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Code Switching in EFL Classroom Discourse: Teachers' Function, Learners' Voice, and Language Choice

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Abstract

Employing code switching as an instructional medium in the foreign language classroom has proved to be controversial. Moreover, learners' voice and implementing learners' power in the classroom context can be pursued in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom code switching. The goal of the current study was to examine how language choice and code-switching by instructors and students function in EFL classroom conversations. To do so, a qualitative study was designed, and the data were collected by means of in-depth live observations of four classes encompassing 50 intermediate-level EFL learners and interviews with EFL teachers of the aforementioned classes, as well as 600 minutes of the classroom interactions recorded in the observed sessions. Based on the descriptive and empirical methods used to analyze the data, code switching was widely used in intermediate EFL classrooms. The learners also used code switching to satisfy their immediate needs pertaining to facilitated learning. Finally, the teachers used code switching as a facilitating factor to enhance their learners' understanding of pragmatic and socio-cultural aspects of the English language. Furthermore, the inter-sentential form of code switching was the most common one among the students followed by intra-sentential code switching and tag-switching. Different functions of code switching were also identified, and the learners' errors were specified as the trigger to this phenomenon. These errors were analyzed and proved to be of pragmatic, semantic, and structural types, with the first one taking priority over the other two. The findings of the present study can help develop the interlanguage research, especially on bilingual and multilingual grounds. Both linguists and applied linguists can use the study findings in the future research on L2 classrooms. Moreover, EFL teachers and learners can benefit from the study findings in their language choice in the L2 classroom for more clarified communication.

Keywords: EFL classroom discourse, Language choice, Language switching, Learners' voice, Teachers' functions.

I | INTRODUCTION

Naturally, interaction is the specified characteristics of foreign language classrooms. Edmonson (2004) identified two connections between language acquisition and communication in the EFL situations. First, learning the target language is meant to help individuals become more proficient in their interlingual communication. Second, communication serves as both the medium and target of instruction. The L2 language acquisition process is facilitated through communication, while, in the absence of the immediate target language community, EFL learners have to be more focused on the medium of instruction which is their target language (Djalilova, 2023; Hiver et al., 2024). However, in foreign language classrooms, in addition to the target language, a second language, typically the teacher's and



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students' native one, is frequently used to facilitate the teaching-learning process (Banaruee et al., 2023; Mazlum, 2024; Paragae, 2023; Shokirovna, 2023). Due to the presence of at least two languages, the L1 and L2, and some dialects and languages spoken by the trilingual in the Iranian schools and language institutes, the setting is multilingual for most of the learners (Daneshgar, 2024). Hence, code switching frequently and naturally occurs during foreign language classroom interactions (Hu et al., 2022).

Since the recent approach in code switching (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021) focuses on the learners' positions and their voice, the role of their native language (e.g., their first language or their mother tongue) in the L2 classroom becomes prominent. When EFL learners come from various geographical backgrounds or different language settings, code-switching is minimized (Pintado Gutiérrez, 2021). However, in linguistically homogeneous classrooms, as is the case in Iranian foreign language classrooms, using the students' L1 becomes a considerably more practical issue (Puspawati, 2018). However, there's still debate about L1 use, even in linguistically homogeneous classrooms. Learners must be exposed to L2 since the classroom is considered as the main source of exposure to the target language for them. Meanwhile, it is not necessary for the instructor to speak exclusively in L2 because, for many students, it gets difficult to follow the teacher (Cancino & Díaz, 2020; Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022). Meyer (2008) considers the nature of the classroom as a decisive factor in using L1 in the L2 teaching learning processes. As he mentions, in EFL classes, while learners progress and improve their L2 communication abilities, the scaffolding provided by L1 should be gradually taken down. It is also argued that L2 should be utilized as much as possible in the classroom, and each classroom should aim to maximize L2 use (Caballero & Celaya, 2022; Hu et al., 2022; Paragae, 2023).

There has been a lot of discussion lately over monolingual foreign language classes (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022). While some scholars contend that L2 education should solely be conducted in the target language (Cook, 2001; Hu et al., 2022; Krashen, 1981; Puspawati, 2018), others maintain that mother tongue is a valuable resource for L2 acquisition (Caballero & Celaya, 2022; Cancino & Díaz, 2020). Yet, there are some others who have voiced their opposition to removing L1 entirely from L2 classrooms (e.g., Almelhi, 2020; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nation, 2003). Moreover, the need of deliberate and purposeful use of both the target and local languages in the classroom is stressed throughout teacher preparation programs (Jehma, 2022). Some other studies have reiterated that L1 can provide beneficial outcomes with caution and planning (Cancino & Díaz, 2020; Cook, 2001; Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022). All in all, it is not easy to be conscious of one's language use or choice, as EFL teachers' experiences have shown. While code switching is viewed by some educators as a cause for concern and an indication of a student's weakness, recent research indicates that code switching is crucial to the learning of a second language and, when used correctly by multilingual speakers, can be a valuable skill (Hiver et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2022; Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022; Puspawati, 2018). The utilization of L1 in L2 classes has long been contentious among scholars and researchers due to the fact that various theories of L2 acquisition have led to differing assumptions regarding the usefulness of L1 use in L2 classes (Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022; Mahmoudi, 2011). Due to the ever-changing nature of the classroom setting, meticulous preparation is always out of the question. Using the target language extensively is now promoted among EFL teacher trainees in Iran (Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022; Sanei, 2022). Still, there is value in using students' native languages while teaching.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1. Code Switching

Code switching can be defined differently depending on the approach the researchers choose to use in the study of this phenomenon. The practice of “the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation” is known as “code switching” (Grosjean, 1982, p. 145). Different kinds of



code switching are not necessarily clearly distinguished by previous studies, nor have code-switching functions been well operationalized. To illustrate the point, Blom & Gumperz (1972) presented the concept of situational and metaphorical code switching, which Botztepe (2003) classifies as types of code switching although these categories can equally be thought of as functions of code switching. By “participants’ definition of each other’s rights and obligations” (p. 424), we mean a change in language when there is a situational switch. This indicates that the language is directly related to the circumstance. For instance, using an informal code in a situation where a formal one is anticipated to be used is the violation of commonly accepted norms (Yletyinen, 2004). Metaphorical switching, in turn, signifies a relation between the unexpected variety and particular kinds of subjects (Almelhi, 2020; Botztepe, 2003). That is, the variety comes to symbolize some social meaning (Heller, 1988). The difference between these terms, functions, and types of codes switched needs to be clarified, because this study has focused on both functions and types of code switching. We will classify various forms of code switching used in the EFL classroom in the Iranian context based on the framework presented by Poplack (1980), as the most frequently cited framework in this respect.

