Code-switching in CLIL contexts

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze teachers' code-switching from L1 (Italian) to L2 (English) in various CLIL contexts in Italy. In recent years there has been recognition of the validity of code-switching, which has been considered as a strategy adopted by all bilingual speakers (Baker 2006, Butzkamm 1998, Cook 2001, Franklin 1990, Gajo 2001, Ricci Garotti 2006). Three teachers (from primary, middle and secondary school) performing CLIL have been observed, recorded and given a questionnaire in order to evaluate if code-switching occurs and in what instances in their lessons. The results show that there are not many differences in the teachers' use of code-switching for primary, middle or secondary schools. Nevertheless, as expected, the primary school teacher makes an extensive use of code-switching. The middle school teacher also uses it a lot, and for non-didactic activities as well, such as reproaching the students. On the contrary, the high school teacher uses it very rarely and only for guiding or instructing the students. All of the teachers observed used code-switching for eliciting the switch as a natural activity to be developed in bilinguals and also to explain the lexis.
Key words: code-switching, bilingualism, didactic, non-didactic activities, lexis

Resumen

Este artículo se propone analizar el fenómeno de la alternancia de L1 (italiano) con L2 (inglés) por parte del profesorado en varios contextos AICLE en Italia. En los últimos años ha sido reconocida la validez de la alternancia lingüística que se ha considerado como una estrategia adoptada por todos los hablantes bilingües (Baker 2006, Butzkamm 1998, Cook 2001, Franklin 1990, Gajo 2001, Ricci Garotti 2006). A tres maestros (uno de enseñanza primaria, uno de enseñanza media y uno de enseñanza secundaria) que han impartido lecciones bajo programas AICLE, se les preguntó si se podía observar y grabar la clase. Tuvieron también que completar un cuestionario con el fin de evaluar si empleaban la alternancia durante sus lecciones y bajo qué circunstancias. Los resultados

muestran que no existen grandes diferencias en el empleo de la alternancia lingüística entre profesores de enseñanza primaria, media y secundaria. Sin embargo, tal y como se esperaba, el maestro de escuela primaria hace un uso extenso de la alternancia. El maestro de enseñanza media también lo usa con frecuencia, incluso en actividades no didácticas, como reñir a sus alumnos. Al contrario, el maestro de escuela de enseñanza secundaria lo usa muy raramente y únicamente para guiar o instruir a los estudiantes. Todos los maestros observados emplean la alternancia como una actividad natural para ser desarrollada en bilingües, así como para explicar el vocabulario.
Palabras clave: alternancia, bilingüismo, actividades didácticas y no didácticas, léxico

1. Introduction

For years, the shift from L1 to L2 was banned in language classes, since it was thought that otherwise the learning of the foreign language would be impaired. In recent years, though, there has been recognition of the validity of code-switching in classroom settings, and it has been considered a strategy adopted by all bilingual speakers. Therefore, if CLIL as currently conceived is to be assimilated to bilingual learning, then code-switching should be present in CLIL contexts. As very few of the studies reported in this section were carried out adopting this approach, it would seem useful to expand research in this direction.

Baker (2006) claims that code-switching has different goals, among which are: emphasizing a specific pattern of the discourse, substituting a word, reinforcing a request, explaining something which can't be explained otherwise and expressing identity. Antón & DiCamilla (1998) see the L1 as a tool for making meaning in text, retrieving language from memory, exploring and expanding context, and guiding the teacher's actions through the task while maintaining dialogue.

According to Butzkamm (1998), scientific terms should be taught in the L1 as well. His studies refer to bilingual settings, which are very close to CLIL ones. He states that code-switching is an integral part of bilinguals' speech; if used properly and systematically it represents a natural aid. He sees the teacher as a bilingual dictionary in interactive classes, but argues that code-switching can also be effective in teacher-centered presentations.

Cook (2001) highlights the fact that the L1 has been used in various methods, including: the New Concurrent Method, Community Language Learning, and Dodson's Bilingual Method. In the New Concurrent Method, the teacher switches from one language to another at key points according to particular rules (when the concepts are important or students are distracted), making use of cognates. The teacher supplies vocabulary in the middle of the sentence. In Community Language Learning students talk in the L2 via mediation of the L1. The L1 is a vehicle for giving L2 meaning in whole sentences. In Dodson's Bilingual Method, the teacher reads a L2 sentence aloud and then, in direct succession, translates it into L1.

