Teaching and learning English in a multilingual classroom

A study of code-switching in an EFL/ESL teaching/learning situation

Undervisning och lärande i engelska i ett flerspråkigt klassrum
En studie om kodväxling i en undervisnings-/lärandesituation i engelska som främmande eller andraspråk

Maureen Lugoloobi-Nalunga
Abstract

This paper aims at finding out if code-switching is an asset or a problem in a multilingual classroom. The main goal of the study was to find out what impact code-switching into mother tongue has on L2 development and what learning/teaching situations induce the act of code-switching. Through classroom observation, interviews and a questionnaire data were collected and the main questions of the study answered.

Previous research and the results from the present study show that code-switching is a natural phenomenon in L2 development and that code-switching has a positive impact on L2 development as it fulfils a significant number of functions in the classroom, including vocabulary and concept development, need for clarification and emphasis, provides a learning strategy for L2 acquisition, and generally helps students maintain and develop their L2.

Keywords: Code-switching, multilingualism, pluralism, first language, mother tongue, second language, foreign language, language learning, language acquisition

Sammanfattning på svenska

Denna rapport syftar till att ta reda på om kodväxling är en tillgång eller ett problem i ett flerspråkigt klassrum. Syftet med studien var att ta reda på vilken effekt kodväxling till annat språk har på andraspråksutveckling och vilka lärande-/undervisningssituationer som framkallar kodväxling. Genom klassrumobservationer, intervjuer och ett frågeformulär samlades data in.

Tidigare forskning och resultaten från denna studie visar att kodväxling är ett naturligt fenomen i andraspråksutveckling och att den har en positiv inverkan på språkutvecklingen, eftersom den fyller ett stort antal funktioner i klassrummet, inklusive ökning av ordförrådet och begreppsförståelsen, fungerar som hjälp när det som läraren säger behöver betonas eller förtydligas, lärandestrategi för andraspråksinlärning, och hjälper slutligen elever att underhålla och utveckla sitt andraspråk.

Nyckelord: Kodväxling, flerspråkighet, mångfald, modersmål, andraspråk, främmande språk, språkinlärning.
1. Introduction

Changes in living conditions, caused by phenomena like globalisation, economic crises and civil wars around the world, are among the reasons why large numbers of people are in motion, resulting in national, transnational and/or international migration. Sweden alone received roughly 44,000 asylum seekers in 2012 from about 130 different countries (SCB, 2013), among whom many were children. Different national institutions, including schools, find themselves with special programs that fight tooth and nail to cater for the immigrants’ learning needs.

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart,” noted Nelson Mandela. However, due to emergent multilingual societies, the need for a lingua franca, which could be the base for communication in language communities without a common language, is growing steadily. For some time English, being a widely spread language and used for intercultural communication, has taken on a strong position internationally (Jorda, 2005:9; Crystal, 2008:702; Sharifian, 2009:1-16). However, for decades, if not for centuries, in many countries especially in Europe, monolingualism has been the norm, and consequently a change to a pluralistic society is becoming a challenge. The political discussion between leaders and grass root citizens concerning English as a Foreign Language, EFL, or Second Language, ESL, in Swedish multilingual classrooms has escalated in the last few years. This is due to the fact that there is a divided focus: The pluralistic ideology is visible in political documents; assimilation/immersion is sought on the grass root level (Vetenskapsrådet, 2012:8).

With the Swedish ratification of The Council of Europe’s Education policy on pluralism and the Swedish ideology of “education for all” regulated in the Swedish Education Act (2010:800) immigrant children are required to attend English classes. In addition to that, The Swedish Education Board stipulates that the aim of English teaching/learning is to “help students to develop knowledge of the language and the surrounding world so that they may have the ability, desire and confidence to use English in a functional and meaningful context” (Skolverket, 2011). The focus of the present study is English language learners who have recently migrated to and have lived in Sweden for a very short period; often merely a couple of months.

\(^1\) A lingua franca is a common language for a speaking community. (Crystal, 2008:701)
L2 development normally involves code-switching as learners and teachers try to negotiate meaning in the teaching/learning situation (Levine, 2011:16). The field of code-switching in classrooms has been researched a lot but mainly in homogeneous L1 groups/communities and L3 learning is a neglected area of research (Jorda, 2005:1). Therefore this study will focus on code-switching in an L2 EFL/ESL teaching/learning situation in a heterogeneous classroom with a variety of different L1/mother tongues.

The discussion in society about immersion vs. pluralism in language education systems has left language planners with many unattended problems (Vetenskapsrådet, 2012; Levine, 2011:126). One issue is whether students should be allowed to code-switch using their mother tongue or L1 as part of the language of instruction in school or whether there should be total immersion in the EFL/ESL without a possibility to use any other language apart from the target language, in this case English. For the focus group it gets even more confusing because of the complicated relationship between English, Swedish and the diverse students’ mother tongues in the classroom. First of all there is no common language in the classroom since the students have not yet learnt English, which is the best candidate for a lingua franca in the world today; nor have they learnt Swedish, the first language in the country they have migrated to. Second, there is a large range of L1s in the classroom, which many do not share. Third, their teachers do not know these students’ L1s. This complex situation results in language learning taking place in some kind of pluralinguistic situation where a triadic system occurs for each individual student. That is to say each individual learner develops English through another L2, Swedish, which is a completely new language to these learners though it is the language of instruction in their school. Individual learners incorporate their L1/mother tongue into the learning process too. Without a lingua franca to lean upon, as most of these immigrant students share neither Swedish nor a common mother tongue, a chaotic learning environment is the result as communication becomes difficult. Which of the languages should be used in the English classroom and is it advisable to allow some kind of code-switching, for instance peer code-switching, for those who share a common language as peer support? If it is, what are the consequences? Consequently the main research question in this paper is: is code-switching a problem or an asset in an English teaching/learning situation in a multilingual classroom, and what is the impact of code-switching in an English EFL/ESL teaching/learning situation in a multilingual classroom?

This fundamental question leads to the following, more specific questions, which this study strives to answer:
• When do learners/teachers code-switch in an English EFL/ESL multilingual classroom?
• How does the teacher and how do learners react when other languages than English are used in the EFL/ESL classroom?
• What learning strategies are used by the students in an English teaching/learning situation in a multilingual classroom without a lingua franca?
• How can students’ L1/mother tongue be used as a resource in the English multilingual classroom?

In summary, the objectives of this study will be to try to identify when, how and why code-switching takes place in the English multilingual classroom.

2. Background

This section will account for relevant research in the field of code-switching. The paper does not claim to make a comprehensive survey of the field, but will take up only that which is applicable to this particular study.

Section 2.1 presents key terminology as applied in this paper. In 2.2 the focus is on two specific frameworks and their corresponding L2 learning approaches and 2.3 contains a survey of previous empirical research on code-switching in the classroom. Finally, in 2.4, a summary of policies which govern English language planning and teaching in multilingual classrooms will be made.

2.1 Some important concepts

Code-switching as a field of research has a good number of terms that are defined differently depending on the context in which they are used. This section presents relevant definitions as they are applied in this paper.

Acquisition vs. learning

Acquisition refers to naturally and gradually developing language through interaction with others who know the target language. This development happens in informal communicative situations, whereby the learner uses the language in a natural environment constantly. Acquiring a language leads to good fluency due to natural influences. Learning a language is a more conscious decision to accumulate knowledge of the target language and it is normally done formally in institutions like schools. Learners of a language tend to know more about a
language than how to use it, whereas those who acquire a language develop good proficiency in it, as it is done in a natural environment (Creese, 2005:150; Yule 2012:187).

**L1, L2, and L3**
L1 is a learner’s first language, the one acquired as a child; it is in most cases one’s mother tongue or native language but not necessarily all the time. The L2 is a learner’s second language, that is to say a language spoken in addition to one’s native language; it is acquired after infancy and it could be the first foreign language one learns. Finally, L3 is a non-native language being used or learnt when a person has knowledge of one L2 besides one or more L1s (Hammarberg, 2009:6; OED; Brown 2006:686-689).

**Content-based instruction, CBI, method**
There are a number of teaching approaches which make use of content-based instruction (CBI). Creese (2005) explains how this approach goes beyond learning words and structures:

> Language work must extend a focus on form (grammar) and teaching of key symbols (vocabulary). Instead language focus must capture the ability to understand the role language plays (along with other signs and symbols) in the creation of meanings in school life (Creese, 2005:145).