2. Poplack’s Categorization of Code Switching

The three forms of code switching that Poplack (1980) outlined are *tag-switching*, *intra-sentential switching*, and *inter-sentential switching*. Code switching occurs between sentences, specifically at the boundary of a clause or sentence when two or more languages are used. She originally described this as *inter-sentential switching*. Since code switching occurs between sentences, she claims that it requires the least integration. The second kind of code switching; *tag-switching*, involves minimal integration of the two languages. According to Romaine (1995), tag-switching is the process of adding a tag from one language to an utterance originally spoken in another language. Poplack (1980) argues that tags are syntactically free, meaning they can be moved about and placed practically anywhere in a conversation without breaking any grammar rules. An example could clarify this type of code switching: “Teacher: You should look them up in your dictionary? -Student: Can we use our mobiles? / *Mishe kbânûm?* / *Nemishe?*” (Can we lady? Can’t we?).

The third type of code switching; *intra-sentential switching*, necessitates a significant level of integration and refers to the introduction of words or phrases from one language into another sentence or speech (Almelhi, 2020; Poplack, 1980). According to Poplack (1980), this particular form of code switching can be considered a more intimate variant compared to inter-sentential switching. This is because both the code-switched segment and the surrounding segments must adhere to the syntactic requirements of both languages. When two languages are combined in a sentence, two distinct syntactic systems are also present. Consequently, the speaker must possess proficiency in both languages to prevent grammatically incorrect utterances. An example representing intra/sentential switching can make the point clear. A student might answer the question “*what did you do to learn the software?*” as “*I took a course for rouz**hâ**y-e fard (the odd days) to learn how to work with it*”. What Romaine (1995) proposes is that intra-sentential code switching will be bound to word constraints and syntactic elements in an utterance. Interestingly, examples of this can be found in Persian. For instance, a Persian word might get an English inflection as in *baches/bacés/(guys)*, where -s is an English inflection for pluralization.

3. Functions of Code Switching in L2 Classrooms

Code switching functions, along with natural multilingual interactions, should be taught in schools. Canagarajah (1995) and Merritt et al. (1992) investigated the varieties and functions of code switching in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom discussions. Three elementary schools in Kenya were examined by Merritt et al. (1992). The languages taught were English, Swahili, and the mother tongue. English served as both the medium of instruction and the learning purpose. Classroom interactions were observed ethnographically to gather the data. Code switching was thus formalized in four distinct situations: 1) when one language is used to express the same idea in another, 2) when one activity is used to add new information to the discourse, 3) when one sentence is translated or words are substituted, and 4) when interactional particles are used (Merritt et al., 1992).



In Jaffna, Sri Lanka, [Canagarajah \(1995\)](#) observed ESL classes and then interviewed the teachers about their perspectives on code switching after each lecture. He discovered both micro- and macro-functions of code switching. Class management and content transmission were the two subcategories of micro-functions. The socio-educational consequences were addressed by macro-functions, which included preparing students for their social and communicative lives beyond the classroom. To rephrase, macro-functions (such as bilingualism and linguistic attitudes) were related to topics outside of the classroom, whereas micro-functions were concerned with classroom-based difficulties ([Canagarajah, 1995](#)).

III. AIMS OF THE STUDY

Due to the fact that Iranian EFL learners are at least bilingual, if not trilingual in some geographical regions, code switching is likely to occur in L2 classrooms. Accordingly, the code-switching types and their functions in the EFL classroom can be studied in an attempt to find more suitable methods of using L1 in teaching L2 and employing code switching as an opportunity, rather than a threat, in the foreign language classroom. Moreover, parallels between the code-switching types and functions might be discovered by carefully comparing these notions. The present study was an attempt to examine language choices based on code switching functions. Hence, the following research questions were raised.

1. What types of code switching can be found in the EFL classroom?
2. What functions can the switched codes play in the EFL classroom?
3. Which error types lead to code switching in the EFL classroom?

IV. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

The participants of the study were 50 intermediate-level EFL learners of English (both male and female) who were studying “Top Notch 2A” in the TEFL Research Center in Tehran. Of them, 27 were female, and 23 were male. They were also from 20 to 25 years old, mostly university students or university graduates. However, their previous academic background was not considered as a significant factor in the present study. The data collection was performed during two months. To choose the sample, the students’ final scores in the previous semester were taken to make sure that the participants were homogenous regarding their proficiency level. They were all non-native speakers of English. The teachers who ran the conversation classes were all non-native females who had studied English at the B.A. level in Iranian universities. The demographic features of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants.

Class	Level	No. of students	Gender		English conversation background	Teachers
			Male	Female		
A	Intermediate	12	6	6	1 year	Female
B	Intermediate	13	6	7	1 year	Female
C	Intermediate	14	6	8	1 year	Female
D	Intermediate	11	5	6	1 year	Female
		N = 50	N = 23	N = 27		



2. Data Collection Instruments

Classroom observations, a researcher-made *classroom checklist*, and *live recordings* of the classrooms for 600 minutes representing classroom interactions and discourse were used to collect the data. *Classroom observations* were a great help which provided the researcher with more in-depth understanding of what was accomplished through the use of code switching while teaching/learning the foreign language. An *observation checklist*, which appears in appendix A, was also filled out for each session to make sure the classes were the same regarding the approaches and activities presented during each session. Following a thorough review of the related literature, the most significant features, types, and functions of the code-switching phenomenon in the classroom were determined and translated to the observation checklist. The checklist was then put to the scrutiny of three experts who were TEFL PhD holders and teacher educators. After being modified based on the comments of experts, the checklist was used to collect the data. The validity of the checklist was thus taken into consideration. It is worth mentioning that the checklist mostly focused on the micro-level functions of code-switching and the macro levels (communicative features and strategies), which are potentially employed in the real language situation outside the classroom. A *voice recorder* was used to audio-record the discourse of the classes as another data collection instrument based on the live EFL classroom interactions. It is also worth mentioning that some controversial cases of code switching, whether in the micro or macro domain, were discussed with the teachers through some informal interviews to get a clearer viewpoint of the factor(s) which motivated the specific cases of code switching and its specific category.