Cook (op. cit.) claims that the L1 is a classroom resource used to convey meaning, explain grammar, and organize the class, as both a collaborative learning tool, and as an individual strategy for students. For these reasons, according to Cook (op. cit.), it is ridiculous to ban code-switching from the class, since L1 meanings do not exist separately from L2 meanings; the two languages coexist in the same mind. Code-switching, therefore, is a highly skilled activity.

Another study was carried out by Franklin (1990) with language teachers in Scotland. He tried to see how code-switching could be used to enhance L2 learning, and found that 80 % of teachers used the L1 to explain grammar, 45 % to maintain discipline and 51 % for testing. The L1, according to the author, is a scaffold for learning the L2 and actually facilitates L2 production.

Gajo (2001) highlights a difference between micro-alternation, meso-alternation and macro-alternation in code-switching in bilingual settings. Micro-alternation refers to a switch from one language to another within the same verbal interactions. This is a sign of bilingual competence, since it is known that bilinguals always switch from one language to the other. It should also be used as a means of acquiring new competencies in the case of formal education. The teacher has to be able to distinguish whether or not micro-alternation leads to an improvement in linguistic means. Meso-alternation occurs within the lesson and code-switching is encouraged according to the task. Macro-alternation occurs when the decision is made to teach all or part of a discipline in L2.

A CLIL study on L1 and L2 use was also carried out by Myers (2006), who analyzed the effects of code-switching on content learning. She studied a classroom situation in which students were given a simulation activity that she was recording. She noted a continuous to and fro between L1 and L2, although students tried to use the L2. The two questions she addressed were: (1) is content learning more effective or less effective when also using the mother tongue? (2) is there language learning gain or a loss when using languages other than the L2? With regard to the former, she found definite evidence of a shift to meta-cognitive strategies. As for the latter, she found improved L2 reading comprehension. The same was true for L2 production. She also noted a great improvement in lexis but less improvement in grammatical competence. The study showed a general positive use of the L1 as a 'backup' and to refine thinking.

Ricci Garotti (2006) points out that if L2 input is reduced in CLIL contexts, some of the content is automatically lost. The fear of traumatizing the students with too much foreign language leads to an impoverishment of the content as well. There should be a shift from primary education, where the teacher should adopt active bilingualism and the students, passive bilingualism, to secondary education, where the teacher as well as the students should adopt active bilingualism. L1 should support the L2 and never the other way around (see table 1).

Table 1. Passive and Active Bilingualism (translated from Ricci Garotti 2006).

Passive Bilingualism	
Competence	Linguistic use in production
Understanding of material mainly through non-verbal language	L1 prevalent in all activities
Understanding of complete verbal material	L1 in home activities
Understanding of explanations and orders	L1 in home activities
Understanding of simple authentic texts	L1 prevalent, L2 for short replies
Understanding of deeper textual meaning	L1 in work groups, L2 in answers or school assignments
Understanding of authentic texts of assignments	L1 in work groups, L2 in answers or school of a certain length and complexity
Understanding of specific authentic texts	L1 in work groups, L2 in answers or school assignments, L2 for materials to be used at home
Active bilingualism	
Answers to exercises and questions	L1 for work at home, L2 only in answers
Providing reasons to answers	L1 for work at home, L2 in answers and when improvising
Writing simple texts	L1 in group work, L2 in plenary activities
Dialogue exchanges that go beyond simple question-answer exchanges	L1 in group work, L2 in plenary
Autonomous writing of texts	L1-L2 in group work, L2 in plenary activities
Participation in discussions and in-depth treatment of academic subject-matters	L2 in group work, L2 in plenary activities

Furthermore, at a conference on CLIL, Bentley (2008) presented a study carried out (between 2003-4) at Alfrink College, Zoetermeer, with 13-15 year olds, where she tried to analyze code-switching according to the categories stated below. Table 2 presents her results where it is clearly shown that both teachers and learners use code-switching. Students, though, use the L1 much more than teachers do.

