The Dynamics of Code-Switching in Social Interactions Among Exchange Students at a Homestay

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Abstract
This study investigates the functions and interactional dynamics of code-switching in an informal dinner conversation among exchange students and the host family members during the students' long-term homestay. Data were collected through audio-recorded interactions among six English learners representing four first languages and their host family members. Informed by conversation analysis, the study explores how participants strategically alternate between languages during naturally occurring interactions. Findings suggest that code-switching serves multiple functions beyond filling in lexical gaps, including repair initiation, meaning negotiation, social alignment, and emotional expression. Rather than signaling deficiency, code-switching emerges as a strategic resource that supports participants, learning opportunities, and intercultural connections in multilingual settings. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions about the pedagogical role of multilingual practices outside of class in ESL environments.

Learning English as a second language (ESL) does not stop at the classroom door and can take place in an immersive environment in the real world, where interactions with the target language (TL) occur daily, shaping learners' social and linguistic development. In ESL classrooms, English is the mandatory communication code; this is not always the case outside the classroom. Beyond school walls, friendships are mostly made between classmates who typically are speakers of the same first language (L1), leading to flexible language use depending on the situation. This paper examines the dynamics of code-switching that occur in one such real-world setting, a homestay with international exchange students.

While some experts or teachers perceive code-switching as a negative practice, associating it with laziness or insufficient proficiency (Olmo-Castillo, 2014), recent research suggests that code-switching fulfills important functions. Analyzing code-switching among language learners outside of the classroom is therefore essential for a deeper understanding of second language acquisition. It reveals how learners negotiate meaning, manage identities, and develop fluency in authentic, low-pressure environments where language use is more natural and dynamic.

Code Switching

Code-switching refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a conversation. This natural linguistic phenomenon is commonly observed in bilingual or multilingual interactions (Cheng & Butler, 1989; Meyerhoff, 2018). As Wei and Wu (2009) emphasize, code-switching is "the most distinctive behaviour of the bilingual speaker; there is no better behavioural indicator to show that a speaker is bilingual than when s/he is using two languages simultaneously in social interaction" (p. 193).

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This phenomenon typically occurs when a main language, the host or matrix (often the speaker's first or dominant language), coexists with one or more languages, the guest or embedded language (usually learned later and spoken with less fluency) (Sridhar 1996; Meyerhoff, 2018). It can take two forms: intra-sentential, when the switch occurs within a single sentence (also called code-mixing), and inter-sentential, when the switch takes place between two sentences (Appel & Muysken, 1990; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

According to Gumperz (1964), code-switching serves both situational and metaphorical functions. It is situational when it orients to the settings, participants, or topics, and metaphorical when the speaker intends to convey solidarity, distance, identity, or perspective. When code-switching for these functions, following Meyers-Scotton's (1990) Markedness Model, speakers make either unmarked choices (choosing to use the expected code to express and maintain an acceptance of the social norm) or marked choices (choosing to use a less expected code to renegotiate or challenge the social norm). According to Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1993), bilingual and multilingual speakers choose which code to use based on the social role associated with each language, to negotiate or reinforce interactional norms. The unmarked choice refers to the usage of the expected or socially accepted code for a given situation and signals an alignment with the group norm. In the context of this study, English represents the unmarked code, especially in interactions involving speakers from different L1 backgrounds. In contrast, a marked choice refers to a deliberate deviation from the expected code.

Building on these concepts, this study attempts to examine how code-switching occurs in authentic interactions in an ESL environment. More specifically, it explores how multilingual speakers draw on their linguistic repertoires during informal and non-academic social encounters, and how these practices function in shaping interpersonal dynamics and language learning experiences. This study will use naturally occurring conversations (Auer, 1998).

Research Questions

This paper aims to examine French-English code-switching by French international students in a long-term homestay in the US. Specifically, I address the following questions:

- How do international exchange students and hosts code-switch during informal conversations?
- What functions does code-switching serve in this environment?

