Code-switching in the English classroom

What teachers do and what their students wish they did

Kodväxling i engelskundervisningen
Vad lärare gör och vad deras studenter önskar att lärarna gjorde

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Abstract

Code-switching is a phenomenon that exists in bilingual societies where people have the opportunity to use two or more languages to communicate. Being able to speak more than one language, bilinguals can code-switch and use their languages as resources to find better ways to convey meaning. Code-switching occurs in English classrooms in upper secondary school every day. Therefore, the aim for this paper was to investigate when and why teachers in upper secondary school code-switch when teaching L2 English. It has also looked into what language the students preferred in different classroom situations. Five teachers were interviewed and 96 students taking English 5 and 6 responded to a questionnaire. The results showed that the teachers generally tried to code-switch as little as possible but that they did code-switch in some of those situations where the students preferred either a combination of Swedish and English or only Swedish. Two of these situations were grammar instructions, where a majority of the students preferred a combination of English and Swedish, and one-to-one situations, where a majority of the students preferred Swedish. A clear majority of the students (87%) wanted their teacher to make them speak more English.

Keywords: code-switching, second language learning, upper secondary school, grammar teaching, students’ preferences

Sammanfattning på svenska

Kodväxling är ett fenomen som existerar i tvåspråkiga samhällen där människor har möjlighet att använda två eller fler språk för att kommunicera. Att kunna tala mer än ett språk ger tvåspråkiga personer möjligheten att kodväxla och använda sina språk som resurser för att bättre förmedla sig. Kodväxling förekommer i engelskundervisningen i gymnasiet varje dag. Därför var syftet med denna uppsats att undersöka när och varför engelsklärare i gymnasiet kodväxlar i sin undervisning. Den har också undersökt vilket språk eleverna föredrar i olika klassrumssituationer. Fem lärare intervjuades och 96 elever som läser engelska 5 och 6 deltog i en enkätundersökning. Resultaten visade att lärarna generellt kodväxlar så lite som möjligt men kodväxlar i många av de situationer där studenterna föredrog antingen en kombination av svenska och engelska alternativt enbart svenska. Två av dessa situationer var grammatikinstruktionen, där en majoritet av studenterna föredrog en kombination av engelska och svenska samt när lärare talade med eleverna enskilt, där en majoritet av eleverna föredrog svenska. En klar majoritet av studenterna (87%) ville att deras lärare skulle få dem att prata mer engelska.

Nyckelord: kodväxling, andraspråksinlärning, gymnasiet, grammatikundervisning, studenters preferenser
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1. Introduction

Since 1945 English has been the first foreign language in Swedish schools (Johansson 2006) and today Swedish children start to study English already in first grade. When they reach upper secondary school the teaching of English “should as far as possible be conducted in English” (The Swedish national agency for education 2011). There have been different reactions to this new guideline and whether students benefit from a teacher who only speaks English or if code-switching into Swedish is a useful resource in the learning of a second language. Code-switching is a phenomenon that exists in bilingual societies where people have the opportunity to use two or more languages to communicate. Being able to speak more than one language, bilinguals can code-switch and use their languages as resources to find better ways to convey meaning. In 2012, I attended a meeting for English teachers in a Swedish upper secondary school with both native speakers of English and native speakers of Swedish, the new syllabus was being discussed, and more specifically the instruction that “teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English” (The Swedish national agency for education 2011). Two sides were quickly formed: the teachers who were native speakers of English who said that they never use Swedish and that this works well for their students on the one hand, and the teachers who were native speakers of Swedish who said that it is important and necessary to use Swedish in different situations, for example to make sure that the students have understood on the other. The teachers who were native speakers of Swedish code-switched elements of their teaching since they found it to be helpful when teaching students English. However, when and why a teacher would code-switch could vary and that is what this paper will look into.

1.1 Aims

The present paper will investigate when and why teachers code-switch and if their thoughts on code-switching agree with what students prefer. My research questions are:

- When and why do teachers code-switch in the English classroom?
- What language do students prefer in the English classroom?
- Is there consensus between the teachers’ code-switching patterns and the students’ preferences?
2. Background

The current syllabus for English was introduced in 2011, replacing the old one from 2000. The 2011 syllabus has a stronger connection to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which will make Swedish students’ grades comparable to European standards. In line with the CEFR, the new syllabus emphasizes that “teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English” (The Swedish national agency for education 2011) in order to increase the input of the target language and thereby stimulate the students to speak English themselves in natural and varied situations. The Swedish national agency for education also points to the students with a different first language (L1) than Swedish and the fact that these students do not benefit from a contrastive teaching method where the teacher alternates between Swedish and English. However, the phrase ‘as far as possible’ does not exclude Swedish entirely, since The Swedish national agency for education in the commentary material gives room for the teachers to, based on their expertise and experience, include Swedish in their teaching when and if they find it beneficial for the students (The Swedish national agency for education 2011). In the following section an overview of code-switching as a phenomenon and code-switching in the language classroom will be described.