Table 2. Bentley (2008). Context: Dutch 13-15-year-olds in Geography, Mathematics, History and Science classes.

Learner Language	**Teacher Language**
Responding (target L)	Instructing (target L)
Questioning (target L + L1)	Questioning (target L)
Giving opinions:	Giving opinions:
· agreeing (target L)	· agreeing (target L)
· disagreeing (target L + L1)	· disagreeing (target L)
· uncertain (target L + L1)	Explaining (target L)
Collaborative talk (target L + L1)	Eliciting (target L)
Reporting back (target L + L1)	Checking (+ some L1)
Checking (target L + L1)	Correcting (+ L1) (subject knowledge)
Repeating language (target L)	Socializing (target L)
Reading aloud (target L)	Scaffolding:
Socializing (target L + L1)	· prompting (target L)
	· reminding (target L)
	Reading aloud (target L)
	Telling anecdotes (target L)
	Summarizing (+ some L1)
	Giving Feedback (subject knowledge)
	· praising /enthusing
	· encouraging

2. Aims and methods

We aim to answer the following research questions by means of a qualitative research method:

1. When does code-switching in teacher talk occur and what is its role?
2. What differences are there between primary, middle and secondary school teaching with regard to code-switching by the teacher?

To test these issues, three different types of schools were chosen for analysis: primary, middle and secondary. Six hours of teaching were audio-recorded by means of a digital recorder with a microphone connected only to the teacher, thereby allowing examples of code-switching in teacher talk to be gathered. In order to ensure reliability, some of the transcriptions were double checked by another researcher. The primary school teacher is one of seven teachers involved in an experimental research on CLIL, carried out as part of a PhD program in *Experimental Education* at *Sapienza University of Rome* and *University of Basilicata*. The students could not be recorded for privacy reasons.

The researcher subsequently filled in an observational grid based on Bentley's categories (see table 2) in order to see in which types of activities code-switching occurred for both teachers and learners.

Finally, a questionnaire was filled out by the teachers in order to compare the field notes and data with the teachers' perceptions of their use of code-switching.

The context of the research was as follows (Table 3):

Table 3. Synoptic table of the research context partially taken from Dafouz Milne & Llinares Garcìa (2008).

	A	B	C
Teacher	**Secondary**	**Middle**	**Primary**
Number of students	23	21	16
Subject	Economics	Geography	Science
Level	16-year-olds	14-year-olds	10-year-olds
Length	1 ½ hours	2 hours	1 ½ hours

3. Results

Regarding the observational grid, these are the results for Teacher C (table 4).

Observational grid on code-switching, Teacher C

Table 4. Based on Bentley's (2008) study on code-switching. In bold, examples where no code-switching occurred.

Teacher C	**L1**	**L2**
Instructing	X	X
Questioning	X	X
Giving opinions		
Explaining	X	X
Eliciting	X	X
Checking		X
Correcting	X	X
Socializing	X	
Scaffolding		
Reading aloud		
Telling anecdotes		
Summarizing	X	
Giving feedback		X
Introducing new knowledge	X	X
Learner		
Responding	X	X
Questioning	X	
Giving opinions		
Collaborative talk	X	
Reporting back	X	
Checking		
Repeating language		X
Reading aloud	X	
Socializing	X	
Writing	X	

The observational grid above (table 4) shows that the teacher made exclusive use of L1 for socializing and summarizing. Exclusive use of L2 is used for checking and giving feedback, while both are used for instructing, questioning, explaining, eliciting, correcting and introducing new knowledge. Regarding the students, L1 is used for questioning, collaborative talk, reporting, reading aloud, socializing and writing. L2 is used for repeating language, and both languages are used for responding.

According to the questionnaire, the teacher thinks that code-switching is very useful and uses it a lot. He also believes it is a good scaffolding strategy and is aware of his using it during lessons. As for differences in code-switching between CLIL and non-CLIL language lessons, he believes that in CLIL lessons, alternation should be understood as the reinforcement of the content and an instantaneous micro-assessment of the transfer of information, while in normal lessons L1 is used to explain reflections on the language, for example grammar explanations. He feels it is particularly useful to adopt code-switching for primary school. His impression is that he uses it only for single words and sentences, which the recording confirms. He thinks he uses it for specific words, which is also true. Regarding the transcription of the lessons, cases of code-switching have been highlighted. In particular, the specific moment of the lesson when code-switching occurred represented the focus of our transcription (Infante, Costa, Benvenuto, Lastrucci, in press). These occurrences were divided into categories according to when there was a switch and the type of activity involved.