Methodology

This study analyzes one dinner conversation involving six non-native speakers of English—five attending an English school in Honolulu and myself, attending a graduate teacher-training program—during an informal meal with the host family members. The students come from France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and Japan, each with varying levels of English proficiency. For this paper, I focus on the conversations among the three French L1 speakers: Marie (pseudonym), a French woman at level C1 of English, Charlotte (pseudonym), a Belgian woman at level B2 of English, and me, Anaïs, a French woman at advanced English level. During the recording, the other participants occasionally joined the conversation, especially Lea (pseudonym), a German woman at level C1 of English. The host family, a Filipino-American couple, Roxie and Paul (pseudonyms), who have lived in Hawai'i for over 40 years, use English as their primary language due to their different native languages (Tagalog and Ilocano). I participated as both a participant and an observer. At the time of the data collection, I was already interested in the process of code-switching in a multicultural environment, but I did not have specific research questions in mind.

To obtain data, I recorded three dinner conversations, and selected, for this paper, the one with the most representative dinner talk. The data collection selected for this paper took place on Sunday, March 16, 2025, and lasted for approximately one hour. Participants were informed of the recording and the general objective of the study in advance. However, the participants' awareness of active audio recording might have affected the naturalness of the data to some extent. To control this point, I first asked the participants to take part in the study without specifying a date, only the context. Then, I made three different recordings, without informing them directly at the beginning. Each participant consented to the recording and its use for research purposes.

For ease of reference, in this analysis, informed by conversation analysis, the transcripts highlight French code-switching occurrences in bold type and code-switching into other languages in bold italics. Translations into English are provided in italics underneath the non-English words.

Findings

Structural Types of Code-Switching

In response to the first research question regarding how code-switching occurs, this section categorizes the structural types observed in the data: inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching.

As mentioned above, inter-sentential switches occurred when the speaker completed an utterance with one code and then began the next in another code. This structure was often used to seek clarification, express emotion, or mark a topic shift. For example, this is observed three times in Excerpt 1.1 (lines 1, 7, and 9), where Charlotte code-switches back and forth between French and English when she starts a new clause or sentence.

Intra-sentential switches were also observed, particularly when speakers inserted brief words or phrases from their L1 within an English sentence. This type of code-switching was primarily used to express affect (e.g. *oula* 'wow' in line 9 of Excerpt 1.5, *nan* 'no' in line 3 of Excerpt 2.2).

The findings thus show that international students use different code-switching structures depending on interactional contexts and communicative needs.

The interactional purposes of these structural code-switching types—such as learning, emotion, or clarification—will be examined in greater detail in the following excerpts.

Interactional Functions of Code-Switching

Code-Switching for Language Assistance

Throughout the data, more than half of the occurrences of code-switching happen as part of language assistance. Language assistance refers to any help that one speaker can bring to another to support communication. This helps include vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or understanding. However, different types of language assistance exist, and they do not serve the same purpose.

Requesting Target Language Forms. The most common form of code-switching for language assistance in the data is explicit requests for English expressions. This code-switching usually initiated a brief language lesson in which one participant took on the role of the teacher and the other the student. There are two types of language requests in my data: stand-alone requests in which the conversation focuses entirely on the language form in question (Excerpts 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3), and self-initiated other repairs in which the speaker solicits an English expression from a recipient in order to continue her utterance (Excerpt 1.4).

Excerpt 1.1 is the very beginning of the recording. In line 1, Charlotte asks Anaïs in French how to say a specific grammatical structure in English.

Excerpt 1.1

(C: Charlotte; A: Anaïs)

1 C: **Comment on dit "j'aurais pas dû" déjà?**
How do you say "I shouldn't have" again?
2 A: I wouldn't... I wouldn't have to …
3 C: I wouldn't have to eat. Wouldn't... wouldn't…
4 A: I wouldn't have eaten or…
5 C: I wouldn't have…
6 A: I wouldn't have eaten.
7 C: **J'essaye de mémoriser comme je peux.**
I am trying to memorize as much as I can.
8 C: You think... you think it's possible if we talk with Michael
9 like "oh Michael, Friday we're going to Big Island
10 can you put the attendance" it will be...

In line 1, Charlotte explicitly requests language help from Anaïs for a specific English structure, using French, their L1, for the entire utterance, not just the structure in question, which makes this utterance an instance of code-switching. Anaïs provides the answer in English in line 2 and Charlotte uptakes it by repeating it (line 3). However, Anaïs self-corrects in line 4, and again, Charlotte uptakes it by repeating, although partially (line 5). This partial repetition may prompt Anaïs to re-provide the model sentence (line 6). In short, Charlotte code-switches to her L1 to initiate a mini lesson in English. Charlotte closes the lesson by mentioning her learning strategy, switching back to French (line 7), then returns to storytelling. It appears that the code-switching serves to mark the boundary of the mini language lesson.