2.1 What is code-switching?

Code-switching is a phenomenon that exists in bilingual societies where people have the opportunity to use two or more languages to communicate. Being able to speak more than one language, bilinguals can code-switch and use their languages as resources to find better ways to convey meaning. Code-switching can also be defined as: “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent ” (Jamshidi & Navehebraim 2013). There are several functions of code-switching such as filling linguistic gaps, expressing ethnic identity and achieving particular discursive aims (Bullock & Toribio 2009:2). These different functions can be divided into two dominant approaches; the sociolinguistic approach and the grammatical approach (Auer 1998:3; Hamers & Blanc 2000:260). The sociolinguistic approach to code-switching focuses on variables such as: “the topic of conversation, the participants, the setting, the affective aspect of the message” (Hamers & Blanc 2000:266). This type of code-switching can be used as a marker of ethnic group membership and identity and has been found to pass down to younger generations even though they might be taught only English as they grow up (Hamers & Blanc 2000:266, 267). Hence, factors regarding differences in linguistic behaviors between e.g. individual conversations, social classes and ethnic groups are relevant to our understanding of code-switching (Gardner-Chloros 2009:97). Code-switching and gender is also a part of the
sociolinguistic approach. A study in Gambia in 1995, for example, found that men code-switched twice as much as women. However, the results in this study indicated that these differences were also connected to what community the men and women belonged to, except for their gender (Gardner-Chloros 2009:109).

The grammatical approach can be divided into three subcategories (Hamers & Blanc 2000:259, 260): extra-sentential code-switching, where a common feature is to add a tag question like in “Du kommer väl på torsdag, right?” (You will be coming on Thursday, right?); intersentential code-switching i.e., where the switch occurs at clause/sentence boundaries like in “I’ll start a sentence in English y termino en español” (I’ll start a sentence in English and finish it in Spanish); and intrasentential code-switching, which occurs within clauses or within words e.g. by adding a Swedish plural ending to a word that has been code-switched: “Hur mår kidsen?” (How are the kids?). There seems to be a thin line between the last two types of code-switching. For instance, the sentence used above to exemplify intersentential code-switching in Hamers & Blanc (2000:259) is used to illustrate intrasentential codeswitching in Zirker (2007:11).

There is also a distinction made between code-switching as an asset for bilinguals with a high competence in both languages and code-switching as a reparation tool for insufficiency in the L2, so called restricted code-switching (Hamers & Blanc 2000:267). Song & Andrews (2009:59) describe restricted code-switching as “an attempt to keep the conversation flowing without having to pause or abandon the message”.

2.2 Code-switching in teaching and learning

When learning a language it is important not only to learn isolated areas of a second language (L2) but to be able to use those areas simultaneously when talking, reading, writing or listening in your second language (Cook 2001:407). In the commentary material to the English syllabus for upper secondary school (The Swedish national agency for education 2011) it is said that English should be used to increase the input and output of the target language and that the L1 should be avoided. However, when teachers’ code-switching is planned ahead it can contribute to a more efficient understanding of a specific topic or be a part of the (L2) learning (Cook 2001:413). One example could be when explaining a grammatical function in the L1, Swedish, and then applying that explanation to L2 English writing. While focus on input and output in the target language is an important aspect of language acquisition, it has been pointed out that the use of code-switching in the language classroom does not prevent students from acquiring their L2 (Cook 2001:404). According to Cook (2001:405) it is important not to prevent students from using their first language but to
encourage them to use the second language in as many situations as possible and to find out when and why code-switching should occur.

The results from a study from the 1980s suggested that both teachers and students code-switched to a larger extent in informal situations whereas the target language dominated in formal ones (Lin 2013:197-202). Later studies show that code-switching is used to create close relationships between students and their teachers (Lin 2013:202; Jingxia 2010:21) and that students find classroom interaction more natural and easy when code-switching is allowed (Cook 2001:413). This comfortable atmosphere that code-switching can contribute to is important in the teacher-student relationship since it gives them an opportunity to communicate in a more informal way where the risk of misunderstandings due to L2 shortcomings can be avoided (Simon 2001:317). In formal situations code-switching can be used to make the teaching more effective. When a teacher explains what is said in the curriculum or another academic text it can be useful to translate or explain some concepts further in the students’ L1 (Lin 2013:202; Jingxia 2010:21). Code switching also leads to more efficient teaching for the simple reason that the students understand faster and more thoroughly. Hence, teachers’ code switching is an important tool for explanations and instructions (Cook 2001:418).