Checking/Giving instructions

1. *Adesso dobbiamo riempire la lavagn*a. Ok? We have to write some words on the blackboard.
2. *Ci vedete*? Can you see?

Here the teacher uses Italian first and then English. If he had done the reverse it would surely have been to ensure that the students had understood, but in this case it seems he wants to justify the use of the L1.

Explaining/Reinforcing lexis

1. Yes, it's a flag... *una bandiera*, Ok?
2. Dark *è buio* and darkness *oscurità*.
3. Milky way... milk *come il latte.*
4. Can you read it? Ok, in English. Sun. Ok, *Sole*.
5. A cover, *copertina. Perché alla fine di questa cosa faremo... ne verrà fuori un libretto,* booklet. *Questa è la copertina,* the cover. Ok?

In example 1, the teacher employs an enforcing strategy by translating the word *flag* in order to ensure the students review a term they already know. Of great interest in example 2 is the teacher's suggestion: in addition to translating the word *dark – buio*, he also provides a derivative term, *darkness – oscurità*. In example 3 as well, the teacher provides an additional prompt by giving the students *milk,* the root of the word *milky*, a word they surely know. In this way he creates mental associations by giving the students more occasions to remember the term.

Eliciting the switching

1. What's the English for *Luna*? [students answer correctly] Moon, yeah. Moon. Moon. Moon. Very good.
2. Meteorite? [students answer correctly] Ok, meteorite. Me-te-o-rite. OK, meteorite. OK, yes it's the same as in Italian... It's meteorite. *Meteorite*.
3. *Gravità cosa sarà?* Gravity yeah. Gravity, OK.

In example 1 the teacher not only elicits but repeats, even positively reinforcing, the correct response of the students. In example 2 the teacher points out that *meteorite* is written the same in Italian as in English. In example 3 as well, the teacher elicits code-switching for words that are very similar in both languages, in particular the scientific lexis, which, as we know, has the same Greek or Latin roots.

As regards the observational grid, these are the results for teacher B (table 5).

Table 5. Based on Bentley's (2008) study on code-switching. In bold, examples where no code-switching occurred.

Teacher B	**L1**	**L2**
Instructing	X	
Questioning	X	X
Giving opinions		
Explaining	X	X
Eliciting	X	X
Checking		X
Correcting		X
Socializing		
Scaffolding	X	
Reading aloud		X
Telling anecdotes	X	
Summarizing	X	X
Giving feedback	X	
Introducing new knowledge	X	X
Learner		
Responding	X	X
Questioning		
Giving opinions		
Collaborative talk	X	
Reporting back	X	X
Checking		
Repeating language		X
Reading aloud		X
Socializing	X	
Writing	X	

Observational grid on code-switching, Teacher B

From the observational grid (table 5), we see that the teacher made exclusive use of L1 for instructing, scaffolding, telling anecdotes and giving feedback. L2 is used exclusively for reading aloud, correcting and checking, while both are used for questioning, explaining, eliciting, summarizing, and introducing new knowledge. As regards the students, L1 is used for collaborative talk,

socializing and writing, while L2 is used for repeating language and reading aloud. Both are used for responding and reporting back. The students use English only when relating to the teacher.

Based on the questionnaire, the teacher thinks code-switching is very useful and uses it a lot. She has the impression of using it only for single words, but according to the recording, she also uses it for longer sentences. She thinks she used it a lot for class management, which appears to be true. However, though she thinks she let the students use Italian only for group work, she actually used it on more occasions.

Below are the results of the transcriptions for Teacher B.