Similarly, in Excerpt 1.2, Charlotte initiates another mini language lesson in her L1 (line 1), once again addressing Anaïs for assistance.

Excerpt 1.2

(C: Charlotte; A: Anaïs):

1 C: **Comment on dit "je colle"?**
How do you say "I stick"?
2 A: …
3 C: **Tu sais pas?**
You don't know?
4 A: You glued the chair?
((Laughs))
5 A: Stick, sticky!
6 C: Stick, sticky! Sticky on the chair.

Due to the multiple possible meanings of the phrase in question, Anaïs does not respond immediately, prompting Charlotte to question this silence in French and assume a possible gap in Anaïs' knowledge (line 3). Anaïs then proposes a tentative translation in the L2 (line 4). When the group's laugher confirms the intended context (the chair is sticky), Anaïs self-corrects (line 5), offering a contextually accurate translation. Charlotte repeats it and uses it in a sentence to signal the conclusion of this brief language-learning sequence in English.

Another form of a language learning episode is initiated by code-switching in Excerpt 1.3, where instead of requesting an English expression, Charlotte seeks Anaïs's confirmation in French after she has produced an English word.

Excerpt 1.3
(C: Charlotte; A: Anaïs):

1 C: Anaïs... Unfortunately, **c'est malheureusement?**
it's unfortunately?
2 A: **Ouai.**
Yes.
3 C: Okay.
4 C: Unfortunately.

By choosing French to ask for English equivalents, both for the sole purpose of language learning and to continue a turn at talk, Charlotte addresses specifically the two other French speakers, and especially Anaïs, to help her with her word search. This choice might be faster and more comfortable for her since she does not have to explain and describe in English what she wants to say. This code choice may be a way for Charlotte to interact easily with people without being limited by her vocabulary.

Whereas in Excerpts 1.1-1.3, Charlotte used code-switching to initiate a stand-alone language learning episode to target a specific phrase, in Excerpt 1.4, she used code-switching to initiate language learning in the service of the ongoing conversation.

Excerpt 1.4
(C: Charlotte; L: Lea; P: Paul; R: Roxie; A: Anaïs):

1 P: I assembled upstairs, here. I make it then bring upstairs to assemble it.
2 P: No?
3 R: And my job is to paint it, I have to paint.
4 C: Oh!
5 L: Oh!
6 C: So, it's a... **Comment on dit un travail d'équipe?**
How do you say team work?
7 L: Hand team.
8 A: Teamwork.
9 C: Teamwork.
10 A: And our job it's to say "Good job Paul!"?
11 L: Yeahhh!
12 C: Good job Paul!
13 P: Good job Paul!
14 L: It looks good!
15 L: I like it.

Charlotte begins in English in line 6 but abandons her in-progress sentence and shifts to French to request the language expression to complete it. This instance represents a repair initiation, though it occurs in a different context than before: Charlotte is not initiating a new topic but rather engaging in an ongoing conversation and momentarily pausing to request a lexical item to finish her utterance. By code-switching to French, she directs her request to Anaïs once more. However, Lea, recognizing Charlotte's need, attempts to assist by offering a possible translation in English (line 7). Since Lea's response is not totally accurate, Anaïs provides the correct translation ("teamwork," line 8), which

Charlotte immediately repeats in full (line 9). This repetition demonstrates how Charlotte processes the new lexical input, orients to her role as a learner vis à vis Anaïs as the teacher, and marks the closure of the mini language lesson.

Other-Initiated Repair. Sometimes, language assistance occurs in other-initiated repair sequences involving code-switching. The students will code-switch from English to French in the initiation of an other-initiated self-repair (Excerpts 1.5) or in the solution of an other-initiated self-repair (Excerpt 1.6). As above, the fact that the question is addressed in French, and not in English, is a metaphorical code-switch that intentionally targets the possible responder.

In Excerpt 1.5, Charlotte is trying to count in English the total number of weeks in her language program in order to figure out the number of her days off from school (one day off per week), but has some trouble with the numbers.