As indicated by this quotation, Creese argues that integrating L2 learning with meaningful content gives learners a language input and thus context; this could be easily done by trying as much as possible not to separate the learners’ linguistic background from what is being taught in the EFL classroom. Instead learning is organised around meaningful information such as other school subjects to be learned apart from the language itself. Students being versed in these other subjects in their L1s could therefore use code-switching as a vital tool providing meaningful input from their own experiences facilitating L2 development.

**Additive vs. subtractive bilingualism**
Additive bilingualism refers to giving students an opportunity to add a language to their repertoire, while subtractive bilingualism means subtracting a student’s mother tongue from active communication while learners concentrate entirely on developing their L2 skills (González, 2008).

**Idiosyncrasy**
Idiosyncratic language is a personal language or language behaviour that is particular to an individual or a limited group of people. Language acquisition/learning is idiosyncratic in the way that it is a person’s individual way of learning, which is influenced by the person’s background and learning context. Language learning is complex as “learners might be influenced by a wide range of factors” (Jorda 2005:13). Multilingual immigrant students are
influenced by for example their social and environmental background and hence they develop their own idiosyncratic language involving code-switching as a specific and recognisable habit pertaining to L2 development. This particular language would then be part of an individual’s English development (Yule, 2012:191).

**Communicative competence**

One of the questions usually raised in this research field is how code-switching can be used as a resource to help learners develop the target language, in this case English. Sociolinguists refer to the understanding and use of language in a meaningful context as communicative competence. Therefore, communicative competence refers to the ability to use a language in an all round sense and that is to say; accurately (grammatical/organisational competence), appropriately (sociolinguistic/pragmatic competence) and flexibly (strategic competence) (Levine, 2011:61; Yule, 2012:194). In general, “the function of a language is effective communication” (Ur, 2000:8) and thus it is about using the language intelligibly to interlocutors, rather than using it exactly like a native speaker. Learners use their competence of L1 through code-switching to develop L2. Figure 1 shows how communicative and strategic competences intertwine when it comes to the knowledge and skills required.

**Code-switching**

Code-switching is when bilingual or bidialectal persons systematically alternate or use more than one language and/or variety in the same utterance or conversational exchange.
(Nationalecyklopedin online, 2013; Levine, 2011:50). Such a shift may be a sign of a change in the speech situation or a signal of the speaker’s attitude to what is said. Code-switching can occur when the speaker or the subject changes, between or after sentences (intersentential) or even inside sentences (intrasentential) (Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2008:476; Mesthrie et. al., 2009:162; Muysken 2001:1; Levine, 2011:49). The following are examples of code-switching adopted from Glottopedia (Nilep, 2010); code-switching starts where the hashtag (#) appears.

1. **English into Swedish:** Intrasentential and intersentential
   
   But #du vet vem du är; you also know that you’re good at, # till exempel, better at Swedish than English. #Du vet det, eller!
   
   *Translation:* But you know who you are; you also know that you're good at, for example, better at Swedish than English. You know that, don’t you!

2. **English into German:** Intersentential
   
   No, but he was only nine, #weißt du?
   
   *Translation:* No, but he was only nine, you know?

### 2.2 Language teaching and learning approaches

This section will discuss some approaches commonly used in L2 learning and their connection to code-switching. A discussion about L3 learning will also be held, as the target study is in a multilingual classroom with students aspiring to study English as an additional language.

There are a number of language learning theories, which have developed over the recent decades including behaviourism, cognitivism and affective learning theory. However, this paper will concentrate on the language learning theory constructivism with a focus on three specific approaches, that is to say, the socio-cultural learning approach, the communicative or interaction-development approach, and the ecological perspective. Of course, other theories have their place in the classroom too, but so far it is appropriate to focus on communicative methods as they translate more effectively for EFL/ESL learning in a multilingual classroom, since they recognize the importance of cognitive development together with social cooperation as a main ground. In addition, code-switching being an interaction practice which could lead not only to metalinguistic awareness but also to sociocognitive development makes communicative methods more appropriate for the present study. Therefore I choose to concentrate on the interaction-development approach (Hedge, 2000:43; Levine, 2011:47, 80, 126; Ur, 2012:6).
2.2.1 Socio-cultural learning theory in language development

Learning theories have been developed and used in education institutes for some time and one of the most influential theory developers is the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky argues that learning is primarily social (Recker, 1996; Einarsson, 2013:169), as humans develop necessary skills. Languages are acquired through social interaction, and language learning therefore requires collaboration. If communication is effective, it will result in useful co-constructed knowledge. What is communicated should not be too far removed from the level of the language learner. Hence, “learning is thought to occur when an individual interacts with an interlocutor within his/her Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006:47) through scaffolding\(^2\) either from the teacher or students to each other (Levine 2011:25).

The sociocultural approach helps students learn the target language skills in a social context. However, the teacher needs to fully understand the role of language in communication, which is to express and share ideas, thoughts and feelings, thus enabling learners to be part of a speech community. As learners use language, teachers help them develop strategies to get to understand each other and then co-construct and produce language output in the form of speech and writing (Creese, 2005; Levine, 2011:33). Teachers or other more competent interlocutors thus guide the learner to the nearest higher level of development (Einarsson, 2013:169). This model is appropriate for the present study as L2 includes cognitive processes, which are associated with language learning strategies and development.

2.2.2 The communicative approach

The communicative approach is one of the methods directly connected with the sociocultural development theory, and it emphasises the function rather than the form of the language. The main aim of this approach is to engage learners in active communication and thus allow them to develop their communicative competence. Code-switching used in an English multilingual classroom is part of this approach as it functions as a tool for communication between classroom participants. Through active teacher-talk\(^3\) and systematic code-switching the teacher can provide clarification, explanations and meaning while learners respond accordingly, interpreting and negotiating meaning of the target language skill which in its turn leads to a communicative classroom (Hedge, 2000:43-74). The classroom becomes learner-centred as learners actively engage in meaningful content- and task-based activities as they collaborate (Ur, 2012:8; Yule, 2012:190). The communicative

\(^2\) Scaffolding is when a more knowledgeable person (teacher or peer) helps the learner to develop a targeted competence.

\(^3\) Teacher-talk involves giving instructions and explanations, giving corrective feedback or error correction, questioning to initiate student response (Mesthrie et. el., 2009:348)
approach was used during a pilot study (described in section 3) and it soon became obvious that it was relevant to the present study and therefore it will be taken into account throughout the study.

### 2.2.3 An ecological perspective

Levine (2011:23-29) suggests an ecological perspective, which emphasises a holistic framework to L2 learning. This perspective suggests that language learning should not be taken as a series of isolated components but as an all around approach, which considers both the setting and the context. In the process, factors leading to code-switching and code choice in general have to be taken into consideration. Levin (2011:33) also suggests that L2 learners should be helped to develop an awareness of when and why to code-switch, since code-switching is a normal creative aspect in a bilingual classroom.

Levine (2011:7) underlines the fact that the classroom is part of the “real world” since it contributes to an individual learner’s maintenance of his/her own sense of identity and cultural belonging through the use of L1. Therefore he concludes that code-switching offers an authentic communication resource in the school social interaction arena. However, he also shows that learners and teachers have to co-construct “norms” in the classroom to promote intelligibility.

### 2.2.4 Learning a third language, L3

According to Jorda (2005:1), L3 is a very young field of study, which researchers have opened up to after recognising the rapid development of pluralistic societies in the last few decades. Jorda’s research is of interest to this study because it deals with multilingual learners and she underscores code-switching as a feature of bilingual speech (Jorda, 2005:11).