Reproach/Checking/Giving instructions

1. *E basta*? That's all???
2. Don't guess! *Non è che dovete indovinare!*
3. Can you check here? *Potete controllare?*
4. You'll do it at home, *va bene ? Lo fate per casa questo.*
5. Do you understand what you have to do? Yes? Do you understand? So, can you explain to your friends? [student trying to answer in English]. Ok, you can explain in Italian. No, it's OK. You are very good, but... *spiegalo pure in italiano*. *Allora qui abbiamo*... read and match the definitions with a name in the list. The list. Can you see the list? South America, Equator, North Pole, Antarctica, South Pole, Europe, Australia, Africa, Asia, North America. Hmm... *avete quindi questo elenco*. A list of names. *Dovete scriverli dove ci sono i puntini.*

It is interesting to note that this is the only teacher who uses Italian almost as if to emphasize negative reinforcement (examples 1, 2, 3). In example 5 she uses Italian to give instructions.

Explaining/Reinforcing lexis

1. It's not a *dizionario*, a glossary is different from a dictionary.
2. *La legenda*. The map key, *si chiama*.
3. Do you understand *landscape*. Landscape. No, it's not *cartina*. *Cartina* is map. *Paesaggio*. Landscape. Graphs. *Grafici*.
4. Australia is a country. The continent which in Italian is *Oceania*. In English you can find the name as *Australasia*.

Using repetition, synonyms, antonyms and positive reinforcement is useful in these examples, since they allow more possibility for vocabulary retention. In example 3, the teacher is trying to explain that *landscape* is not exactly *cartina* but *territorio*, two terms that in fact could be confused. In example 4 it is interesting to note that the teacher offers a translation that otherwise would not be known. In fact, in primary school we observed a lot of code-switching, since the students risk learning the lexis in only one of the languages. By being able to make associations there is more possibility to remember the terms.

Eliciting the switching

1. *Quindi se* to border *vuol dire confinare come si dirà confine*? [students answer correctly]. Border.
2. Do you know better in Italian? *Volete dirmelo in italiano?*

3. *Proviamo a dirle in inglese*. You repeat what you said in English.
4. What's the Italian for reef?
5. Australasia... What do you call it in Italian? Oh, *Oceania*!
6. What can you call this type of map? *Come si chiama questo tipo di cartina?*
7. Who knows the name *pianura* in English? [students answer correctly]. What is *pianura* in English?

Here the teacher tries to elicit the code, but when she doesn't receive any answer she provides it herself.

Grabbing attention

1. Great Barrier Reef. Reef? What's the Italian for reef? Great Barrier Reef. Great Barrier Reef. *La Grande Barriera Corallina.* Great *e` grande*. *Anche* big; *non e` che c`e` solo un modo*. Great, *grandiosa*. So, the Great Barrier Reef. Which is very endangered. Endangered. Not for the, not for the... no... because of the pollution. Ok, but also, yes, for sharks *C`e stato uno mangiato da poco. Qui. Durante le vacanze di Natale uno che faceva il bagno è stato dilaniato da uno*. Sharks. Sharks. Jellyfish. Jellyfish. Jellyfish. Ok, so, *la barriera corallina che è la più grande del mondo. Sapete cos`è una barriera corallina?*

Here Italian is used basically to grab students' attention by telling an anecdote. If she had done it in English, the goal of trying to maintain the students' attention would not have been achieved. Very interesting here is the explanation of *great*, which has many meanings in Italian.

Below are the results of the observational grid for Teacher A (table 6).

Observational grid on code-switching, Teacher A

From the observational grid (table 6) we see that the teacher made exclusive use of L1 only for socializing. Exclusive use of L2 is used for instructing, questioning, eliciting, correcting, scaffolding, reading aloud, summarizing, giving feedback, and introducing new knowledge. Both are used for explaining and checking. As regards the students, L1 is used for socializing while L2 is used for reporting back, repeating language and reading aloud. Both are used for responding, questioning and collaborative talk.

According to the questionnaire, the teacher thinks that alternation is very useful and uses it a lot. She also believes it is a good scaffolding strategy and is aware of it. She uses alternation in language lessons to systematize the grammar in order to avoid falling into "teacher talk", or for individual lemmas. However, in proposing a non-linguistic topic she avoids insisting on the grammar in order to make it clear the focus is on the content; thus the alternation occurs more with specific terms or complex concepts. Generally, alternation has a social-linguistic interpretation, as a factor in the aggregation of a group; however, in terms of teaching methods it is better to use alternation rather than leave the students with doubts or, even worse, mistaken notions. She has the impression she uses it both for single words and sentences, which is confirmed by the recording, and for specific words, which is true. She thinks she uses it a lot for didactics, which appears to be true, and that she lets the students use Italian only for group work, which is partially true.