Excerpt 1.5

(C: Charlotte; A: Anaïs):

1 A: It's short, but if it's twenty weeks,
2 you'll have twenty days that you can take off, and still be in the 80%.
3 C: Wait... So, I'm arrived here.
4 One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven
5 C: **Nan**.
no
6 C: Eleven…
7 A: Twelve...
8 C: Twelve... fourteen…
9 A: Thirteen.
10 C: Fifteen
11 A: **Oula**... Thirteen, Fourteen, **compte en français.**
Wow… *count in French.*
((Laugh))
12 C: **Jusque dix, ça va, après il y a un problème.**
Until ten, it's ok, then after that there is a problem.
13 **Mon cerveau est trop fatigué là**.
My brain is too tired now.
14 C: **Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf, dix, onze, douze,**
15 **treize, quatorze, quinze, seize, dix-sept, dix-huit, dix-neuf, vingt.**
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty.
16 A: So, you can have twenty days off.
17 C: Ok.

During this conversation, Charlotte faces challenges in establishing how many days of school she can skip without being in trouble. The first trouble source is seen in line 4. She starts counting without hesitation until she reaches the number eleven, but shows difficulty continuing. By repeating "eleven" in line 6, Charlotte initiates a form of self-initiated other-repair (a word search). Anaïs answers by giving the repair ("twelve"), keeping English as the language. After this other-repair, Charlotte uptakes the repair (line 8) and continues the counting. However, she produces a new source of trouble: skipping the number thirteen, and Anaïs provides this number in English as an other-initiated other repair (line 9). However, this time, Charlotte shows a lack of uptake of the repair and goes on with the

next number after her last turn, "fifteen" (line 10). Anaïs then switches to French with the interjection "oula" at the start of her turn (line 11). This interjection serves to pause the progressivity of Charlotte's counting, and the language switch enhances this focus shift. Anaïs then repeats her two other-initiated other-repairs in English, before switching to French, suggesting that Charlotte use French. With that, the situation changes from other-initiated other-repair to other-initiated self-repair: Charlotte now has the opportunity to repair herself after an error identified by someone else in French. However, Charlotte does not take the self-repair opportunity immediately; instead, she gives an account for the interactional trouble (lines 12 and 13). Only after this does Charlotte complies with Anaïs's suggestion and self-repairs by counting in French from the start (lines 14-15).

In Excerpt 1.6, the code-switch into French occurs during the self-repair after another participant initiates repair. Here, Charlotte asks a question to Marie (line 3) about the driver of the car Marie and other friends rented for the weekend. All the people mentioned are students from the same school that Charlotte and Lea also frequent regularly.

Excerpt 1.6

(C: Charlotte; L: Lea; M: Marie):

1 C: How many? Just four?
2 M: For four, yes.
3 C: And it was Yanns who drive?
4 M: Yanns?
5 C: Yanns? Yans?
6 M: Hansi?
7 C: **J'sais pas, le mec qui a embrassé ta pote là?**
I don't know, the guy who kissed your friend?
((Marie laughing))
8 L: Thomas! Thomas? Uh?
9 M: Thomas.

Charlotte opens the repair initiation by asking a closed question concerning the driver of the car. In line 4, the other-initiated self-repair "Yanns" indicates that Marie does not seem to recognize the name. Consequently, Charlotte attempts a self-repair by changing the pronunciation of the same name (line 5). An attempt that failed since in line 6, Marie tries another other-initiated self-repair by proposing another name. After that unsuccessful attempt, in line 7, Charlotte switches from English to French to self-repair by providing more information about the person she is mentioning. Against all expectations, it is Lea (a German speaker) who produces the expected repair. Repair is then uptaked and validated by Marie.

Code-Switching for Discourse Management

Emotions play an important role in code-switching. The switch can appear in both languages, but the L1 and the TL do not convey the same emotions as the speaker does not assign the same affective functions to the different languages (Anonymized Master's dissertation, Oxford University, 2023). Some positive emotion, such as happiness or pleasure, will be most likely expressed in the L1. On the other hand, embarrassing expressions will often be used in the TL. However, multilingual speakers may simply switch the language when they want to express surprise, sadness, frightened, or threat.

In Excerpts 2.1 and 2.2, we can observe this phenomenon through short words such as *nan* ('no'), *seulement* ('only') (see also the interjection *oula* ('wow') in Excerpt 1.5).