3. Procedure

The data collection procedure was accomplished in a two-month period. To select the sample, not only the students' level but also their final scores were used to make sure that the participants were homogenous in terms of proficiency. Each one of the four classes was observed and audio-recorded for two to three hours, which made a total of 10 hours of classroom discourse. Additionally, notes were made to offer more details about the classroom setting. Likewise, the checklist was completed for each session during observing the same class. After each class, the unclear data or unspecified types of the switched codes were discussed with the teacher of the class through informal talks. This was done to find the exact category in which a switched code could be placed. Then, the class recordings were listened to and transcribed carefully to be analyzed. It should be mentioned that, since the focus of the study was the cases of code switching in the EFL classroom, only the parts containing the use of L1 were transcribed. The transcriptions and the information taken through the classroom observations were then meticulously analyzed, explained, and reported.

4. Criterion for Analysis and Scoring

The data analysis instruments were qualitatively oriented and were subject to both *descriptive and content analyses*. In the descriptive analysis, different views on the topics mentioned in the code-switching criteria were taken into consideration. Included in this section were data summaries, the data classifications derived from the classroom observation checklists, and the data classifications derived from the recordings of classroom interactions. The criteria used were those reported by Poplack (1980), who classified instances of code switching into three types: *intra-sentential switching*, *inter-sentential switching*, and *tag-switching*. To provide a more diverse view of various functions of code switching in the EFL classroom, micro functions (Canagarajah, 1995) were taken into account (Table 2). Due to the nature of macro functions, which are mainly found in real bilingual or multilingual situations, the researchers did not consider them in their analysis.



Table 2. Coding functions (Canagarajah, 1995, pp. 179-192).

Micro-functions	Classroom management	Opening the class, Negotiating directions, Requesting help, Managing discipline, Teacher encouragement, Teacher compliments, Teacher's commands, Teacher admonitions, Mitigation, Pleading, Unofficial interactions
	Content transmission	Review, Definition, Explanation, Negotiating cultural relevance, Parallel translation, Non-formal student collaboration
Macro-functions	Communicative functions	on reaching both the educated and the uneducated, on conveying exact meaning, on streamlining communication (i.e., taking the easiest and shortest route), on negotiating with more authority, on drawing attention
	Goal oriented strategies	lack of equipment/registration issues/speaker's state of mind to stress something, to have habitual experience, to have semantic importance, to demonstrate membership in a group/for more practical purposes, to grab people's attention, to reach out to new demographics

Code switching allowed teachers and students to efficiently and systematically regulate classroom interactions, which was examined under classroom management functions. The idea that code switching can facilitate the efficient transmission of language skills and course materials was referred to as “content transmission” (Canagarajah, 1995). The sources of code switching and the initial stimulating factors of the phenomenon were also followed through analyzing the learners’ structural, semantic, and pragmatic errors (Allwright, 1988; Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; James, 1998; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). The category has been widely employed in error analysis studies since its birth (Brown, 2007; Caballero & Celaya, 2022; Ellis, 2008; Myles, 2002; Puspawati, 2018). Based on the explanatory analyses and the matrix of structuring, the findings were organized and described using frequency tables.

V. RESULTS

1. Research Question 1

What types of code switching can be found in the EFL classroom?

Appendix B represents the code-switching observation results of whole sessions observed as well as the frequency of each type or function based on their degree of attraction for the learners and teachers. The checklist findings revealed that among the *code-switching types* employed in the foreign language classroom context, “inter-sentential code switching” was the most frequent one, with the frequency of 71. “Tag-switching” and “intra-sentential code switching” showed to be less attractive types of code switching in the classroom context with the frequency of 33 and 32, respectively.

Moreover, the class recordings showed that *inter-sentential* code switching was often used by both teachers and students. The results also showed that *tag-switching* was seldom used, and, when it did occur, it was largely by the learners. The ability to transition between the two languages’ structures was often necessary for *intra-sentential code switching*, which happened when there was a switch inside a sentence. As Poplack (1980) argues, only the most proficient bilingual learners use intra-sentential code switching because of the amount of integration it needs. Despite the fact that the participants in our EFL classroom were not typically proficient bilinguals, the results showed that intra-sentential code switching did occur.



2. Research Question 2

What functions can the switched codes play in the EFL classroom?

Based on the results of the checklist data analysis (see appendix B), among the *classroom management functions*, “requesting help” and among the *content transmission functions*, “explanation” represented the highest frequencies with 81 and 96 degrees, respectively. Following these elements, “teacher admonitions”, as one of the *classroom management functions*, and “definition” and “parallel translation” which are categorized in the group of *content transmission functions* were represented to be of 43, 47, and 48 degrees of frequency, respectively and therefore moderately frequent in the classroom context at the intermediate level. The rest of the functions of any type referred to in the checklist or the related literature showed low frequencies and could be accounted as the least attractive functions for the learners and teachers in the EFL classroom.

Classroom recordings data were analyzed based on [Canagarajah’s \(1995\)](#) criteria to find the micro-level functions (classroom management and content transmission). The frequency and causes of occurrences of sub-functions of these categories in the classroom context were found and the results revealed the following:

2.1. Classroom Management Functions

Opening the class: This function of code switching was rather similar to another one named *unofficial interactions*, which will be discussed further in this section. The conversations in the beginning of the class were considered somehow unofficial, and the teacher and students usually felt free to use Persian in such cases. In line 1 in the following example, the teacher used Persian in the beginning of the class, and her code switching triggered it on the part of the learners. It could be inferred that the teacher might try to lighten up the atmosphere and help the learners to start with more energy.