Jorda (2005:10-13) suggests that there is a difference between L2 and L3 learning, attributing distinctive characteristics to L3 development: 1) non-linearity, 2) maintenance, 3) individual variety or idiosyncrasy, and 4) interdependency and quality change. While L2 researchers regard language learning as linear, Jorda reports that L3 learning is non-linear, referring to a progression which does not follow a straight line but a variety of ways whereby learners pick up skills as they arise in reality when learning a language. Maintenance is the feature needed to avoid attrition and the more languages known, the more effort to practice is needed in order to maintain the proficiency level. Due to idiosyncrasy, learners attain language depending on their individual specific traits. Jorda (2005:13) explains it in the following way: "As complex human beings, learners might be influenced by a wide range of factors while learning L3, thus analysing internal structures in isolation may facilitate their
study.” Jorda argues for meaningful input in order to help learners maintain the acquired skills, because the more L3s learners command, the more effort is needed for maintenance. Without enough meaningful input/output and practice the newly acquired language could be fossilised, which is similar to L2 learning as both interaction and variation are required for a dynamic language learning process. However, L3 being an extra and newly learnt language, it needs much more maintenance than an L2. The interdependence and quality change characteristic helps us to understand the relationship between the L1, L2 and L3 and how learners build up a language system unit commanding all these three languages at once. Learners reconstruct and build on the new skills based on old experiences and thus make a quality change in their language system. Jorda (2005:14) refers to the languages known by a learner as a “whole unit” instead of isolated entities, as they enrich each other.

The four L3 features presented above are of vital importance when it comes to language choice as they cover the learning in the multilingual classroom environment. These features help us to distinguish L2 from L3 learning since they account for the order in which languages are learned, as well as the sociolinguistic features and psychological factors involved (Jorda, 2005:18). Thus, they are of great interest and they will provide a necessary theoretical framework for the present study.

2.3 Previous empirical studies on code-switching

There have been a number of systematic studies on code-switching, starting already in the 1960s (Levine, 2011:49). Yet, it is impossible to do a comprehensive review of all of them. Levin states that depending on the purpose of the research there are different models used to try to understand this phenomenon. He mentions three specific purposes leading to different frameworks namely; (1) why and what choices people make to use two different languages, (2) formal linguistic constraints of code-switches and (3) interactional characteristics of turns in a conversation. These three purposes individually would obviously lead to different methods, but it is advisable to use all the three where applicable in order to cover as large a field as possible, which was done in the studies presented below.

One of the earliest studies of code-switching is an ethnolinguistic study on a bidialectal community in Norway, which dates from 1972 (Mesthrie et. al., 2009:164). Social functions in the communicative use of code-switching between two varieties of Norwegian: Renamål and Bokmål, were investigated. Renamål was found to be the socially informal language used at home with family and friends whereas Bokmål was the formal variety used in administrative and social institutions such as schools, hospitals and in other official
transactions like religion and mass media. It depicted a diglossic and not a real code-switching situation in which the alternation act happens in the same speech situation. Though not a classroom study it set the tone for what was to come in the research area, as it built awareness of code-switching in contemporary society.

Over the last three decades there has been a great interest in code-switching in the classroom. However, as already mentioned such studies have mainly focused on bilingual and bidialectal classrooms, in which learners in many instances share an L1 and have a relatively homogeneous background. The most prominent code-switching classroom research has been carried out in the immersion programs of North America and Canada with the intention to find out what function code-switching has in the classroom. It also aimed at finding out when, by whom, how often, how much code-switching is used as well as what the ratio between L1 and L2 was (Mesthrie et al., 2009; Muysken, 2001:1; Dagenais, 2008:202; Levine, 2011:80; Lin, 2013: 195-218).

The first study describes the Canadian French immersion education model, which came out of a discussion between English speaking parents who wanted their children to develop a bilingual status, as the community was apparently becoming bilingual in the 1960s. In this program a group of homogeneous English speaking learners were put in one classroom and followed a “one-way” approach. That is to say, learners followed the majority language group in the process of learning the L2 and thus content-based instructions were applied, which means that the focus was not on the language but on the content as all subjects (i.e. mathematics, history etc.) were taught in the target language (Fortune & Tedick, 2008:4). Results of this study showed among other things that learners gained additive bilingualism status, at the same time gaining additional cognitive and thus academic and employment skills. The second study, which served linguistically heterogeneous groups involved Spanish learners in North America, specifically in Miami-Dade county in Florida, and thus was a direct opposite of the immersion model. Here the Spanish-speaking parents adopted a “two-way” bilingual education program, where both Spanish and English speaking learners were put in the same classroom making it a dual language education system (Fortune & Tedick, 2008:6). The main results of this study were the positive cross-culture attitudes learners developed, thus encouraging cultural diversity and the dual language proficiency.

From the two above-mentioned studies L1 preference was shown when individual interaction took place in the classroom. These studies revealed that some of the social functions of code-switching refer to a situation in which two languages (or two varieties of the same language) are used under different conditions within a community, often by the same speakers (OED).
switching were to express solidarity, checking for comprehension and other social motivations (Mesthrie et al., 2009:164). Mesthrie et al. (2009:164) stress that the meaning and function of code-switching have to be interpreted in a context. However, Mesthrie et al. (2009:361) also suggest that L2 learning benefits from the development of L1 skills and successful education depends on allowing learners to develop L2 and L1 in parallel, based on the interdependency hypothesis. With the illustration of the “Babel conundrum”, Levine (2011:19) mentions communication competence, organisation, pragmatic and learning strategies, as a prerequisite to intelligibility between conversational partners. The learners’ local need to understand each other and not the teachers’ strategic planning would then lead to L2 development, and this could be the main factor why learners code-switch (Levine, 2011:61). From these results a conclusion can be drawn that code-switching is beneficial for L2 development.

Additionally, studies from Canada, using a “matched-guise” technique, and aiming to find out what attitudes towards different language speakers informants had, showed that English is regarded highly. This implies that English is suitable to be an international language in many countries (Mesthrie et al., 2009:147-8). In Sweden English is required in order to qualify for higher education (Skolverket, 2011), and good knowledge of English is also necessary in many international commercial organisations in the country. The Canadian study shows a language hierarchy, where English comes out as the language with the most prestige, something that promotes immersion (one-way) education programs. This puts English in a dominant position as a language of choice in different planning policies and therefore teachers are advised to instruct children in this preferred language and restrict any other languages in the classroom (Mesthrie et al., 2000:147; Sealey, 2010:102-107; Levine, 2011:120).

According to Dagenais (2008:201), even if bilingual and immersion studies dominated early studies, the reported shift towards issues of multilingualism has gained stability, and research in the field of code-switching is evident as a body of literature is growing. Research has developed from a focus on the early immersion programs in Canada to the current situation with multiple L1s in the classroom where additive bilingualism is encouraged. This is a natural progress following the reality in today’s society with “forces of globalisation, population shifts, language diversity, community affiliations and program options in education” (Dagenais, 2008:201). The development of the emerging pluralistic societies is therefore one of the bases for the researchers’ interest and reason for the choice of the field of code-switching in the present study.
2.4 Education and language policies

Code choice in a foreign language English classroom is a very sensitive issue, although it needs to be pointed out that it has to follow education policies in the nation in question. In a diverse language community the choice is not obvious, as students tend to be either bilingual or multilingual, making it difficult to decide on whether to use an assimilation/immersion or pluralist language education approach (Meuter, 2009:27-51).

This section presents reasons for using an L1/mother tongue in an English multilingual classroom. Noteworthy is that the policies below are simply suggestions; in the end it is the individual schools and classroom teachers who decide what is the appropriate application of language policies in their respective schools and classrooms (UNESCO, 2003).

Different sociolinguistic approaches are also noted in the policies as benchmarks for the “acceptability criterion” of language planning. The Sociolinguistic approach stresses “the social and symbolic context of language use and the importance of language attitudes and social change in a given society” (Mesthrie et. al., 2000:386). Since the social aspects of language are taken into consideration, the context and each individual learner’s situation have an important role to play in the classroom language choice. Code-switching is part of L2 learning/teaching and therefore it would constitute one of the choices in a diverse language classroom.

As mentioned above, ideologies underlying the development of language policies include linguistic assimilation and linguistic pluralism. These approaches have been used in different nations to consciously change the linguistic behaviour of speech communities so that they could represent what particular nations prefer and not always how societies are linguistically constituted (Mesthrie et. al., 2000:371-406). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages defines plurilingualism as

the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experience of several cultures (Beacco & Byram, 2007:8, Council of Europe, 2001-2003: 168).