Excerpt 2.1

(C: Charlotte; A: Anaïs):

1 C: Because, this Friday we don't come.
2 We don't are going to the school on Friday.
3 A: You're not going, yeah.
4 C: And Friday, when... because because, yeah,
5 because my mom-my mom is going on Tuesday, so on Friday
6 I will also not going to the school on Friday. And when we...
7 A: And you told me you're staying in Honolulu for sixteen weeks in total?
8 From January to May, sixteen weeks, no maybe not.
9 C: **Nan**.
No.
10 A: Till, wait... eighteen, eighteen weeks.
11 C: Eighteen, **seulement?**
only?
12 A: Because you have three cycles.

Code-switching occurs twice in Excerpt 2.1. The first *nan* ('no') is a softened version of *non* ('no') that expresses a slight disagreement in an occurrence that signals a complete thought. The word *seulement* ('only') here expresses Charlotte's surprise at the small number. This second switch occurs within the clause. Neither of these code-switchings to French is intentional since they represent a direct reaction to the evolution of the settings.

Excerpt 2.2

(C: Charlotte; A: Anaïs):

1 C: I already took one Friday, the Friday that come,
2 another Friday and... one, two, three, four, five.
3 So just eight days... in total.
4 A: You already took?
5 C: **Nan!** I am going to take seven days. Because, I already took one day.
No!
6 So, now seven days.

Once again, in that Excerpt 2.2, Charlotte indicates a slight disagreement through the interjection *nan* ('no'). This interjection comes in French, before naturally switching back to English when clarifying the situation.

Code-switching to Shift Participation Frameworks

Earlier, we mentioned that code-switching concerns the shift from the unmarked, or common code, to a marked code. Choosing a marked code can be a voluntary act from the speaker to target a specific person or group of people who share the same language and differentiate against other speakers, or it can be the consequence of a change in the settings of the conversation, for example the modification of group composition as shown in Excerpt 3.1.

This excerpt follows a long conversation where Charlotte and Lea asked Anaïs many questions about the planning of a trip on the Island of Hawai'i (Big Island). Having already visited the island, Anaïs provided advice concerning the activities to do.

Excerpt 3.1
(C: Charlotte; L: Lea; M: Marie; A: Anaïs):

A: So, the two things that are more in the East the sunrise
and the volcano park.
But I think if you do like the sunrise on Saturday
morning you can do the volcano park for the rest
of the morning and then do something uh...
at that part you will be close from the green sand beach for example.
So, maybe doing it the same time because even else like this
Green Sand Beach is so far from everything so you can do it
almost at the same time like that you do the things that are super
far away and you can stay on the... the....
L: On the Kona side.
A: Yeah.
C: And when we went to Mauna Kea for the sunrise...
M: **Vous parlez de quoi?**
What are you talking about?
C: Big Island.

Marie, who was speaking in a parallel conversation in English with another student and Paul, enters this conversation by code-switching into French to ask about the topic (line 14). However, some code-switches reflect marked choices. By using French as a marked code, Marie targets only L1 French speakers, intentionally excluding others, even though she can ask the question in English, and non-French speakers can answer it. The code-switch thus signals a shift in her participation framework, namely, leaving the previous conversation with another student and Paul (both non-French speakers) and entering the conversation among Charlotte, Lea, and Anaïs.

In Excerpt 3.2, Charlotte and Anaïs are talking about how to use an English grammatical structure. Charlotte code-switches to French when she defends her language use and again when she gives an account for why she is confused by the structure. Charlotte's shift in codes coincides with her shift in footings: from a language learner focusing on the target language form to a person focusing on emotions and physical state.

Excerpt 3.2
(C: Charlotte; L: Lea; P: Paul; A: Anaïs):

C: Grammar at 8:20 pm. Ugh!
A: Never too late to do grammar. We love grammar!
C: Yeah, but like… I saw the last episode on Grey's Anatomy.
A: In English?
C: Of course! Because they're… it's too early to have the subtitles
in French. So it's all in English, and I was like ugh…
they speak too fast. Ugh.
L: Grey's Anatomy is very hard in English.
C: And, but I saw a lot of "I will always been…", "I'm **naninana…**" so…
blablabla
A: "I will always been"?
C: "I have always…
A: Oh, because that was not English.
C: No, "I have always been".
A "I will have always been"?
C: "Have always been".