At the beginning of the class, the students greet in Persian:

1. T: /harki marize bere ha/, goodbye! (Those who are sick may leave the class.)
2. S: / nomrero age midin berim. / (If you announce the scores, we will leave.)
3. T: / hâlâ na, at 2.../ (Not now. At 2.00)
4. S2: /page 29/
5. S3: /21 mide...behet/ (She will announce your scores)
6. T: Ok, alright, page 30 right?

As it was seen in line 6, the teacher switched to English to signify that they were going to officially start the class.

Requesting help: This function was often employed by the learners when facing a problem. They used it when they wanted to ask for help. This function was quite usual in the present data. According to the examples, the students most often asked for help in Persian when they needed a word equivalent, or when they were dealing with a grammar-related difficulty. The following examples illustrated the cases where students switched codes to ask for the equivalents of words:

Asking for the English equivalents:

1. S: /vasâye-le jânebi chi mishe/? (What is the meaning of accessories?)
2. T: accessories

Interestingly, in lines 3 and 5 in the next instance, the student switched to Persian while the teacher told her not to. So, she kept asking questions in Persian while the teacher answered them in English.



After role playing a conversation:

1. S: excuse me can I use Farsi?
2. T: no, what's your problem?
3. S: /man fek mikardam ke moghe-'i ke masalan mikhâim begim bahs bar angiz nis, on vaght oun chi mishe?/ (I think when we want to say something is not controversial, what do we say?)
4. T: 'it's out of the question', means we are not going to speak about it
5. S: /yani inke rad mishe ya harf raje besh zade nemishe?/ (It means that, is it taken for granted or nobody speaks about it?)
6. T: no difference

As mentioned, students resort to code switching to find answers to their grammatical problems. The following extract demonstrates one of these cases. In line 3, a student used Persian to ask a question about the usage of “used to”, but the teacher did not answer the question, probably to show her dissatisfaction with the use of Persian and code switching in such a case.

One of the students had a grammatical question and preferred to ask it in Persian:

1. S: can I ask a question in Persian?
2. T: no try to say it in English.
3. S: /âxe vaghe'an nemi-tounam... estefâde az “used to” to-ye part b aslan barâm jâ nemi-yoft-e.../ (To tell the truth, I can't. I don't know how to use” used to” in the second section.)
4. T: you arrived late
5. S: yes, sorry
6. T: so would you please wait.

Teacher admonitions: According to [Canagarajah \(1995\)](#), this function is employed when a teacher expresses displeasure or annoyance with the students using their mother tongue. In the example below, the students were supposed to do an exercise in the class. The teacher found out that one of the students had the answers in his book, while it had been notified several times before that they should do it in the class. That's when she switched to Persian in line 3 to show her dissatisfaction. This also triggered the student's code switching in response.

Checking the answers in the class:

1. T: what about Friday?
2. S (just arrived): play, 7 o'clock
3. T: /shoma ye lahze goushâtuno begirin ... vâlâ man torki balad nistam vali bâ zaboune hamshahri bâ lahje migam, gharâr bood pâk konid.../ (Please listen for a moment.... God knows, am not speaking the dragon's language, but I put it clearly. You were to clean it.)
4. S: / khub goush kardam, CD ro man dâram âkhe.../ (I listened very well. I have the CD. You know?!).
5. T: / hame dâran, daste gole-tun dard nakone/ Ok, Friday? (Everybody has a copy. That's good.)

Unofficial interactions: Unofficial encounters are those that “are not required by the lesson” ([Canagarajah, 1995, p. 185](#)). There were several instances of unofficial interaction in the present data. Most of these



cases happened when future plans were being discussed. As they were not the discussions demanded by the lesson and because the teachers and the students considered them important, they both switched to Persian to prevent misunderstandings.

The teacher goes through the future plans in the class:

1. T: ok for the next session, we have ...work book, grammar booster, listening, writing and then you have 5 days to get ready for the final...
2. S1: /yani yekshanbe hafte dige?/ (Do you mean next Sunday?)
3. T: /yekshanbe do hafte dige/ (The Sunday in two weeks.)
4. S2: /ba'd interview ke-ye ostād?/ (When is the interview, teacher?)
5. T: /nadārid/ (You'll have no interview.)
6. S2: /chetor? Cherā nadārim?/ (Why? Why don't we have one?)
7. T: /term-e ba'd/ (next semester.)

According to the observations, most of the unofficial interactions took place between learners while asking each other for help or doing activities in pairs or in groups. The data analyses revealed that *opening the class*, *requesting for help*, *teacher admonitions*, and *unofficial interactions* were among the most frequent functions of code-switching taking place in the classroom context. The rest of the functions were either rarely employed or totally ignored in such a situation.

2.2. Content Transmission

Reviews and definitions: There were many instances in the data where the teacher saved time by giving the definition or equivalent of English words in Persian. The teachers also used this strategy to prevent misunderstandings regarding the meaning of new words. But this function of code switching was usually used with abstract words or the words which were problematic in case the definitions were given in English. The following example shows one of these cases, in which the teacher interestingly lowered her voice giving the equivalent of “masterpiece” (line 4). She did this to signify that using Persian here was an exception.

A reading aloud exercise:

1. T: Sohrabi next one.
2. Sohrabi: The three sisters by Anton Chekov masterpiece.
3. T: masterpiece, what is masterpiece?
(No answer)
4. T: (with a lowered voice) /shāhkār/ (Masterpiece)

In another example, at first the teacher tried to give the meaning of the word “stunning” using English and body language. In line 2, a student checked his understanding by giving an equivalent, and, in the last line, the teacher also switched to Persian to clarify the misunderstandings.