According to the above definition, pluralism could be regarded as an inclusive system which has to do with using several relevant languages in a learning/teaching situation, at the same time encouraging cross fertilisation (Dagenais, 2008:202), while assimilation is an exclusive system advocating a one-way approach, whereby the dominant or rather target language is used in a classroom situation (Mesthrie et. al., 2000:391). The pluralism approach is based on the current development in speech communities whereby many people today are
multilingual and language diversity is regarded as the norm. A number of questions remain; what should be the language of choice in a multilingual classroom? Which language policy should be applied?

2.4.1 UNESCO and UNICEF

Two of the United Nations’ specialised organisations work hand in hand to cater for the needy in different areas, including education. In that capacity they have developed guidelines on multilingualism in education, based on research. According to UNICEF (2007:77) research shows that “learners learn better in their own mother tongues as a prelude to and complement of bilingual education approaches.” Therefore there should be a way to facilitate the use of learners’ L1 and thereby promoting their identity preservation; a basic human right.

An earlier report from UNESCO from 1953 states that a lingua franca should be developed (additive bilingualism) for a speaking community including classrooms but that language should not be a substitute (subtractive bilingualism) for the mother tongue unless the learners are familiar with it before coming to school. The policy suggested that allowance for tolerance and acceptance of linguistic diversity could lead to improvement in the quality of education (Mesthrie et al., 2009:358). From these guidelines it is possible to draw the conclusion that code-switching would facilitate learning and social equality in a multilingual English classroom. Therefore one of the goals of this study was to investigate whether this was the case in two multilingual classrooms.

2.4.2 European Union language education policy

One of the main objectives of the Council of Europe is to promote and enhance cultural identity and diversity in Europe, which is mostly done through education (Council of Europe 2003:9; ECML, 2003). The council’s education framework is based on the pluralism approach to language beliefs/ideologies, practices and planning. One of the conventions drawn up by the council is the Regional or Minority Language Charter for Protecting and Promoting Regional Languages, which was adopted in 1992. According to this convention, language minority students have a right to be taught in and/or use their mother tongue or those languages they command well in the classroom. This allows a possibility for bi- and multilingualism in the English language classroom as expressed in the following quotation from the council’s position paper:

Policies for language education should therefore promote the learning of several languages for all individuals in the course of their lives, so that Europeans
actually become plurilingual and intercultural citizens, able to interact with other Europeans in all aspects of their lives. (Council of Europe, 2003: 7).

Thus, though national languages in the union are to take the leading role in individual states, the plurilingualism perspective is the principal policy and multilingual education is encouraged to help all learners in Europe to develop their communicative competence and thereby participate democratically regardless of nationality. According to these regulations, a multilingual classroom should enable its students to use their L1s or code-switch where necessary.

### 2.4.3 Swedish language education policy

The Swedish government has developed policy documents based partly on current education research and partly on the European language education framework, and this section discusses policies relevant to English language learning for students with another mother tongue than the school language, Swedish.

The Swedish Education act (2010:800:1:4§) stipulates the aim of the Swedish school system and emphasises the idea of “education for all”, promoted by UNICEF as education is a human right (UNICEF, 2007), and encourages the development of all learners’ lifelong desire to learn and thus develop the basic democratic values that Swedish society is based on. The official language of the country, Swedish, is also the language of instruction in schools and this explains why many teachers code-switch into Swedish even if the syllabus recommends that “teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English” in an English classroom (Skolverket, 2011:1). However, English is a prioritised language, thus given a “special role” (Crystal, 2008:695) in the country, and it is required in higher education (Einarsson, 2013:228).

Chapter 17 of the Education act regulates a special “Language introduction program”, which embraces an immersion approach (Skolverket 2011), in which newly immigrated learners (16-20 years old) without qualifications to join secondary school national education programs are put in separate classrooms and given special intensive training in the Swedish language. These heterogeneous groups, with learners from a diverse linguistic background, should be assimilated into the education program as focus is put on the school language (Vetenskapsrådet 2012:8, Skolverket 2013:6) but they are also required to learn English before they can join “regular” secondary school classrooms.

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5 [http://www.skolverket.se/skolverketsybeskolan/gymnasieutbildning/gymnasieskola/program-och-utbildningar/introduktionsprogram/sprakintroduktion-1.195789]
The curriculum for English, GY11, is based on the immersion approach and it states that in English lessons “teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English,” since if English is used throughout the whole interaction it will remain active in the learners’ minds and thus facilitate communicative competence. On the other hand, the Introduction program policy document (Skolverket, 2013:28) states that students learn best in a language they fully master and understand. Consequently, learners should be given a possibility to continue their knowledge development through their mother tongue at least for a while, even if it would require code-switching. With these two ideologies, newly immigrated learners to Sweden should be able to use their L1s in case there are classmates who share the same language and code-switching should also be allowed in the English classroom.

2.4.4 Education policy application in the classroom

The school where the present study was carried out decided to interpret the policies based on a learner-oriented and a content-based approach; that students’ needs form the basis for the education program and thus the language policy. The schools’ organisation structure, vision, teachers’ and learners’ individual language competence are carefully considered before the learners are recruited into the program (Focus school, 2013). However, their diverse L1s are not one of the criteria for their admission to the school; the main criterion is that they are newly immigrated and they need to learn the language of instruction, Swedish, in preparation for the Swedish education system.

Swedish is the main language of instruction but through collaboration and an interdisciplinary approach in some projects, English is used as a complementary instruction language. Subject and language teachers work in partnership in these different projects, whereby subject teachers provide the content input and language teachers give the task a language form. Thereby content-based instruction is created. Creese (2005:153) explains that schools work in this way because they need to prepare students for the immersion in the monolingual inclusive culture preferred in the country.

In summary, language policies, whether international, national or local, are based on ideologies that reflect linguistic relationships between user communities. In a monolingual and/or bilingual society the policy tends to be in favour of assimilation, whereas in a multilingual one a pluralistic approach is preferred.
3. Methods

There are a number of qualitative and quantitative approaches that can be used to gather data, and in many cases it is advantageous to have a mixed methods approach (Angouri, 2010:30). Therefore I carried out a pilot study to help me decide on the appropriate method to be used in the study. During this pilot study a communicative approach was put in practice in the observed classroom. The approach used a process-oriented and task-based activity (debate) where students spontaneously code-switched into their respective L1 in order to understand and negotiate meaning. Through dialogue/interaction learners went through a natural learning series of activities leading to L2/English learning. Teachers code-switched into Swedish, which is the language of instruction in other content courses than English, and they guided the learners to collaborate towards a common goal while developing their speaking skills and the English language in general. There were also many other code-switching situations when learners switched to their L1. The pilot study gave mixed results, which confirmed that to collect sufficient data, a mixture of methods, including both quantitative and qualitative approaches, was essential.

The methods decided on were interview, questionnaire and classroom observation, and they were based on deep and systematic survey allowing both qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Observation was the main data collection method but I also conducted three separate interviews with three English teachers and in addition, an electronic questionnaire was sent out to the learners.

I started out with the teacher interviews in parallel with the student questionnaire and later I did a classroom observation in three English classes. To complement the observations, digital equipment (mobile phone, computer and Dictaphone) was used to record what happened in the classroom, especially in code-switching situations.

Section 3.1 presents the observation method, section 3.2 participants, section 3.3 describes the questionnaire, section 3.4 presents the interview, and 3.5 ethical considerations.

3.1 Observations

In order to get direct evidence and be able to identify code-switching situations in an English, EFL/ESL multilingual classroom, where students were all recent immigrants to Sweden, direct and systematic observation in a natural classroom setting was the main method applied, as described in Denscombe (2010:197).
Three groups were observed twice each, and in order not to miss features worth observation I created and followed an observation schedule (Appendix D based on Denscombe, 2010:200). To complement observations, digital equipment (mobile phone, computer and a dictaphone) was used to record what happened.

According to Denscombe (2010:204-205), there are some disadvantages in using systematic observation due to the simplicity of the observation schedule. Categorising overt behaviour and not intentions becomes the focus of the study, and thus contextual information could be missed as a non-holistic approach is used. Despite this drawback I found observations more fitting for this study due to the following advantages. First, systematic observation is advantageous since it allows for direct data collection as a direct record of what the people who are observed do, which may be distinct from what they say. Second, the use of an observation schedule reduces the risks of selective perception and produces objective observations as it effectively eliminates any bias from the current emotions or personal background of the observer. Third, it also efficiently provides means for collecting substantial amounts of data in a relatively short time span. In order to compensate for the observation method’s weakness I decided to complement the observations with a questionnaire to students and also to interview the teachers.