16 A: Better.
17 C: Something like that…
18 P: "Always been".
19 C: "Always been".
20 P: "You always been"?
21 C: Oh! It's not good? I'm so tired!
22 C: But yeah, they speak so fast.
.
.
.
23 A: But, "I have always been" works.
24 C: "I have…", **nan** because "I'll", like this.
no
25 A: So, this is "I'll have always been".
26 C: So, it's good? "I'll have always been".
27 A: Yeah, this one works.
28 C: **Bah c'est ce que j'ai dit.**
This is what I said.
29 A: But, not, wait, not at first you said "I will...
30 C: **Oui, parce que mon cerveau est fatigué.**
Yes, because my brain is tired.
31 A: Because "I will have", "I will have been" could work
32 but nobody uses that.
33 C: Yeah. But "have" is...
34 A: Just "have been" is common. But "will been" no.

In lines 28 and 30, Charlotte switches to French to complain and seek sympathy even though she has the vocabulary to express the same idea in English. This marked choice may signal a shift into a more personal or affective stance. She expresses an emotional strain in a language that feels more comfortable to her. These examples of code-switching due to feelings or content association serve a communicative function. Also, learning a language in an ESL environment has an impact on the code-switching process for a bilingual or multilingual individual. Although some patterns can be highlighted, it appears that each individual will develop a unique language behavior toward emotion expression.

Code-Switching for Sharing Culture

Sharing cultures is an important aspect of learning a language abroad, especially in a local host family. In Excerpts 4.1 and 4.2, we can observe the representation of the French culture (shared with other French-speaking countries) that involves exchanging a polite formula before eating: *bon appétit*. This custom is shared with other cultures, but not necessarily with American culture. In the first example, Charlotte, a French speaker from Belgium, initiates this polite exchange, which is followed by the other participants.

Excerpt 4.1
(C: Charlotte; L: Lea; M: Marie; P: Paul; R: Roxie; A: Anaïs):
1 C: **Bon appétit!**
Enjoy your meal!
2 R: **Bon appétit!**
Enjoy your meal!
3 L, M, A: **Bon appétit!**
Enjoy your meal!

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4  P: Bon appétit!
      Enjoy your meal!
5  P: Bon appetito!
      Enjoy your meal! ((Half French, half Italian))
6  C: And… Why did you change the table?
```

All participants produce the French formula *bon appétit* without hesitation or questions, which suggests that the repetition of the phrase is not a learning experience, but serves a social function. This social function can be further observed in line 5, when Paul mixes the French beginning with an Italian ending even though he is not a speaker of these languages. This code-mixing invokes a playful and metropolitan stance, and no one corrects Paul's expression.

The metropolitan stance in this cultural sharing ritual can be further seen in Excerpt 4.2, which is a continuation of Excerpt 4.1, which involves Sachi, a Japanese student with low English proficiency and perhaps also less familiar with the French expression to start a meal.

Excerpt 4.2

