teachers used code-switching when wanting order in the classroom and when explaining instructions again to those who did not understand when the instructions were given in the target language.

Teachers and students were in agreement when it came to the choice of code in the classroom and in how the students would be most likely to gain greater knowledge and proficiency in the English language. The choice of language should be English and in order to progress in their learning, they should use only English during lessons. Some of the interviewed teachers also mentioned the possibility of their students using English outside of the classroom.

The results presented show that a large majority of the students prefer using English and they are also taught by teachers who use English consistently during their lessons. There is thus a connection between the teachers’ use and the students’ willingness to use the target language see also Simon, 2001, and Sert, 2005.

In conclusion, the results of this study are very much in line with the previous research. Code-switching takes place in situations when the students feel that they do not need to use the target language and in situations when they need to confirm their own perceptions of given instructions with those of their peers. Teachers tend to mainly use code-switching when repeating already given instructions and when teaching grammar as well as when requesting order in the classroom.

We find that the field of code-switching is interesting and need to be researched further. More research should be done on code-switching that occurs in the second and the third language.
classroom and how it can help some learners to gain a greater understanding of the target language. Investigating a larger number of students for a longer period of time would be rewarding.

The study presented in this dissertation is limited to four classrooms at two medium-sized secondary schools and the results can not be seen as universal but rather as an image of what the situation is at the represented schools. During the process of writing this text we achieved a better understanding of code-switching and the role that it plays in language learning.
List of References

Primary sources
Classroom observations carried out 2009, [September 28 – 2009, October 02].
Questionnaire with 87 students, 2009, [November 16 – 2009, November 18].
Interviews with the four teachers, teacher 1, 2, 3 and 4, [2009, November 26, 2009, December 04].

Secondary sources


### Appendices

#### Appendix 1

**Observation schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Swedish spoken by student with teacher about lesson related matter</th>
<th>Swedish spoken by student with teacher about non-lesson related matter</th>
<th>Swedish spoken by student with other student about lesson related matter</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Swedish spoken by student with other student about non-lesson related matter</strong></td>
<td><strong>Swedish spoken by student as a substitute for an English word or sentence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Swedish spoken by teacher with student/s about non-lesson related matter</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Swedish spoken by teacher with student/s about lesson related matter</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Questionnaire

1. Under lektionerna i engelska använder jag:
   □ Endast svenska
   □ Mest svenska, ibland engelska
   □ Lika mycket svenska som engelska
   □ Mest engelska, ibland svenska
   □ Endast engelska

2. Om du använder både engelska och svenska på engelsklektionerna, när är det du använder svenska? (Välj ett eller flera alternativ)
   □ När jag pratar med klasskamrater om uppgiften vi håller på med
   □ När jag pratar med klasskamrater om annat
   □ När jag pratar med läraren om uppgiften vi håller på med
   □ När jag pratar med läraren om annat
   □ När det är ett engelskt ord som jag inte kan/förstår
   □ När vi håller på med grammatik
   □ När jag blir stressad
   □ När jag vill uttrycka egna åsikter eller känslor
3. Vad tycker din engelsklärare om språkvalet i klassrummet?

□ Vi måste prata engelska hela tiden

□ Vi ska helst prata engelska men det är ok om vi pratar svenska ibland (t.ex om vi inte förstår eller kan uttrycka oss på engelska)

□ Det är helt ok om vi pratar svenska

4. Vad tycker du om språkanvändandet i klassrummet?

□ Vi borde uppmanas att prata mer engelska

□ Vi borde få prata svenska oftare

□ Det är bra som det är

5. Genom vilket av följande sätt tror du att du lär dig mest?

□ Om jag får växla till svenska ibland

□ Om jag alltid måste prata engelska

6. Under lektionerna i engelska använder min lärare:

□ Endast svenska

□ Mest svenska, ibland engelska

□ Ungefär lika mycket engelska som svenska

□ Mest engelska, ibland svenska

□ Endast engelska
7. Om din lärare använder både svenska och engelska på lektionerna, när är det han/hon använder svenska? (Välj ett eller flera alternativ)

☐ När han/hon ger oss dagens uppgift

☐ När han/hon förklarar något vi inte förstår

☐ När han/hon vill få ordning i klassrummet

☐ När han/hon pratar om grammatik

☐ Annat tillfälle, ange vilket/vilka:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

__________

Tack för din medverkan!

Christoffer & Henrik
Appendix 3

Interview questions

1. Vad tycker du om code-switching? (What do you think of code-switching?)
2. Växlar du språk (code-switchar) i klassrummet? (Do you code-switch in the classroom?)
3. Om så är fallet, när och varför? (If so, when and why do you code-switch?)
4. Tror du att din användning av engelska och svenska i klassrummet påverkar elevernas användning av engelska och svenska i klassrummet? (Do you think that your use of English and Swedish in the classroom affect that of the students?)
5. Tycker du som lärare att det finns fördelar med att byta språk i klassrummet eller för det bara med sig problem? (Do you as a teacher think that switching to the native language in some cases can be beneficial to the students’ language acquisition, or is it only a problem?)
6. Växlar dina elever språk (code-switchar) under lektionerna? (Do your students code-switch during English lessons?)
7. Finns det några specifika situationer då dina elever växlar språk (code-switchar)? (Are there any specific situations in which the students code-switch?)