Grammar and vocabulary learning can also be facilitated by code-switching (Cook 2001:414; Jingxia 2010:21; Kumar & Arenda 2012:61; Lin 2013:205). Kumar and Arenda (2012) found that grammar instruction was the area that contained the largest amount of code-switching. When code-switching, L2 teachers were able to draw upon students’ L1 grammar knowledge, which agreed with what Cook found in her study from 2001. It showed that explicit grammar teaching could be conveyed more thoroughly in the students’ L1; even students with a high L2 proficiency level absorbed information about grammar better if it was in their L1 (Cook 2001:414).

Another area where the effects of code-switching have been studied is that of vocabulary learning where Lin’s (2013:205-207) findings indicate that code-switching seems to increase the amount of cognitive processing made by students. Lin suggests that a larger cognitive effort is required to process words when there is both an explanation in the students’ L2 and a translation into the students’ L1, which could mean that the students will learn new vocabulary more thoroughly. Whereas Lin’s study did not show that code-switching was more effective when learning new vocabulary, it did show that code-switching did not affect vocabulary learning in a negative way.
The main argument for avoiding code-switching is that the students miss out on input in the target language and are deprived of genuine L2 interaction (Cook 2008:181). In groups with more than one L1, the teachers should ideally be able to relate to all L1s. Since this is not possible, code-switching should be avoided and the target language be used consistently instead (Cook 2008:181). One method that avoids the L1 is the teaching method Communicative Language Teaching, which since the 1970s has been one of the most adopted teaching methods in the world (Song & Andrews 2009:35). It focuses on target language communication rather than teaching the linguistic systems of a language. Through participation in communicative activities the L2 learners are using the target language and the purpose is to use the target language in order to acquire it. Consequently, code-switching should be kept to a minimum in the L2 classroom (Song & Andrews 2009:36). This view is also echoed in the Swedish 2011 syllabus.

In a study from 2009, Song and Andrews found that students tended to accept their teachers’ code-switching regardless of what and how often they code-switched. The three teachers that participated in Song and Andrew’s study varied their code-switching regarding amount, purpose and topic. The key to the students’ acceptance seemed to be confidence in their teacher. The students thought that the medium of teaching chosen by their teacher fulfilled a purpose and served to help them to meet different needs (Song & Andrews 2009:204).

To sum up, there seems to be an agreement on the effects of code-switching in research from the 1990s until 2013. Both the sociolinguistic approach focusing on e.g. the topic of conversation, the participants and the setting, and the grammatical approach focusing on grammatical functions of code-switching e.g. intersentential and intrasentential code-switching can be applied in second language learning to facilitate the learning outcome. However, the strongest argument against code-switching is that the students miss out on target language input.

3. Methods

In order to study the extent to which teachers code-switch in the classroom and students’ attitudes towards it, both teachers and students have been consulted. The following section will describe how the data used in this study was collected and who the participants were and how they were selected.
3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were both teachers and students, all from a medium-sized town in Sweden. Five teachers were interviewed, four female teachers and one male and their mother tongue was Swedish. They taught English 5 and 6 at two different upper secondary schools. All of them were experienced teachers, four of them having taught for more than 20 years and the fifth for 13 years. 96 students filled out a questionnaire, 24 who took English 5 and 72 who took English 6. Out of the 96 students 42 were male and 54 were female. Among these students, 11 had a different mother tongue than Swedish.

3.2 Interviews

The teachers were informed that the purpose of the present study was to research code-switching in the English classroom. In order to find teachers who were willing to participate in the interviews I visited the schools and asked them in person. Three of the five teachers consented rather unwillingly, which might have affected their answers. However, when I conducted the interviews none of the teachers gave the impression that they did not want to participate. The questions were prepared in both Swedish and English but all five teachers chose to speak Swedish during the interviews. The teachers were asked about their own attitudes to and use of code-switching in the L2 English classroom. The interviews were semi-structured, that is they consisted of questions prepared in advance but allowed follow-up questions to be asked (see Appendix A). There were 13 questions and each interview took approximately 30 minutes. After the interviews, I asked the teachers if they would let me distribute a web-based questionnaire in their classes. This question was asked after the interview so as not to influence their answers to the interview questions. In the results and analysis section, the teachers have been given fictional names in order to make it easier for the reader to keep them apart and follow their individual views. The comments from the teachers found in the result sections are my translations. The exact quotes in Swedish can be found in the footnotes.