The teacher tries to teach the meaning of ‘stunning’ using body language:

1. T: look, ‘stunning’ is like this, for example I’m acting here and you really like it so you look like this...
2. S1: /ta’ajob āvar-e?/ (Is it surprising?)
3. T: in a good way
4. S2: /mishe ta’ajobāvar?/ (It means astonishing.)
5. T: /nadige, man alān heirat zade shodam./ (No... I am surprised now.)



Explanation: Code switching frequently served as an explanation in the given data. It occurred through different activities in all the four classes under study. Since the learners were less competent in the foreign language, English in this case, sometimes they needed an explanation in their mother tongue, Persian in this case, to help them understand the lesson better. This function occurred when the teacher repeated what had already been said in English in order to help the pupils understand her.

Explanation was usually used when the teacher gave instructions on how to do an exercise or play a game. Through such explanations, the teacher either tried to clarify her message by code switching to Persian and thus making the learners do what she wanted them to do, or just to make sure that they understood what should be done. The following example showed how in lines 1 and 2 the teacher employed code switching when the students were going through a listening comprehension exercise. She told them what to do in English, and then she switched to Persian and repeated the instruction. She thus made sure that they would follow the exact instruction.

Going through a listening comprehension exercise:

1. T: ok first read the questions in part B... no don't answer just read the questions.../hichio hal nakonid alān faghat soālo bekhunid./ (Do not answer the questions, just read them.)
2. T: I'm gonna play it once again, please write your name on the paper because I want to collect them....../ ye bār dige mizaram dafē-ye ākhare ba'd barge hāro jam mikonam/ (I will play it once more. It is the last time and then I will collect the papers.)

In the following example the teacher employed code switching on the last line to explain how to play a game.

The teacher explains how to play a game:

1. T: the game is like this. look at me, what is this number
2. Ss: twenty
3. T: how do you spell that?
4. Ss:..
5. T: /Ok. hālā in grouh neshoun bedē shomā hads bezanid....../ (Now this group will show and you will guess.)

Code switching for giving further explanations was a useful strategy to save time and to make sure that the students, especially the less competent ones, would be able to follow what was going on in the classroom. However, care should be taken not to use it a lot because it might make the learners expect an explanation in their first language every time and, thus, pay no attention to English instructions given by the teacher. This probably would affect their development of foreign language skills.

Negotiating cultural relevance: Cultural issues were usually discussed when teaching pragmatics and fixed expressions in the EFL classroom. In cases as such, the teachers preferred to use Persian to prevent misunderstandings and make sure that the students' pragmatic knowledge would develop in the correct direction. The following example shows one of these cases in which, following the role playing of a short dialogue in the lesson, the teacher used Persian in the last line to explain the new structure.

Role playing:

1. S1: please pass the butter.
2. S2: here you are!



3. T: oh, be careful whenever you eat something, /didin ironiā; masalan shoma ounvar-e mizin man invar, bad masalan namakdoun ounjas man tā koja kham misham namakdouno bardārām, una ghashang migan/ ‘can you please pass the salt, the butter... (Have you noticed Iranians at the table... For example, you are at the other side of the table and I am at this side; I stretch myself to pick up the salt shaker. The English speakers will simply say.’

In a similar extract, the teacher switched to Persian to clarify the cultural difference in using the expression “god bless.....”.

Teaching pragmatics through role playing the conversations based on the book:

1. S1: my grandfather died 2 days ago.
2. S2: oh, I’m sorry.
3. S3: God bless you?
4. T: no, God bless him! Sorry,...sorry, Hengame said something interesting, /gof mishe begim ‘god bless him’, khodā biā morzadesh, kheili jalebebe donyā ounjā mamoulan vase zende hā migan, ‘bless you’ yani khodā hefzet kone./ (Hengame said; “Can we say, God bless him when somebody passes away? It is an interesting world. They will use the expression for the living people, while we use it for the dead.)

Parallel translation: This function of code switching was somehow similar to explanation. Parallel translation was also used as a clarification strategy. One of the most common uses of this function was apparent in teaching grammar, when the teacher tried to explain the use of certain structures by giving the parallel counter parts in Persian. The following two examples are suggestive. In line 5, the teacher used parallel translation to clarify the use of articles.

Some students role played a conversation they just listened to:

1. S1: what are you going to do Kate?
 2. S2: I’m going to paint the bathroom, the kitchen...
 3. S1: a bathroom, a kitchen.
 4. S3: no true, the bathroom...
 5. T: /harfi ke shomā mizani injouri mishe, ye dastshoue’i, ye ashpazkhune.ye dune na, migim: ashpazkhuna ro/, the kitchen, the bathroom, we know which bathroom... (what you say means one kitchen, one bathroom, meaning just one. In English when they are definite and we use “the” to show that they are specific or particular nouns. We say, “the kitchen, the bathroom”, “we know which bathroom”.
1. S: if I have enough time this week, I ‘m going to travel.
 2. T: good, /oho age vaght dāashtam miram safar, / .. alright, alright, next. (If I have enough time, I will go on a journey.)
 3. S2: if I stay home tomorrow night, I’m going to read the book.
 4. T: I’m going to read *the* book. /khob shomā alān migin ‘the’ man migam ketabi ke shenākhteh shode ās, ‘ketāba ro mikhunam’/ I’m going to read a book if different from I am reading the book. (We use “the” for the specific nouns. I need “the” book, not I need “book”).

Among the content transmission functions of code switching in the classroom, the data analysis of the recordings revealed that, reviews, definitions, explanation, negotiating cultural relevance, and parallel translation were the most frequently employed by the learners and the teachers.

3. Research Question 3

Which error types lead to code switching in the EFL classroom?



In most of the cases observed in the classroom and the transcriptions of the recordings, the learners' misunderstanding and lack of successful communication were the prime sources of code-switching. The gaps resulting from these miscommunications or interruptions were filled by code switching, specifically on the part of the teacher who intended to satisfy the learners' immediate needs. Therefore, the students' errors were analyzed to find out the real sources of code switching. The results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Learners' error types leading to code switching.