3.2 Participants

The learners who are the focus in this study were all newly immigrated students who had been living in Sweden only for a couple of months. They were of diverse ethnic origins and social background and thus make up a speech community with a varied linguistic background. There were altogether 40 students, divided into three subgroups based on their English proficiency levels. In the whole group there were 25 female and 15 male students, from 16 to 20 years of age with a total of fifteen different mother tongues (Appendix C). All students were required to attend English lessons, in parallel to their efforts to acquire the school’s language of instruction, Swedish.

There were one male and two female English teachers with whom I took personal contact in order to ask for permission to carry out a study in their classrooms as well as to interview them about their attitudes towards code-switching in the classroom. The female teachers were both immigrants and multilingual whereas the male teacher was a bilingual, speaking English and Swedish. All three are experienced language teachers in both English and Swedish. Nonetheless, none of the teachers shared a common L1/mother tongue with any of the learners.
3.3 Questionnaire

Since I had limited time with the focus classes I decided to use an electronic questionnaire as this instrument allows for a quick and easy way to get vast amounts of data (Denscombe, 2010:169). I tested the questionnaire on one student who did not participate in the study and he confirmed that it was clear as he could answer all the questions without any major problems.

The questionnaire was then sent out to the 40 students (see 3.2) on a safe and secure school network system where the learners were guaranteed confidentiality and technical help if needed. One of my objectives was to identify problems and possibilities of code-switching in a multilingual classroom and a questionnaire is a good tool to solicit that kind of information directly from the learners. The questionnaire was made simple for students’ self-administration and I intentionally never translated it into Swedish because I wanted to see if code-switching would also occur in the students’ written production. Though questionnaires could be economical they might be prescriptive, giving “pre-coded” answers. To avoid this, I tried to create as many open questions as possible so that the learners would feel free to express their opinions without restrictions (Denscombe, 2010:157-171).

3.4 Interviews

I conducted semi-structured one-to-one interviews and had open discussions with three teachers in order to get first-hand information (Edley & Litosseliti, 2010:156-157). I had prepared topics, but decided to be flexible to take in the interviewees’ ideas and thoughts. This allowed for open-ended answers and they emphasised and elaborated their points of interest. I would have liked to have a group interview in order save time, but the teachers’ schedule would not allow for this possibility. It has to be kept in mind that what informants say in an interview situation might be what they think the researcher would like to hear rather than what they actually do, but it is still useful to include interviews as it makes it possible to compare teachers’ beliefs with what they actually do in the classroom. The teachers’ interest in the report (they said that they would like to use it as part of their teaching/learning evaluation) makes the interviews necessary both to the teachers and to my study. I take this as an advantage for the study since the risk of negative effects from the interviewer’s personal opinion will be minimised, as it is a shared interest (Denscombe, 2010:175-178).

The interviews were recorded digitally and analysed immediately while the information was still fresh in memory to facilitate easy analysis. Usually recording inhibits the interviewees’
free contribution but the digital culture at the focus school facilitated this methodology and I never experienced any negative attitudes towards recording.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Participants were given background information about the study, both through their class teachers but also from me personally. I visited the classes long before the study began and I explained among other things the procedure of the study. I made sure that all students understood why and how the study was to be done by talking to them individually. On the day of the observation, together with the teachers I explained once more the procedure and purpose to make sure that the students still wanted to be part of the study, which they consented to. Due to time restrictions I never had an opportunity to get the students’ written consent, which would have covered the integrity and security issues but as these participants were all above the age of 15 they were asked individually if they voluntarily would like to be part of an eight week study and they all gave an oral consent. Participants were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time if they desired to do so without any advance notice to me. This is evident in the questionnaire results, where only 60% of the 40 learners answered. The school principal was also made aware that a study was being carried out on the school premises and she also gave her approval. In addition to that, the students had signed a contract with the school about digital production and publication, which could also be regarded as consent to use digital equipment during the classroom observations. Furthermore, all participants were guaranteed confidentiality (Denscombe, 2010:160).

4. Analysis and results

In this section I will present the results obtained from the three different parts of my data collection. First, section 4.1 will discuss the results obtained from the interviews with the teachers and answer the question about their habits and attitudes towards code-switching in a multilingual English classroom. Then section 4.2 will focus on the results obtained from the questionnaire in order to answer the question about students’ views on code-switching. Finally, section 4.3 will discuss the data collected through observations; its aim is to show why, how and when code-switching was practically carried out in the multilingual English classroom.
4.1 Interview results

Of the three teachers (referred to as T1, T2 and T3 in this section) interviewed, one is bilingual and the other two are multilingual. Altogether, these three teachers command seven different languages (Croatian, English, Finnish, German, Serbian, Spanish and Swedish) between them, among which none of them is the L1/mother tongue of any of the students. However, the teachers share two common languages with the students, one being English and the other the school’s language of instruction, Swedish. Nonetheless, the learners in this study do not master these two languages and hence there is a need for code-switching to their individual L1 in particular situations. It is noteworthy that two of the teachers in this study are also immigrants, which gives students a context and a motivation to focus and a boost to their self-confidence in their endeavor to learn English.

A view of code-switching which the three teachers shared is that it should not be allowed unless the situation requires it. Therefore the only situation in which code-switching would be allowed would be when students need extra help and that would mean that code-switching could only be from English into the school’s language of instruction, Swedish. Teachers would then be the ones to help out and students would not be allowed to code-switch in their interaction with each other. Thus according to the three teachers, code-switching is not allowed from English into the students’ L1. The teachers agreed that students should use English as far as possible in the English classroom. This is not in line with either what the syllabus or the school policy prescribes, but the teachers had decided not to allow code-switching referring to the difficulty of managing many different L1s.

T1 referred to his own teacher education where he was never allowed to use any other language apart from English. T2 quoted the English curriculum (GY11) which states that “teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English,” and accordingly, she thus recommends only the use of the target language, in this case English, in the classroom. T2 went on to clarify her concern about students’ use of dictionaries without considering the full context of the word. Students get the meanings of words but cannot use them in proper communication; therefore she does not allow translation dictionaries (English into L1) in her English classroom. T3 has a similar opinion, that students should not use any other language in the English class than the instruction language. All three teachers therefore try to prevent students from code-switching and in special cases they advise students to ask the teachers for clarification rather than code-switch or consult online translation tools and dictionaries.

However, all the three teachers admitted to using Swedish in the English classroom, and therefore I could not understand why they were never tolerant of code-switching as a phenomenon. They also expressed their support for students’ code-switching into Swedish,
reasoning that students need to understand the instructions given in the classroom, which could be achieved through peer scaffolding in a language they have in common with fellow students. However, when T2 asked if she would allow students’ L1/mother tongue in the classroom, she hesitated, saying that code-switching to mother tongue might create disciplinary problems, as not all the students share any other common language apart from Swedish. Nevertheless, if the students who share the same language code-switch discretely, she would allow it for a brief period of time. T3 never expanded her view on the use of the mother tongue in the English classroom apart from expressing a negative attitude toward code-switching to students’ mother tongues by saying she did not believe it could help students’ language development. T4’s views never became clear to me either. He simply stated that code-switching to students’ L1 never occurs in his English classroom, which later proved wrong during observation; students who shared a mother tongue code-switched to their L1.

