# MACRO AND MICRO FUNCTIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING IN EFL CLASSROOMS IN THAILAND

**Sunattha Krudthong ***, **Kridsada Krudthong ****

*Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand,*
** *Graduate School, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand*
*E-Mail: *sunattha.kr@ssru.ac.th, ** kidsadar.kr @ssru.ac.th*

## ABSTRACT

The concept of code-switching has been used nationwide in Thailand's EFL classrooms of tertiary education from English to Thai and vice versa for multiple reasons and motivations; yet, there is a great controversy of its advantages and disadvantages for non-internationalized modules where the students' limited English proficiency has been an issue. Its functions, therefore, have been specifically focused for effective use. The study is driven by the objective of investigating the macro and micro functions of code-switching in EFL classrooms in four Thailand's Rajabhat universities. To reach its aim, the quantitative approach was used to collect data from 8 EFL teachers in different English language- related faculties. The methods of classroom observation, speech recording and questionnaire survey were utilized to audio-record the instructions to inspect the code-switching behaviors and the underpinning reasons in the classrooms. Data was transcribed, labelled and categorized according to the Canagarajah (1995)'s framework of macro and micro functions of classroom codeswitching. The result indicated that code-switching has been employed for both macro and micro functions at different levels to assist successful language learning. Besides, this study exposed several factors affecting the practices; main classroom language use, classroom behaviors, teachers' backgrounds, students' dialects and the lesson difficulty. The understanding of code-switching behavior in EFL classrooms in Thai Rajabhat universities as well as the awareness of its functional and psychological benefits acting as a scaffold to learn L2 successfully have been found from this study leading to the future improvement plan of English language learning for the education managements at the national level.

**Keywords:** Code-switching, Macro functions, Micro functions, TEFL

## INTRODUCTION

Thailand has been entered the new digital age and joined the AEC recently. English is therefore important to life in the new stage of development for the world population. Learning English as an international language is inevitable for all learners. Teaching practice is one of the keys to promoting and supporting new learners in the new learning environment by preparing learners and enabling them to acquire life skills. In the digital age, teachers act as a facilitator to learners, in which students have practiced and learnt from their own experiences, eventually leading to a lifelong learning process (Yordchim and Anugkakul, 2014).

The educational sector in Thailand has actively responded to the collaboration and has been planning implementation for the changes as it is believed to enhance the economic growth of the country. Therefore, English has been positioned as a core subject for all levels of the Thai education system (Ministry of Education, 2008). According to the Ministry of Education, Thailand (BEC, 2008), the English language was included as one of the most critical policies at all levels of education from kindergarten, primary, secondary and university to respond to the globalization phenomenon. The students are required to learn English as compulsory courses at the secondary and tertiary levels. Furthermore, according to the National Education Act (NEA) of 1999, tertiary education was internationalized by the use of English as a medium of instruction in courses offered by higher educational institutes.

Problems in learning English may be found at the Thai university level as it was determined that most students have achieved English learning efficiency at a low level from high school. It can be seen from the national academic average test scores (Basic O-NET) in English subjects with a total score of 100 points. Out of 414,688 Mathayomsuksa 6 (senior high school) students, 40.30% of them received low scores in the range of 10.01-20.00 (Waluyo, 2019). In 2016, the Grade 12 O-NET exam average English score was 24.98%, the lowest of the five subjects tested (Person, 2021). These outcomes are disappointing and demonstrate the weak performance of English language teaching and learning in the tertiary level. In the regional and international levels, a number of reports about the ranking of Thai students' proficiency in English have been published. Low English competency in Thailand is a great concern to the government sector and educational management (Person, 2021). So, the issue has been raised regarding which language option, the mother tongue (L1) or target language (L2), the Thai universities should opt for in order to effectively teach the English language as the issue of using L2-only as the medium of instruction in English as a foreign language classrooms is that it will hinder students from acquiring newly-input language content, but excessive use of their first language impairing students' target language exposure is a controversial issue (Kirkpatrick, 2014).