Error Type	Frequency	Percent	Code switching function triggered			
			Micro-functions		Macro-functions	
			Classroom management	Content transmission	Communicative functions	Goal-oriented strategies
Structural	35	16.20	14	11	4	6
Semantic	75	35.18	15	27	25	8
Pragmatic	106	49.07	24	22	41	19

N = 216

As Table 3 represents, the most frequent error type leading to code switching was "pragmatic" errors, which, according to Ellis (2008), impeded understanding in a social or semi-social situation. The semantic errors followed the pragmatic ones and the least problematic forms of errors causing code switching were represented to be the grammatical or structural ones. The results in Table 3 represented that, in both classroom management and communicative functions, the pragmatic error had been the most prevalent cause of code switching, and the least effective cause was attributed to the structural ones. Meanwhile, in the case of the content transmission function, this was the semantic error which showed to be of paramount importance causing the code switching. In the case of goal-oriented strategies, pragmatic errors also proved to be active enough to cause code switching.

Classroom observations and the informal talks and interviews with the teachers pursuing the sessions observed revealed the significant points that signified the causes of code switching in the classroom context. The most prominent ones are listed as follows:

1. Lack of students' attention to the topic discussed in the classroom.
2. Students' interest in ignoring the monolingual dictionaries and believing that using bilingual ones were less time-consuming.
3. Both local and global errors which might threaten structural, semantic, or pragmatic understanding of the learners.
4. Complicated explanations of the course books to present the directions and instructions.
5. Students' needs for more clarified explanations.
6. Learners' interest to speak in the second language, which, in a lot of cases, led to some fluency but threatened their accuracy, whether structurally or pragmatically.
7. Student-to-student speeches to ask for help, which could be the result of less ambiguity tolerance on the side of the learners.
8. Teacher's tendency to do teacher correction and paying less attention to self or peer correction.
9. Learners' tendency to satisfy their immediate needs resulting from misunderstandings.

VI. DISCUSSION

The present research was an attempt to describe the functions of teachers and learners' language choice and code-switching in EFL classroom discourse. As the findings of the first research question showed, among the code-switching types employed in the classroom context "inter-sentential code switching" was the most frequent one, while "tag-switching" and "intra-sentential code switching" showed to be less attractive types of code switching in the classroom context.



Both the teachers and students made use of code switching in the classroom context, but their purposes were different. The learners employed code switching to a) make jokes and have fun in the classroom, b) answer a question, c) translate something, d) talk about personal experiences, e) get away from the difficulties of explaining events in English, f) prevent misunderstandings, g) follow the interrupted discussion, h) present equivalents for culture-bound words, and h) avoid ambiguity. The teachers, however, mainly employed code switching to a) make the point clear to everyone in the classroom, b) explain the grammatical points, c) help the students with the problem they faced while talking in the target language, d) use translation as a strategy to make clear what was supposed to be done, e) show their dissatisfaction with the use of Persian and code switching in some cases, f) lighten up the atmosphere and help the learners to start with more energy, g) prevent misunderstandings and h) make sure that the pragmatic knowledge of the students would develop correctly. It seemed that the findings of this section were in line with those of [David \(2003\)](#) in Malaysia. He reported that specific terminology problems might be the source of code switching in technical class discussions. [Malik \(1994\)](#) also claimed that, in the classroom atmosphere, tired or angry bilinguals (students) usually have a drive to code switching. The findings are also in line with a good number of studies on different forms of code switching employed by teachers and learners in the educational settings where bilinguals or multilingual coexist ([Almelhi, 2020](#); [Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021](#); [Bhatti et al., 2018](#); [Botztepe, 2003](#); [Cancino & Díaz, 2020](#); [Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022](#)).

With respect to the second research question, the results of the data analysis revealed that, in the classroom context, code switching is done to fulfill a variety of functions for different reasons. The functions for which the code switching takes place could be referred to in terms of their frequency of occurrence as an index for the importance of those functions. Among the classroom management functions, “requesting help” and, among the content transmission functions, “explanation” had the highest frequencies of 81 and 96, respectively. Following these first ones, “teacher admonitions”, which belongs to the classroom management functions, and “definition” and “parallel translation”, which could be categorized in the group of content transmission functions, were of the frequency of 43, 47, and 48, respectively, hence moderately frequent in the classroom context at the intermediate level.

The data analysis of the recordings also revealed that opening the class, requesting help, teacher admonitions, and unofficial interactions were among the most frequent functions of code-switching performed in the classroom context. The rest of the functions were either rarely employed or totally ignored in such a situation. Among the content transmission functions of code switching in the classroom, the data analyses of the recordings revealed that, reviews, definitions, explanation, negotiating cultural relevance, and parallel translation were most frequently employed by the learners and the teachers. What could not be ignored was the role the error played in triggering the code-switching instances. Based on the findings of the research, a variety of error sources on the learners’ side could potentially trigger code switching in the classroom either by the learners or by the teacher. It was revealed that the most frequent error type leading to code switching was pragmatic errors, which, according to [Ellis \(2008\)](#), impede understanding in a social or semi-social situation. The semantic errors followed the pragmatic ones, and the least problematic forms of errors causing code switching were represented to be the grammatical or structural ones. The results showed that, in both classroom management and communicative functions, the pragmatic error was the most prevalent cause of code switching, and the least effective cause was attributed to structural ones.

With regard to the third research question of the study and the results of the data analysis, the most frequent error type leading to code switching was pragmatic errors followed by semantic and syntactic ones. It was also found that code switching in the present study helped learners come over their interest in fluency but threatened their accuracy, whether structurally or pragmatically. This is in line with the purposes of code switching supported in the literature ([Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021](#); [Bhatti et al., 2018](#); [Wei & Milroy, 1995](#)). It is argued that a successful communication in L2 is bound to co-constructed discourse ([Dolea, 2018](#)), which requires a relatively good command of the learner over pragmatic, semantic, and syntactic aspects of the target language.