When teachers were asked about when and why teachers and learners code-switch I got a number of answers. Some answers related to practical functions, and others indicated what the problems are with code-switching in a multilingual classroom. Firstly, the need for clarification and emphasis was mentioned as to why both students and teachers code-switch. The teachers explained that immigrant learners were not as versed in English as one could think and therefore they need more help to understand instructions. Secondly, the lexicon function was cited. Communicating effectively requires that learners have an accurate vocabulary, but learning new words is a tricky part of learning a new language, and students find it difficult to find the right words to use. It is also natural that some experiences made in the L1 context are difficult to relate in a new language as the new language might lack equivalent concepts or ideas (Cheng, 2003). Thus students tend to code-switch, in search of an appropriate word, into the language they command. The teachers reported that many students expressed a lack of concept knowledge in English and therefore they almost always code-switch for concept comparison/reference. Commanding a language is related to learners’ concept experience and therefore it is natural for them to code-switch to their L1. The lexical function is about helping students to build up semantic relationships between L2 and the language they code-switched into. Students try to build up a vocabulary bank through comparison as their need for expression develops in L2. Additionally, many grammar books have Swedish instructions and therefore it appears to be natural for teachers to code-switch into Swedish when teaching grammar. Thirdly, code-switching is used for communication purposes; this means that students need to use the easiest strategy possible to acquire the target language. Lastly, students also code-switch because they need to maintain a relationship with their interlocutor as they are not comfortable to keep quiet simply because
they cannot find an English word, and therefore they keep the communication flowing as they fill the gaps with words from their L1.

However, all three teachers expressed their concern as regards the many L1/mother tongues in their English classrooms. They mentioned the problem of having no single lingua franca in the classroom and they all agreed on the importance of trying to help students with content-based meaningful input from other subjects. However, they also emphasized the problem of negative transfer, whereby interference from the students’ mother tongues could affect for example students’ L2 development. T1 also remarked that if students get used to the teachers’ code-switching into Swedish, they would not pay attention when English instructions are given since they expect that the teacher will code-switch or translate anyway. This problem does not only cause disciplinary problems but affects L2 development too and thus results in poor proficiency in the end.

In summary, the interviews with all three teachers presented a unanimous positive attitude towards code-switching into the school’s language of instruction, Swedish, and a completely negative view of code-switching into students’ mother tongues. Communication, concept and vocabulary development, clarification of instructions, and peer scaffolding functions were mentioned as reasons leading to situations when code-switching occurs in the English multilingual classroom. Teachers and students code-switch and all the three teachers were of the opinion that students benefit to some extent if they use code-switching as a learning strategy in their L2 development.

4.2 Questionnaire results

The aim of the questionnaire survey was to complement the classroom observations and answer the following two research questions:

- How do learners react when other languages than English are used in the EFL/ESL classroom?
- What learning strategies are used by the students in an English teaching/learning situation in a multilingual classroom without a lingua franca?

This section will therefore account for the results from the student questionnaire.

Only 24 of the 40 students in the study answered the questionnaire, which is 60% of all the students in the three groups. The questionnaire was online and students did it in their own free time without any supervision, which I think was regrettably not satisfactory. In retrospect I think that if the students had been supervised while answering the questionnaire,
many more would have participated and the results would have been much more reliable, giving more comprehensive material for analysis. However, I did not want to influence their responses and therefore I chose to leave the students to do it without my presence. Nevertheless, I gained a picture of the learners’ attitudes, opinions, preferences and background facts.

Fifteen mother tongues (Appendix C) were registered, twelve of which were shared by at least two or more students, and only three (Tagalog, Tamil and Luganda) were spoken by only one student each. None of the students reported speaking English at home or with friends, but they claimed to be trying very hard to learn it through the school’s main language of instruction, Swedish, which they regard as a common language in the classroom. Individual students commanded more than three languages, but their English (L3) is on a basic level, learnt informally from media, for example TV, newspapers and the Internet.

According to the students, their teachers all speak Swedish in the English classroom and students are allowed to code-switch into Swedish. They were also aware that they are not allowed to speak their L1/mother tongue in the classroom. To the question if and when students code-switch into L1, the common answer for those who shared a mother tongue was that they code-switched when a friend wanted help or when they themselves had not understood what the teacher said in either Swedish or in English.

The answers given here reveal that one strategy used by the students when they do not understand is to code-switch into L1 and ask a friend for help. They also used other strategies for developing their proficiency in English, for example watching English films, listening to English music and practicing oral communication. Finally, the questionnaire shows that the students are aware that the teachers do not allow use of the L1/mother tongue in the English classroom, but the students code-switch anyway, and they are not bothered by other students talking their mother tongues.
Figure 2 shows students in the multilingual English classroom language use in percent as interpreted from the questionnaire results. 70 percent of the students report preferring using their L1 in the English classroom.

4.3 Observation results

As described in section 3, three groups of altogether 40 students were observed and the following is a brief summary of what took place in the classroom.

The first group that was observed was a very lively English class where every learner spoke freely without restriction. In the beginning it was hard to decide what the language of instruction was until the teacher appealingly asked the students to speak English. Then an activity in preparation for an upcoming examination was started; from that moment students started asking for more clarification, and both the teacher and the students code-switched back and forth from Swedish into English as the following sample conversation (1) shows:

(1) T1. Can you please answer these questions; they are in preparation to next Friday
   S1. What is it that is going to be done on next Friday?
   T1. You will compare Oliver Twist the novel and the book.
   S1. What, nej! I vill inte göra prov.
   S2. Menar du att det blir en examination?
   (A vivacious discussion goes on revealing that students had not understood what was expected of them and the teacher code-switches momentarily to Swedish)
   T1. Yes, you are having an examination, och om ni öva på de här frågorna nu, är jag säker att ni kommer klara det.
   S3. Guys, keep quiet, I am listening to instructions.
   T1. Yes, you should all listen and please speak English.
Another example showing when and why code-switching was done comes from the second group which was observed. Group two is an English intermediate class, which was also a very lively class but very orderly and their English was much better than that of the first group. The observation took place during a grammar (vocabulary) exercise as shown in example (2).

(2) **T2.** Ok, get out your grammar lists and write a sentence per word
    **S1.** Men jag förstår inte vad de här orden betyder.
    **T2.** Which word don’t you understand?
    **S2.** Use your dictionary
    **T2.** Men, let her be, vilka ord har du kollat upp?
    **S1.** I checked for the first three but, jag förstår inte ändå.
    **S3.** (Says something in the same mother tongue as S1, S1 moves to S3’s table and the two students attempt to work together).
    **T1.** English please, S1 please move back to your place and I will soon help you (The teacher stops them from code-switching, otherwise collaboration is allowed).

In both the above examples it is clear that teachers and students code-switch and the purpose is to clarify the instructions when students do not understand what to do. There is also evidence of both the teachers’ and the students’ opinion on code-switching. When code-switching was done for a long period of time, some students and even the teachers reacted negatively.

However, there were also instances when one particular student (S4) consistently spoke Swedish in almost every other utterance. I later understood that S4 had trouble shifting from one language to another without interrupting the conversation; in addition, he enjoyed attracting attention from the other students. In this case code-switching functioned as a strategy to let the communication flow and maintain interlocutor relationship. Another possibility is that S4 had a limited vocabulary in English and he wanted to compensate for it, as it proved easier for him to express himself in Swedish than in English.

Then there were instances where two students code-switched to their shared mother tongue continuously, and if they were speaking quietly no one said anything. Only one time they spoke rather loudly and one student shouted out: “speak English!” These students spoke their mother tongue in order to exclude others from their conversation. It appeared that these two students were helping each other and they never wanted students nearby to understand some of what they had found out in the exercise they were working on in class. This is one of the issues that the teachers mentioned, for instance that code-switching might lead to discipline problems as the students who were left out felt the isolation and started shouting.
Afterwards a group of boys complained to me that there is a lot of Swedish speaking in the English classroom both from the teacher and other students and they were afraid they would not learn English as they had expected. However, when I asked them if they themselves speak their mother tongue in the classroom, they admitted to doing so, but they did not see a problem in that. They preferred to be allowed to speak their L1 more than Swedish, since they thought code-switching to their mother tongue helps them to ease communication between themselves, while helping each other out to develop their L2.

In group three, both oral and written code-switching was observed in the classroom. This group had mixed competence in English; there were beginners and intermediate English students. They never talked much in the classroom but there were also situations where oral code-switching was observed, as example (3) shows. Class organisation facilitated code-switching since students who shared a mother tongue sat at the same tables.

My observations in group three took place during a reading comprehension exercise. The teacher asked each student to read out loud a passage in a course book and later discuss what he or she had read. There were a number of new words, which the students did not understand, one of which was “earthquake”. The students tried to find out what it was in Swedish through translation (using an English-Swedish dictionary online). However, they did not understood the Swedish word (jordbävning) until S2 started shouting it out in his own L1 and then S3 who shares the same language as S2 started acting out an earthquake. Then the students together came up with an idea that those who had understood the word should write it in their own L1 on the whiteboard; see Figure 3.