Canagarajah (1995) commented that the code-switching is used for various functions, such as giving directions, managing classroom, instructing, analysing content and asking for help. He also initiated two board types of micro-functions that dealt with classroom code-switching and macro-functions which involves how to use languages outside the classroom. The table I. below shows how each category is divided into several sub-functions (Canagarajah, 1995). In this study, the model of macro and micro functions of code switching was used as a framework to code and analyze the results into frequencies of code-switching occurrence for different functions. From Table 1.

**Table 1**
**Macro and micro of code-switching (Canagarajah, 1995)**

| Macro- function | Micro- function | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Socio-educational situations | Content Transmission | Classroom Management |
| Negotiation of students' identities | Review | Opening class |
| Co-group membership | Definition | Negotiating directions |
| | Explanation | Requesting helps |
| | Negotiating cultural relevance | Managing discipline |
| | Parallel translation | Teacher encouragements |
| | | Teacher compliments |
| | | Teacher's commands |
| | | Teacher admonitions |
| | | Mitigation |
| | | Pleading |

## OBJECTIVE

1. What are the macro and micro functions of code-switching practice in Thailand's EFL classrooms?
2. What are the factors affecting the practice in Thailand's EFL classrooms?

## METHODOLOGY

The study is designed to investigate the micro and macro functions of code switching in EFL classrooms in four Thailand's Rajabhat universities in the North, North East and South of. Besides, the factors that affect the practice will also be explored. In this study, quantitative method is used explore macro and micro code-switching functions as well as its context and characteristics, The methods of classroom observation, questionnaire survey are used to audio-record the lecture of in English classes. Next, quantitative method was applied for code-switching analysis from classroom observations and survey. The data on tape were transcribed and coded (numbered for frequency count and analysis) to meet the research objectives. The researcher has audio- recorded a 3- hour English class from each lecturer. 8 teachers were asked for their permission to record the lectures by using audio and video tape. In order to gain their general ideas of code-switching practice, questionnaire survey was used. The lecturers' identities as well as the objective of the observation were unidentified to avoid behavior modification.

## RESULTS

A. Factors affecting code-switching behavior in EFL classrooms

In this study, the code-switching behavior of teachers in several Rajabhat Universities were observed through their English as a foreign language   class teaching. The classroom context of each classroom and the universities were found here. There were four Rajabhat

universities included in this study. Each of them is located in three regions throughout Thailand. Chiang Rai RU and Chiang Mai RU are in the northern region, while Loei RU is in the northeastern region, and Surat Thani RU is in the south. Two teachers in each RU were intentionally asked to participate in the study. Totally, eight teachers were selected as research participants. From the questionnaire survey, it was found that each Rajabhat University has differences in terms of their socioeconomic status. These contexts effected teachers' behaviors in ELT classrooms. Internal factors such as teacher backgrounds, student backgrounds and course backgrounds and External factors such as university backgrounds and community backgrounds were summarized. Examples of classroom background of the Rajabhat Universities under this study are also shown below.

a. Chiang Rai Rajabhat University (CRRU)

Teacher D was rated as a MB teacher. Teacher D earned a Master of Business English degree from a Thai university. She has more than 7 years of experience in English teaching at the university level. During her class observation, she taught a course on English for Careers for non-English major students on the topic of 'Personality, Present continuous'. Her overall students' English background is quite low. She reported that during lesson deliver, she usually uses an equal mixture of English and Thai in classroom teaching and seldom uses local languages. She stated that she will introduce code-switching into her class if her students have poor English backgrounds. The major reasons for her to use code-switching were a) to translate unfamiliar words, b) explain grammar, c) manage the class, d) display sympathy and friendship, and e) assess students' understanding. After teaching, she rated the students' academic English proficiency performance level as 'well'.

b. Chiangmai Rajabhat University (CMRU)