It seemed that code switching in the classroom context satisfied the immediate needs of the learners and the teacher. The learners mostly tended to avoid ambiguities, and the teachers mostly focused on explanation and clarification. What is worth mentioning is that code switching can be focused on through both positive and negative lenses (Cazden, 2001). The negative view considers code switching as an impediment to EFL learners' acquisition of the target language and prevents L2 learners from accuracy and fluency (Bran, 2015; Gundarina, & Simpson, 2022). Hence, the monolingual approach to teaching L2 does not leave any specific room for L1 use in the L2 classroom. In the present study, it was found that code switching encourages teachers to rely on teacher-correction and pay less attention to self or peer-correction. This is not in line with the comparatively accepted and frequently supported notion of dynamic teaching-learning in L2 teaching, which emphasizes self- and peer corrections as helpful techniques promoting learners' autonomy (Ramírez Balderas & Guillén Cuamatzi, 2018; Suliman, 2024; Toufaha, 2024) and paves the way for a socio-cognitive L2 development (Mohamed et al., 2023; Van Ha & Murray, 2021).

Taking the positive view might strengthen the idea that code switching serves as a facilitative element, providing the learner with a better comprehension of the target language's sociocultural, pragmatic, and cultural aspects (Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022; Meyer, 2008). Based on the class observations and informal talks with the teachers of the classes observed, the researchers could find that employing code switching in the EFL classroom could help learners increase their attention to the topic discussed in the classroom, make them aware of both local and global errors which might threaten their structural, semantic, and pragmatic understanding, facilitate the complicated explanations of the course books in presenting the directions and instructions for the learner, provide the learner with more clarified explanations, help them with less ambiguity tolerance, and help them satisfy their immediate needs resulting from misunderstandings. These findings are in line with the results of some of the previous studies such as Maftoon & Amjadiparvar (2022), Meyer (2008), Almelhi (2020), Caballero & Celaya (2022) and Cancino & Díaz (2020), arguing that code-switching can promote EFL development and create a friendly atmosphere in the L2 classroom, especially at elementary and low intermediate levels.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Codes switching is a common phenomenon in English classes in Iranian language institutions, but the main language of instruction is English. According to the views of the EFL teachers taking part in the study, coding in Persian language knowingly or unknowingly occurs in foreign language classes. In addition, many teachers and learners have a positive attitude towards coding in Persian language, which is consistent with the results of the research conducted by Marako (1997), Jingzia (2010), and Maftoon & Amjadiparvar (2022). Greggio & Gil (2007) considered code switching as a linguistic activity of bilingual or multilingual speakers. Foreign language classes are also a bilingual situation in which examining the purposes behind switching from one language to another gains significance. Therefore, a language classroom is more than just a classroom; it offers education in both foreign and second languages at a variety of competency levels, from beginner to almost native. As a result, perspectives on the significance and role of learners' mother tongue vary.

The three patterns of code switching presented by Poplack (1980) are used by teachers and learners in English language classes, but the dominant pattern is inter-sentential one. This finding is consistent with the findings of Maftoon & Amjadiparvar (2022) and Botztepe (2003), showing that this type of code switching is a facilitating tool in English language classrooms. Meyer (2008) considers the nature of the classroom as a decisive factor in using L1 in the L2 teaching learning processes, mentioning that the number of novice learners in the classroom and students' learning purpose are the main criteria for the decision of the teacher in this regard. In the present study, we came to know that the type and quantity of L1 use should differ depending on the classroom setting and the content introduced to the learner.



Hence, it can be concluded that, while learners progress and improve their L2 communication abilities, the scaffolding provided by L1 should be gradually taken down.

The present study findings revealed that L2 learners use code switching as a facilitating learning technique to compensate for their gaps in their L2 command. Hence, code switching can be viewed as a skill, even an advanced skill among bilingual speakers; i.e., EFL learners, enabling them to precisely manage their social relationships. The idea can take support from Yletyinen (2004) who argues that, in the bilingual situations, using both L1 and L2 consecutively represents the speakers' added values and ability in socialization.

Believing that L2 and L1 acquisition are conceptually the same, some researchers have pushed for a monolingual approach, stating that L2 exposure should be maximized and L1 exposure should be minimized because interference from the first language knowledge hinders second language acquisition (Cook, 2001; Krashen, 1981). Conversely, there are some who have voiced their opposition to removing L1 entirely from L2 classrooms (e.g., Almelhi, 2020; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nation, 2003) and some others who have reiterated that L1 could provide beneficial outcomes with caution and planning (Cancino & Díaz, 2020; Cook, 2001; Maftoon & Amjadiparvar, 2022). With respect to the present study findings, we can conclude that Iranian EFL learners and teachers employ code switching to facilitate and manage the classroom interactions. Among the classroom management functions, opening the class, teacher admonitions, and unofficial interactions are the most frequently used switched codes. Moreover, out of the content transmission functions, definition, explanation, negotiating cultural relevance, and parallel translation could be accounted as the most frequent switches used in the Iranian EFL classroom context.

The data extracted from the interviews with teachers showed that learners' command of English and their L2 proficiency is the most important factor that can lead teachers and learners to code switching. The results also showed that decoding includes various functions such as translating words, explaining grammar, managing the class, and creating intimate relationships with students. In addition, code switching is a useful strategy to create a more motivated English language classroom. Therefore, the results showed that code-switching is a common phenomenon in English language teaching classes in Iran, and this phenomenon has an effective function in the process of teaching and learning English. The study findings support the code-switching definition by Gumperz (1982) who focuses on the simultaneous use of parts of speech from two distinct grammar systems or subsystems in a single speech interaction. In the same vein, the present study found that the simultaneous employment of two languages in a classroom discourse does not take place unless it fulfills the teacher or learners' needs for clarification of meaning and satisfaction in communication.

With respect to the *theoretical implications* of this research, the authors believe that the findings can help clarify the controversial discussion of using L1 in L2 classroom. In fact, "switching codes" as an instructional medium has been in the state of controversy in the ELT. Most experts in the field of EFL are supportive of monolingual language classrooms, in which use of L1 is seen as a negative feature and should be avoided at all costs. This belief is also widespread among language learners. However, when it comes to real practice, they cannot avoid the role played by the mother tongue. It should be made clear to both students and teachers that code switching could be beneficial to the process of language development if it is employed properly. The present study which investigated this controversy over L1 use in EFL classes found that systematic use of L1 could facilitate L2 acquisition. However, its practicality for all EFL situations and classes is another issue that needs to be considered in further studies.