Below are some examples from the transcription of Teacher A.

Table 6. Based on Bentley's (2008) study on code-switching. In bold, examples where no code-switching occurred.

Teacher A	**L1**	**L2**
Instructing		X
Questioning		X
Giving opinions		
Explaining	X	X
Eliciting		X
Checking	X	X
Correcting		X
Socializing	X	
Scaffolding		X
Reading aloud		X
Telling anecdotes		
Summarizing		X
Giving feedback		X
Introducing new knowledge		X
Learner		
Responding	X	X
Questioning	X	X
Giving opinions		
Collaborative talk	X	X
Reporting back		X
Checking		
Repeating language		X
Reading aloud		X
Socializing	X	
Writing		

Explaining/Reinforcing lexis

1. Amount, in other words... The total amount he needs. The...? *La somma. La somma.* It's a maths term. The sum he needs. The amount. The sum he needs.

At this point the teacher asks a rhetorical question that she answers without allowing the students time to respond.

Reproach/Checking/Giving instructions

1. *Cosa c`e`? Ho visto. Ho visto l`espressione. Allora ascolto. Il* bank clerk *deve chiedere;* you are the bank clerk. *Beh, vi salutate*. Good morning, Miss Sara. I`ve seen that you asking for a loan.
2. *Non dovete ripetere.* Please try to use your own words... *ho reso*?
3. *Si` pero` se lo dici cosi`*... Why do you want a loan' is very rude, very rough, aggressive.

Here Italian has a purely explanatory role.

4. Conclusions

In general, there are not many differences in the teachers' use of code-switching for primary, middle or secondary schools. Nevertheless, the study has shown that, as expected, the primary school teacher makes extensive use of code-switching. The middle school teacher also uses it a lot, and for non-didactic activities as well, such as reproaching the students. On the contrary, the high school teacher uses it very rarely and only for guiding or instructing the students. All of the teachers observed used code-switching for eliciting the switch as a natural activity to be developed in bilinguals and also to explain the lexis. This seems to be especially useful for younger students, in order to give them the lexis in both languages. The risk here, especially with specific lexis, is that the children will learn the foreign word but never have the chance to learn the term in their native language. Moreover, this attention to lexis could be very useful when English is the language of instruction because it is a stress-timed language: that is, it is based on cognates to convey meaning in discourse. With regards to Bentley's (2008) findings on the same categories, we have found some differences in the use of the target language by the students. The learners observed by Bentley use the L2 much more than the students in our Italian study do. We think this is due to the fact that the school visited is in the Netherlands, where English is known to be more spoken widely. Unfortunately, this is not the situation in Italy where students are not accustomed to speaking English outside the context of the classroom.

As regards the students, in all cases they use L2 only when relating to the teacher. In general the students always use L1 for socializing and for collaborative talk. This is quite normal, but at the same time teachers should be aware of it and try to change the situation slightly. The focus that the teachers have towards specific lexis and code-switching itself is a good sign of the attention they have for CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Skill), which, according to Cummins (1984), should be one of the goals of bilingual education.

As regards the teachers' opinions of code-switching, all of them are in favor of it. They are very aware of their use of it but less so of the students'. That is to say, they think they resort to it less than they actually do.

To sum up, according to Gajo's (2001) categories, they all use micro-alternation more than macro-alternation, which is thought to be a very positive development, since the latter represents the true bilingual skill.

We feel that code-switching is a useful skill for both didactic and non-didactic aspects, but we also believe that more awareness is needed on the part of teachers concerning their use of code-switching. The impression is that at times it is used in a random way, whereas if there were more repetition, synonyms, antonyms and positive reinforcement there would be more possibility of vocabulary retention. We are also aware of the fact that our is a very small scale study, therefore, a wider corpus would be needed in order to obtain more precise data that may be generalized.

1. Legend
... : pause
italics : switch to L1
[] : comment by the author

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