```
(S: Sachi—Japanese; R: Roxie; A: Anaïs):
   1  R: Bon appétit! ((talking to Sachi))
         Enjoy your meal!
   2  A: That's French!
   3  R: Itadakimasu!
         Thanks for the food! [Japanese]
   4  S: Itadakimasu!
         Thanks for the food! [Japanese]
```

In line 1, Roxie addresses the French polite formula directly to Sachi, who has not participated in the exchange of the expression at the table. Anaïs intervenes to point out that Roxie talked to Sachi in French. In response, Roxie code-switched once more to produce the Japanese polite formula, thus recipient-designing her utterance for Sachi. The fact that Roxie uses the Japanese expression here further supports the idea that what the participants are concerned with at the moment is the social action of sharing the cultural ritual of starting a meal and not learning French. Sachi responds with the Japanese expression (line 4), participating in the ritual.

Overall, we can observe occurrences of code-switching from English to a different language by all the participants in order to learn, or teach, a word or phrase from another language than the target language. These types of interactions have a social function in the host family by connecting the participants, no matter their English proficiency.

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of the dinner interactions highlights several important elements concerning the nature and functions of code-switching among international students. The findings show that code-switching in informal ESL settings serves far more functions than simply filling linguistic gaps. A significant part of the code-switches were motivated by different forms of language assistance, including self or other-repair initiation, metalinguistic reflection, and collaborative problem-solving. These strategies provided both cognitive support (access to unfamiliar vocabulary or clarity), social support (allowing speakers with lower proficiency to be active participants in the interaction), or simply a communicative function (express feelings or content association). The behavior of Charlotte particularly shows that switching

from English to French is a resource to maintain her participation in the conversation and reduce the pressure of failing.

Importantly, these code-switches were generally brief and temporary. The participants quickly returned to English, which indicates a shared willingness to maintain English, the unmarked code, as the group's common code, thus avoiding excluding non-French speakers. By choosing to align with the default norm, the participants aim to preserve the group cohesion, mutual intelligibility, and social inclusion in the ESL environment. For example, during the various conversations between Charlotte and Anaïs, who share French as their L1, both speakers maintained English, reinforcing the norm even when switching to French would have been more natural and easier. This reflects a conscious effort to sustain the unmarked code despite shared linguistic background.

Although this informal setting, a dinner conversation, may not be typical for metalanguage discussion, a few utterances emerged (as shown Excerpt 3.2), demonstrating that learners actively engage in academic reflection outside the classroom. The different forms of repair initiation create opportunities for meaning negotiations, and consequently, support both learning and social cohesion that align with Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1983).

However, language assistance was not the only motivation for code-switching. Participants also used French for emotional expression, social alignment, and cultural sharing. As the immersion program exposes the learners to linguistic, cultural, and individual challenges, their L1 can become a resource for managing their identity, expressing their affect, and strengthening interpersonal links. While English was maintained as the unmarked, default code, French was used strategically to address communicative needs, express nuance, or momentarily connect speakers of the same L1. Rather than an obstacle to fluency, the data suggest that code-switching functions as a resource—a tool for negotiation, collaboration, identity marker, and intercultural exchange in multilingual interactions.

These examples of code-switches between the unmarked and marked codes align with Gumperz's (1982) distinction between situational and metaphorical code-switching. Situational code-switching occurs when external conditions change, such as a group composition or clarity needs, prompting a code change. For instance, the choice to remain in English during the exchanges between Charlotte and Anaïs despite the switches to French reflects situational awareness and a desire for inclusivity. By contrast, metaphorical code-switching, as seen in Marie's and Charlotte's examples, respectively Excerpts 3.1 and 3.2, serves affective or identity-related purposes and is not required by the interactional setting. In this way, the participants' language use reflects the dynamic negotiation of both the social norm and personal positioning in a multilingual environment. Throughout the recording, Charlotte's behavior corresponds with Gumperz's findings (1982). It clearly illustrates both situational and metaphorical code-switching. At times, she involuntarily switched when a change in the situation naturally invited her to use one language more than another; at others, she switched deliberately and metaphorically to target specific speakers (French speakers, especially Anaïs) or convey distinct meanings. Her access to L1 peers with higher proficiency allowed her to use French as a resource to communicate without significantly interrupting the flow of the interaction.

This study has some limitations. First of all, this conversation-analysis informed analysis focuses on only one hour of conversation; the same situation during another dinner could emphasize different behavior, and so, different occurrences in code-switching in quantity and quality. Another limitation of this study is the observer's paradox with my presence as both a participant and an observer. My behavior, as well as that of the participants, might have been impacted and modified by this factor.

Overall, despite these shortcomings, this study highlights the complexity and usefulness of code-switching in multilingual environments. Rather than identifying it as a lack of proficiency or the

expression of laziness, language teachers and host families should recognize it as a natural and strategic tool that supports language learning, cultural exchange, and social connections, especially for non-fluent English speakers. Informal conversations, like those shared at the dinner table, serve as extensions of the classroom. They offer low-pressure opportunities for authentic language use and valuable feedback (positive and corrective). While maintaining the target language is essential during instructional time, allowing code-switching can prevent communicative collapse and, therefore, support learners who might otherwise not interact at all. As this analysis demonstrates, even imperfect or mixed English contributes meaningfully to cognitive, social, and emotional development. Far from a sign of failure, code-switching is a sign of language flexibility and social awareness resources that language instructors can leverage to enhance learning.

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