The study findings have some *pedagogical implications* as well. In order to use mother tongue systematically, code switches need to be predicted in advance; that is, teachers' language choices should be based on some specific framework. The language choice should be based on the purpose of the language classroom and the purpose of each activity. In this regard, the study has an implication for teacher training courses. Through these courses, pre-service teachers could learn how to switch codes consciously in a way that their language choices do not affect pupil's exposure to L2 but help their language learning. They could



also learn how their use of code switching can manage learners' choice of codes. That is, teachers allow the learner to switch codes. Meanwhile, they do not strictly indicate that they want their learners to use a certain language in a certain situation. Moreover, EFL learners can benefit from the study findings as they pay attention to the language choices demonstrated by their teachers, focus on linguistic and cultural differences in L1 and L2, and get to know how to use L1 to clarify complicated structures or minimize misunderstanding in classroom dialogues or discussions.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Classroom Observation Checklist

Class observed:

Date:

Level:

Institute:

A. Types of code switching

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
1	Inter-sentential code switching					
2	Tag-switching					
3	Intra-sentential code switching					

B. Functions of code switching

1. Classroom management functions

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
4	Opening the class					
5	Negotiating directions					
6	Requesting help					
7	Managing discipline					
8	Teacher's encouragement					
9	Teacher's compliments					
10	Teacher's commands					
11	Teacher's admonitions					
12	Mitigation					
13	Pleading					
14	Unofficial interactions					

2. Content transmission functions

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
15	Review					
16	Definition					
17	Explanation					
18	Negotiating cultural relevance					
19	Parallel translation					
20	Unofficial student collaboration					



Appendix B

Code-Switching Results in the Sessions Observed

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	total
Inter-sentential code switching	5	4	4	4	4	5	3	4	4	1	4	4	5	4	3	5	4	5	5	5	71
Tag-switching	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	33
Intra-sentential code switching	3	2	2	1	2	3	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	32
Opening the class	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	27
Negotiating directions	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Requesting help	4	4	4	5	4	3	4	4	4	4	5	4	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	81
Managing discipline	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Teacher encouragement	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Teacher compliments	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Teacher's commands	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Teacher admonitions	5	1	1	4	1	1	1	3	3	5	1	3	2	2	1	1	1	2	4	1	43
Mitigation	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Pleading	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Unofficial interactions	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	5	94
Review	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
definition	3	3	1	1	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	47
Explanation	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	96
Negotiating cultural relevance	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	23
Parallel translation	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	4	3	3	3	48
Unofficial student collaboration	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20
Total	45	38	36	37	26	39	35	41	40	37	36	40	41	40	37	34	37	39	42	39	

Appendix C

Sample Transcriptions of the Classroom Discourse

(At the beginning of the class, the teacher greets the students. One of the students tries to talk about her sickness.)

S: sore throat.

T: sore throat, so sorry... you got a running nose too?

S: /ey/



T: /ey/... alright, alright, I hope you got better very soon, promise you'll get better really soon. Ok which page were we, which page?

S: 18

T: 18, Ok, alright. /bah bah/, close your books..

(The teacher tries to find the listening part on CD while the students are speaking in Persian.)

(A class discussion is going on about marriage.)

T: Samaneh is married? Really? You are married?

S: 8 years...

T: How old were you?

S: 29

T: would like to get a divorce?

S: sometimes

T: sometimes, why?

S: /dige piš miâd dige/

S2: /tafahom-e bish az had/

T: do you kick each other?

(The teacher asks the students to make sentences using 'would like'.)

T: alright Bahare, go on.

S: I would like to graduate.

T: you still study in university? ...are you a student of university? Now?

S: no

T: so, you're graduated right? /vali hanouz ârezou dârin ke fâreghe tahsil shin/

S:/ edame tahsil/

S2:/ doctora/

S: I would like to buy a car.

T: what kind of car? Peykan? No

S:/ peykan javanan/

T: /bah bah, gojei/ ok.

(Teacher's introducing some new words to the class)

T: let's go to the last one what is that? divorcé... if I'm not married to... I'm divorcé.... again, this is a very old-fashioned word...

S: /motalaghe?/

T: aha! they don't use it these days...

(The students were supposed to write conversations in pairs and practice responses to good or bad news. The teacher asks them to role play their conversations for the class.)

T: would you please read your dialogue; bad news is good news?

S1: what's new?

S2: I have some bad news; I'm going to change my work place.



S1: I'm so sorry to hear that.

T: changing the work place is bad?

S2: /age aziat beshi .../

T: ok next...

S3: I have some good news, today my boss said. I'm going to... one of the companies /monhal kardan?/

T: they want to ... one of the company's branched. Why? this is good news?

S3: yes, yes... my work very few... /kam mishe/

T: ok..

(The students were supposed to work on some short stories as a complementary exercise in the class.)

T: you didn't read the story?

S1: /na naxundim/

T: /daste goletun dard nakone ... kalamâto êeck kardim .../

S2: /soalaro faghat check kardim/

(After a listening comprehension exercise)

T: now you can check your answers again.

S1: /vaghe'an nemishe, kheili tond bood/

T: really?!

S2: / khob hatman râs mige dige çera miporsin/

S3: /na mâ bâhoushim/

T: so first of all....

S4: /man az sedâye yâru khosham nayoumad/

S5: / sedâsh aslan khub nist/

S6: /sedâ ghavi nist.../

T: so first of all, what is after Monday?

S: Tuesday

T: what about after that?

Ss: Wednesday

T: can you spell that?

S: v,e,...

T: v, e,...

S: W

T: /ozr mikhâm/

Ss: w, e, d, n,...

S: /na bâbâ eshtebâ dârin migin, hâlâ begin.../