Teacher E was rated as a MT teacher. Teacher E earned Master of English degree from a university in Thailand. She has more than seven years of experience in English teaching at the university level. During her class observation, she taught a course on English for Daily Communication for music major students on the topic of 'Describing people'. Her overall students' English background is quite low. She reported that during lesson delivery, she usually mostly uses Thai in the classroom teaching and sometimes uses local languages. She stated that she will introduce code-switching into her class even if her students have regular English backgrounds. The major reasons for her to use code-switching were a) translate unfamiliar words b) explain grammar c) manage class d) display sympathy and friendship to students e) shift topics, and g) assess their understanding. After teaching, she rated the students' academic English proficiency performance level as 'well'.

c. Loei Rajabhat University (LRU)

Teacher A was rated as an ME teacher. Teacher A earned a Doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an ESL background from a non-English-speaking country. He has more than 20 years of experience in English teaching at the university level. During his class observation, he taught a course on Writing Instruction for English education major students on the topic of 'Approaches, methods and techniques'. His overall student English background is moderate. He reported that during lesson delivery, he usually mostly uses English in

classroom teaching and seldom uses local languages. He stated that he would introduce code-switching into his class if his students have poor English backgrounds. The major reasons for him to use code-switching were (a) to explain grammar, (b) get students' attention, and, (c) assess their understanding (d) assess their understanding. After teaching, he rated the students' academic English proficiency performance level as 'well'.

d. Surat Thani Rajabhat University (SRU)

Teacher G was rated as a MB teacher. Teacher G earned Master of English Language Studies degree from a university in Australia. She has more than seven years of experience in English teaching at the university level. During her class observation, he taught a course on 'English for Secretaries and Office' for English major students on the topic of 'Office equipment'. His overall students' English background is moderate.     She reported that during lesson delivery, she usually uses an equal mix of English and Thai in classroom teaching and sometimes uses local languages (southern dialect). He stated that he will introduce code-switching into his class even if his students have regular English background. The major reasons for him to use code-switching were to (a) translate unfamiliar words and (b) assess students' understanding. After teaching, he rated the students' academic English proficiency performance level as 'well'.

As seen from above, the classroom backgrounds play important roles as the factors that affect the use of code-switching technique in the classrooms. The degree of code-switching frequency depends mainly on the teacher experiences, students' English knowledge level, students' major and lesson nature and difficulty. The percentage of English used in the classroom assigned the mode of instruction for each teacher in this study which is classified as ME (Mainly English), MB (Mainly Bilingual) and MT (Mainly Thai). ME teachers used English almost all of the time. MB and MT teachers tend to balance both Thai and English in their class. This is one of the most important factors influencing the code-switching behavior as well as its functions in the classrooms.

B. Macro and micro functions of code-switching

In order to answer the question 'What are the macro and micro functions of code-switching practice?', in this study, the researcher categorized code-switching patterns into two broad types, according to Canagarajah (1995), namely macro and micro functions which are sub-categorized as content transmission and classroom management for micro functions and co-group membership and negotiation of students' identity for macro functions. The data from the classroom recordings reinforce the observations with regard to the functional uses and deepen the data from the questionnaires. In this part, the frequency of the functions of the use of code-switching are counted from their three-hour class. Table II. displays the macro and micro functions of the practice that occur when the lecturers switch from English to Thai and from Thai to English and. The first column presents the different functions of macro and micro code-switching, and the rest are the times of occurrence in each direction, based on the various code-switching functions. From Table 2.