(3) T3. Earthquake is jordbävning
   S1. But what is jordbävning?
   T3. Anyone who knows?
   S2. Jag vet, it is Terremoto, Terremoto, Terremoto
   S3. Oh terremoto, I know! Så här! (S3 starts shaking vigorously).
   T3. Yes, shaking and all the houses and everything falls down, vad är det då?
   S1. I don’t know, can we please check google translate?
   S2. Yes, and write on the whiteboard.
   T3. Check in English, men ni kan också titta i svenska ordböcker på jordbävning.
   S1. But we want to write in our languages.
During this lesson, the learners' L1s served as resources in the English classroom and the main function of code-switching in this case was to help the students understand what they were reading and at the same time develop their Swedish. Code-switching also functioned as social interaction and an identity marker. It was also for reasons of solidarity, as was evident when S4 found out my mother tongue from one of the students I share a mother tongue with, and when I came into the classroom she shouted out a greeting phrase in my language. I answered back and then the rest of the class joined in trying to make a conversation with me in mixed languages (Swedish, English, Luganda). During the exercise students with the same L1 consulted each other asking for clarification of the teacher's instructions. They also collaborated with each other in carrying out the activity. Participant classrooms in this study therefore allowed for partial pluralism as a triadic system, applied on individual learner level mostly through peer scaffolding.

During the observations content-based learning took place as learners got meaningful input in the exercise. Code-switching played a vital role in the content-based instruction, as the learners used meaningful content to promote L2 development (Creese, 2005:145). Experiences gained through L1, and not only English, were used in L2 learning in a multilingual classroom. It was also used in a scaffolding process in which learners had a possibility to guide each other and thereby developing and acquiring L2 (Creese, 2005:148; Genesee, 2008:32). For instance, learners who shared the same L1 sat together and collaborated on a given task.
In conclusion, observations generally confirmed the results from both the interviews and the questionnaire. First and foremost the observation gave an answer to how and when code-switching occurred in a multilingual English classroom. Cheng (2003:61) mentions a number of situations conducive to code-switching and says that the functions of code-switching determine when and how other languages can be used in an English utterance and this was evident in the observations. In these observations, instruction clarification, collaboration, identity preservation, and class organisation determined when and how students code-switched.

5. Discussion

The main research question of this study was whether code-switching is a problem or an asset in the English classroom and what impact code-switching has on an English teaching/learning situation in a multilingual classroom. The scope of the study proved to be wide while the time aspect was limited and therefore the results presented may not be generalisable. However, this section discusses the results in relation to current research in the field of code-switching.

From this study’s interview results I can see conflicting ideologies, where on the one hand the teachers’ educational background gives rise to negative attitudes towards code-switching based on observed influence of L1 on L2, and on the other hand, in their daily contact with the students the teachers witness positive effects of code-switching. However, linguistic research presented in section 2 shows results which agree with what teachers experience in the classroom, that positive functions outweigh negative ones if both teachers and learners are aware of the positive and negative consequences of code-switching. The commentary material on the English syllabus also points out that occasional code-switching not only into Swedish but also into learners’ L1s could be essential in order to help students develop their L2 (Skolverket, 2012). Likewise research confirms a positive influence of L1 on learners’ L2 development, which is worth paying extra attention to. Learners given a possibility to develop their metalinguistic awareness could easily make positive transfer to the target language. This is because they use already learnt skills to develop the new language (De Angelia & Dewael, 2011:25).

In addition to that, results from the teacher interviews answer the research question positively, as it is evident that code-switching into L1/mother tongue gives participants a possibility to communicate effectively, as it is effective to communicate in the language
students already command. As L1 is used as a scaffolding tool students develop their self-esteem as they help each other to take on the task of learning L2. The message in Ladberg’s book *Tala många språk* (Ladberg, 2000) is that the more languages humans speak the richer the world. Ladberg also emphasizes the importance of keeping the individual mother tongues alive while acquiring the L2, something that will promote additive bilingualism (Ladberg 2003:143). The conclusion is that code-switching is an asset as it has a positive impact in an English EFL/ESL teaching/learning situation in the multilingual classroom at the same time as it helps students keep their mother tongues alive. Therefore teachers should allow for the pluralistic language society and permit more use of L1 in the English classroom.

Furthermore, results from the questionnaire show a need for language development through social interaction, which is in line with the socio-cultural learning theory. Students expressed their willingness to help each other through collaboration and thus the social aspects of the language would be taken into consideration. The context and the individual learner’s situation, *idiosyncrasy*, should be given a special role in the classroom as s/he makes a language choice. Learners have diverging social and educational background issues in their baggage, which makes their learning situation even more sensitive than that of other learners without such background (Jorda, 2005:13-14). Therefore the teacher should consider these specific situations while deciding on what and how to present a new language to the learners. Code-switching as a natural part of L2 learning/teaching would therefore be one of those choices made.

Vygotysky (cited in Recker, 1996; Einarsson, 2013:169) argues that learning is primarily social, as humans develop necessary skills, and language being used as a social interaction tool has a special role in learning as learners communicate in a collaborative manner. Code-switching being a common phenomenon in L2 would rightly be part of an EFL/ESL classroom collaboration learning strategy in a heterogeneous classroom as it could benefit language development. Learners get to practice meaningful skills involving active participation and understanding or appreciating the content in its context. Collaboration between the language teacher and the content area teacher helps learners acquire set goals while using collective tasks with meaningful input. Learning and teaching are thereby motivated by a purpose and thus teachers help learners to develop and internalize the skills over time (Creese, 2003:145; Levine, 2011:4, 80; Kumar & Narendra, 2012: 65-71; Lehti-Eklund, 2013).

Students’ lack of English practice outside school (shown by results from the questionnaire) shows that teachers have to work hard and find learning strategies to help them in their L2 acquisition. The three teaching and learning approaches, discussed in section 2.2, if used
effectively could give students a possibility to develop their L2. All three approaches being communicative allows for interaction and collaboration and if code-switching is incorporated in the learning environment then students’ active engagement would be advocated letting students “own” their learning process.

My results in combination with previous findings indicate that teachers need to understand that code-switching is a form of collaboration in a heterogeneous L2 classroom which allows students to “own” their learning processes through the language they master. The ecological perspective advocates for a holistic approach whereby all aspects of a language should be paid attention to in order to help L2 learners gain a meaningful context. Therefore code-switching which allows learners to interact as they practice meaningful skills involving active participation and helping them to understand instructions would be an important strategy in L2 acquisition. Code-switching is also helpful in developing intercultural competence as it allows for affordance and tolerance for other people’s languages (Ur, 2012:219). It also promotes identity preservation, which is a prerequisite for learning due to idiosyncrasy grounds for language development. Code-switching allows for assisted performance, done by peer scaffolding, which enhances intelligibility as learners engage in active participation in line with the sociocognitive perspective. Learners and teachers co-construct norms needed for the learning environment, holding a sociolinguistic significance through acts of identity and culture preservation (Levin, 2011:26, Mesthrie et al., 2009:358).

It is noteworthy that all the students in this study are already multilingual and when given the possibility to develop an additional language without losing their L1 proficiency they will achieve additive bilingualism. On the other hand, if denied that possibility the results will be subtractive bilingualism leading to attrition as their L1 proficiency will decrease while developing the target language, English (Fortune & Tedick, 2008:4), which is not desired. Instead of avoiding code-switching in the English classroom for multilingual learners a new approach based on Jorda’s research on L3 development (Jorda, 2005) presented in section 2 should be applied. The characteristics distinctive of L3 development used in content-based tasks and meaningful interaction would encourage learners to develop a new language while keeping their L1 intact. Students themselves admit to code-switching even if teachers try to stop them, and it is also the case that teachers code-switch, as shown in section 4.3. Hence, the only sensible thing is to find positive ways to encourage learners to use their metalinguistic skills to prosper in the new language rather than preventing them from using their L1 in the English classroom.

