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Teacher Code Switching: Functions and Impact on Students' Performance and Attitudes

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Code switching (CS) or translanguaging in the ESL classroom has been viewed from different perspectives. Some scholars like Chi (2000), Brown (2001), Macaro (2001), Tang (2002), Lie and Martin (2009) have shown that the use of the L1 in the language classroom may lead to more dependence on L1 and that it may hinder progress in mastering the target language (TL). In contrast, researchers like Larsen and Freeman (2011), Makuloluwa (2013), Magid & Mugaddam (2013) and Ratwatte (2014) have argued that CS may facilitate the learning process and the teaching of the TL, as teachers can explain complex ideas more effectively in learners' L1. The present study investigates the effectiveness of CS in the teaching and learning of L2 grammar, the attitudes of the students towards teachers' CS practices in a university ESL classroom. Qualitative and quantitative data was obtained from 60 first year undergraduate students and 2 teachers of the Wayamba University. Teacher talk was recorded and transcribed. The analysis of the pre and post-test marks reveals a significant relationship between teacher's CS and learners' learning of verb tenses. The student attitude questionnaires and focus group discussions further confirm that the majority of students perceive CS as an effective teaching strategy because it enables learning in different ways. Consequently, it can be concluded that although the use of the L1 has been criticized by some scholars, a balanced and judicious use of teacher CS can be a useful strategy in classroom interaction with adult learners.

Key words: Code Switching, English as a Second Language, Perspectives, Target Language, Translanguaging