**Table 2**
**Macro and micro functions of classroom code-switching practice**

| MICRO-FUNCTIONS | FREQUENCY Eng-Thai | FREQUENCY Thai-Eng |
|---|---:|---:|
| - CONTENT TRANSMITTION | 1087 | 962 |
| - CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT | 72 | 42 |
| MACRO-FUNCTIONS | FREQUENCY Eng-Thai | FREQUENCY Thai-Eng |
| - CO-GROUP MEMBERSHIP | 16 | 18 |
| TOTAL | 1175 | 1022 |

From the transcribing, it was found that the most frequent code-switching functions from English to Thai that all lecturers used as a teaching tool are (1) content transmission (1087 times), (2) classroom management (72 times), and (3) co-group membership (16 times), Similarly, the most frequent code-switching function from Thai to English are (1) content transmission (962 times), (2) classroom management (42 times), and (3) co-group membership (18 times). The results are quite identical (both from English to Thai and Thai to English). The nature and difficulty of the subject also influence the switching in the class. In writing and speaking courses, the lecturers, who use English as the dominant language in their classrooms, need to explain the long processes, concepts and the structure of writing an essay or article and also comment extensively on the students' presentations and pair work; therefore, they predominantly use English to explain grammar, the content and ask questions to promote target language exposure in the classroom and use Thai occasionally in case they need to elicit a response from the students, ensure their comprehension and reduce a stressful classroom atmosphere.

In the practice classes, such as English for Career and English for Office and Secretaries, which involve an extensive number of technical terms and phrases, for example, business document reading and writing and job interview preparation, the lecturers frequently provide L1 equivalents to enhance students' comprehension in order to reduce stress in class. The figures of switching direction from English to Thai are higher. This can be understood that people are likely to change from the unfamiliar language (L2) to the more familiar language (L1).

**CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK**

Based on the study, a correlation between the occurrence of code-switching and several factors involved has been highlighted. Those are both internal factors and external factors. Surprisingly, the data from the questionnaires identified that the lecturers with longer year of teaching experience (senior lecturers) tend to have more English proportion used in class. It seems that they usually have more confident and feel more comfortable to speak English in their classrooms. Difficulty of the subject also plays a key role affecting code switching behavior in

the classrooms. If the difficulty increases, the more frequent the switching is. The findings in this study show that there are some general code-switching patterns happened in the classrooms. English was used with the course content while Thai was switched into while there are some personal interactions between teachers and students and when the teachers would like to introduce new concepts to the class. The lecturers tend to switch when the lesson gets more complex since they need to explain newly-input of technical terms, contents and activities as agreed by Manara (2007) in her findings of code-switching study in tertiary EFL education.

In Thailand's context, the more translation that occurred, the greater the switching frequency was. Furthermore, all the teachers tend to switch from the direction of English to Thai rather than Thai to English. This can be concluded that the speakers always switch from the target language to the more familiar language, the mother tongue. The students' background also influences the teachers' classroom behavior in that most teachers often use more or less code switching with poor English background students to ensure their understanding. Most teachers also stated that if the students' proficiency is low, the more frequent CS they tend to perform. This is in line with Jingxia's (2010) finding of the most significant factor influencing the teachers' switching to Chinese. The Nature of course and topic taught is also a significant contributor. The findings of this study also clearly indicate that the two classes of functional course (Writing 2 and Writing Instruction) are taught mostly in English while other ESP lessons as well as English for Communication are taught in mixed Thai and English. This can be assumed that the teachers use more English to teach English language skills which require a great number of drills and repetitions in class so, their students can understand and practice how to write an English essay and teach English writing effectively through students' presentation activity and the rest of the teachers use mixed language to explain new content and technical terms when they teach applied English lesson. However, the results contradict the claims of Bhatti (2018) that most of the teachers code-switched from English to Urdu in the functional course of speaking skill. This means that both internal factors and external factors such as the profile of teachers, students and courses greatly influence code switching behavior in the classroom.

The study aimed to explore the macro and micro functions of code switching practice in EFL classrooms in four Thailand's Rajabhat universities as well the factors behind the practice. The results can enhance multi-level development of Thai education system; at classroom level for lecturers' proper training of code-switching as an effective tool for EFL teaching, at education management level for setting policies in case of bilingual and multilingual classes are needed to train the students communication skills ready for 21st century and at national level where the reforms are needed to be developed to meet the needs of international community such as ASEAN, AEC and many more.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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