Lastly, my observations confirmed what was already found out in the interviews and the questionnaire. Despite the efforts from “monolingual” discourses concerning education
policies, teachers and students study, negotiate and co-construct norms in a classroom. Classrooms being socialization institutions, which are part of the “real world” of modern multilingual spheres, follow a pluralistic ideology. In the multilingual classroom studied, linguistic pluralism was evident in the total number of languages spoken during the classroom observations. That both students and teachers code-switched into different languages show the need for it. Therefore, it appears that there is no way code-switching in a multilingual classroom could be stopped, as it proves to be part and parcel of L2 development. Many students who neither master the instruction language nor have a lingua franca tried as hard as they could to find a common base to start from through code-switching. They showed that regardless of how code-switching is considered by society, their daily practice in the classroom is sustained by the help they can get through the use of their L1/mother tongue. My observations affirm that code-switching is an asset and that the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction is not a hindrance in a multilingual classroom.

6. Conclusion

I had a number of questions about code-switching in a multilingual classroom prior to the study which I have got answers to. The fundamental issue was that code-switching was indeed seen as an asset. During the observations many situations (including the examples presented in this paper) came up showing that the positive impacts of code-switching outweigh the negative ones as it fulfills a number of communication functions leading to L2 development. These results are in accordance with current research in the field of code-switching. The diversity of languages spoken in the classroom makes code-switching a natural part of communication. This is also in line with the pluralism ideology in European education policy. Students code-switched into their L1 when there was a need for clarification and emphasis but also to maintain interlocutor relationship, for concept and vocabulary development, and for identity preservation. All these functions support L2 acquisition. Teachers preferred code-switching into the school’s language of instruction and it was done for the same reasons students code-switched into their L1. Therefore, code-switching either into the school’s language of instruction or into the students’ L1 cannot be separated from the learning situation, as it has proven to be of major importance in L2 development.

Another question I needed an answer to was the participants’ attitudes towards code-switching. Even though both teachers and students code-switched, their opinions on code-switching were different. Teachers thought it was alright to code-switch into the school’s
language of instruction while students preferred code-switching into their L1. Teachers found it difficult to maintain discipline in the multilingual classroom whereas students were tolerant of each other’s languages. However, both students and teachers agreed that code-switching regardless of which language is involved is necessary in L2 development.

Though code-switching is seen as having both a positive and a negative influence on L2 learning from many teachers and researchers, the positive effects outweigh the negative ones. Crosslinguistic influence is common in all L2 and L3 development and if the focus is shifted from methods, teachers and textbooks onto the learners and the acquisition process, then code-switching should be regarded as a natural learning strategy rather than negative transfer. Code-switching will also be part of the communicative approach which allows for social interaction and gives learners a possibility to communicate their experiences. It also helps in emphasizing the functions of the language instead of the form of language (De Angelia & Dawael, 2011:19; Yule, 2012:190-191). Conversely, teachers’ code-switching into Swedish is not regarded as interference but as a strategy needed to help teachers accommodate students’ language (Mesthrie et. al., 2009:180). Alternation of language as a form of code-switching in teacher talk is therefore regarded as tool helping students to develop their L2 (Jacobson, 2001:59-72).

In the current globalised society there is a clear paradigm shift towards pluralinguism as is evident in my findings and in line with the European language policy. Although many countries insist on a monolinguistics policy as the language of instruction in schools, many learners can easily alternate between more than three languages and 70 percent of the students who answered the questionnaire reported preferring using their L1 in the English classroom (Figure 2). However, I never found out how learners’ L1s could be used as a resource in the English classroom. Therefore, I recommend anyone interested in the field of code-switching to study how students’ L1/mother tongue could be used as a resource in the English multilingual classroom. Students’ social and cognitive ability should be put into consideration as it is well established that English learning success in school depends largely on these abilities (Ur, 2012:257). A more pluralistic approach, whereby L1 should be given more time and space in the development of the L2, should be investigated to build on what the students know already and thus close the gap between the known and the unknown. To accomplish this I believe more research in the development of L3 in comparison to L2 is required, as multilingual students have already built working languages. I also think that shared responsibility, whereby parents and other citizens with similar L1s should be involved in language teaching in schools, is a key to L3 development. A starting point would be to find out parents’ attitudes towards pluralinguistic approaches.
Finally, I am sure that multilingual and sociocognitive awareness incorporating code-switching could benefit language development on different levels. This belief is based on the realisation that code-switching is inevitable in the teaching/learning situation and especially in a multilingual classroom where students in many cases do not have a common lingua franca at the same time as this may contribute positively to L2 development.
References


Edley, Nigel & Litosseliti Lia. 2010. Contemplating interviews and focus groups. In Litosseliti, Lia (ed.): 177-179.


Appendix A: Interview questions to teachers

1. How many languages other than English and Swedish are spoken in your classroom?
2. What is the language of instruction in the English classroom?
3. What is your opinion about code-switching?
4. Do you code-switch in the English classroom? If yes, when and why?
5. Do learners code-switch? When and why?
6. To which language do they code-switch? When and why?
7. Are there specific situations when the teacher or/and learner code-switch?
8. What happens when the teacher or/and learner code-switch?
9. Do you think that the use of different languages in the same speech act from both you and learners affect teaching/learning? How and why?
Appendix B: Questionnaire to learners

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1E0AoaAjuUQG7eScbvrM_shhYU8tIzYfRqabzv-ezbW8/viewform: Multilingual English classes’ language use/code-switching survey

* Required

1. Are you *
   - Female
   - Male

2. How old are you? *

3. What is your mother tongue? *

4. What language do you speak at home with your:
   a. parents?  
   b. siblings?

5. What language do you speak with your friends:
   a. at school?  
   b. at home?

6. Are there other people in your English class who have the same mother tongue as you?  
   - Yes  
   - No

7. What language(s) do you speak other than your mother tongue?

8. How did you learn to speak the languages you speak?

9. Can you read and write in the language(s)?
   - Your mother tongue  
   - English  
   - Swedish  
   - Other:

10. In the English lessons the teacher speaks
   - English  
   - My mother tongue  
   - Swedish  
   - Some other language(s) I don’t understand  
   - Other:

11. When does the teacher speak other languages than English?
12. In the English lesson I speak
- [ ] Only English
- [ ] English and my mother tongue
- [ ] Swedish and my mother tongue
- [ ] Swedish, English and my mother tongue
- [ ] English and Swedish
- [ ] I don’t speak
- [ ] Other: ______________________

13. In the English lesson I am allowed to speak
- [ ] Only English
- [ ] English and my mother tongue
- [ ] English and Swedish
- [ ] Swedish and my mother tongue
- [ ] English and Swedish, my mother tongue
- [ ] Swedish and my mother tongue
- [ ] I am not allowed to speak
- [ ] Other: ______________________

14. When do you speak your mother tongue?
- [ ] When the teacher says something I do not understand and I ask my friend
- [ ] When my friend asks me for help
- [ ] When I do not want the teacher to understand what I am talking about
- [ ] Other: ______________________

15. Does it help you learn English better if you can use your mother tongue in English class?
   a. [ ] Yes. Why?
   b. [ ] No. Why not?

16. How does your teacher react if you speak other language(s) in the English classroom?
   a. Swedish
   b. Mother tongue
   c. Other language(s). Please specify!

17. How do you think you learn English best?
   - [ ] When I use only English in the classroom
   - [ ] When I can use other languages I know in the English classroom
   - [ ] When I travel to countries where they speak English
   - [ ] When I read English books
   - [ ] When I watch English films
   - [ ] Other: ______________________
Appendix C: Students’ mother tongues from the questionnaire results

1. Bulgarian
2. Chinese
3. Dari
4. Farsi
5. Luganda
6. Mongolese
7. Persian
8. Polish
9. Russian
10. Spanish
11. Tagalog
12. Tigrigna
13. Tamil
14. Turkish
15. Vietnamese
## Appendix D: Observation Schedule

### Observation sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who code-switches?</th>
<th>From what lg?</th>
<th>To what lg?</th>
<th>What reaction is observed – by whom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$T1$ (= teacher)</td>
<td><em>Swedish</em></td>
<td><em>English</em></td>
<td>$S1 - S2$ start talking in their $L1$; $S3$ raises hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S4$</td>
<td><em>(T1: English)</em></td>
<td><em>Swedish</em></td>
<td>$T1$ says Ask in $En$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(T1: English)*

This would mean that teacher 1 is speaking English but student 4 says something in Swedish.