3.3 Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaires was to enable a comparison of teachers’ code-switching behavior and students’ code-switching preferences. The questionnaire investigated students’ attitudes towards code-switching in different classroom situations and also included some background information (see Appendix 2). The questions were of the multiple-choice type allowing the students to choose only one answer per question. It took the students approximately three to five minutes to fill out the questionnaire, which was internet-based and filled out on the students’ computers in class. Unfortunately, all students did not answer
all questions which will be indicated in the legends as N=x where x represents the number of students who responded to that specific question. Further, it is important to consider the fact that the students have accounted for what they believe to prefer in certain classroom situations. However, this might not be what they actually prefer since it is always problematic to self-evaluate.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The material that was used in the present study was collected based on the ethical considerations presented in Wray and Bloomer (2006:173-176). All participants were informed about the study and its general purpose and it was stressed that their participation was voluntary. The information was conveyed in Swedish and English to make sure that all participants fully understood. The teachers’ participation was confidential, in order to enable contact with them if needed (Wray & Bloomer 2006:174). The respondents to the questionnaire were guaranteed anonymity.

4. Analysis and results

This section presents the analysis and results of the interviews and questionnaires. Section 4.1 presents the teachers’ views and use of code-switching while section 4.2 presents the students’ language preferences in the English classroom.

4.1 Five teachers’ views on and use of code-switching

The main purpose of the interviews was to look into some teachers’ general views on code-switching and also to find out when they code-switched and whether they had a specific purpose in doing so. They also gave their opinion on the fact that, according to the syllabus from 2011, teaching should be conducted in English as far as possible. The teachers’ answers have been subdivided into 4.1.1 which contains their general views on code-switching, and 4.1.2 which presents when and why they code-switch.

4.1.1 The teachers’ general views on code-switching

Four out of the five teachers held the same opinion regarding code-switching when teaching English, namely that Swedish does not belong in the English classroom. However, they all gave somewhat different explanations as to why they held that view. Teachers Anders, Bella and Cala reacted with a firm No! Swedish should not exist in the English classroom! This was their immediate reaction to code-switching in the classroom. Teacher Dana explained that:
English is the target language and I normally tell the children that when they enter the classroom English is the only language allowed.¹

Cala made it clear that she only allows English in her classroom and explained that some students find it hard but that she usually explains to them that they can speak Swedish during breaks and in all other classes. She tells her students that in her classroom they have to speak English. This rule is like a law with no exceptions besides translation exercises. Erica, who was the most positive towards code-switching, did not give a direct answer as to what her general view of code-switching was but explained that:

English should of course be spoken as much as possible but the truth is that it is not my mother tongue. Neither is it the students’ mother tongue. Therefore it is my opinion that you can never be as clear in your second language as you can be in your first.²

Consequently, Anders’, Bella’s, Cala’s and Dana’s views of code-switching was that it should be avoided, while Erica’s answer was more of an explanation as to why she would code-switch. What made her differ from the rest of the teachers was that her attitude towards code-switching was much more open and she code-switched for social reasons to a much larger extent than the other teachers.

4.1.2 When and why do the teachers code-switch?

The teachers also gave their thoughts on when and why they code-switch which showed that their code-switching habits are connected to what is being taught. Their code-switching has to do with efficiency in their teaching and how to make it easier for the students to understand what they are teaching. Erica’s reasons for code-switching often seemed to originate in the fact that she never quite felt that she could be herself when she taught. She explained that her second subject was German and therefore she always communicated with the students in either her second or third language. Sometimes she code-switched in order to fully feel that she was being herself:

Since I’m a teacher of two foreign languages I find it difficult because sometimes I feel like I’m never quite myself. I try to speak English but it often feels as if I have to pressure myself not to switch too much.³

¹ ”Engelska är målspråket och normalt så talar jag om för eleverna att när de kliver över tröskeln till klassrummet så är engelska det enda tillåtna språket.” (Dana)
² ”Engelska ska naturligtvis talas så mycket som möjligt men sanningen är den att det inte är mitt modersmål. Inte heller är det elevernas modersmål. Därför anser jag att du aldrig kan vara lika tydlig i ditt andraspråk som du kan vara i ditt modersmål.” (Erica)
All teachers code-switch parts of, or all grammar teaching even though three of them initially said that Swedish does not belong in the English classroom. This could indicate that they look at Swedish as functional in some situations but that they try to avoid code-switching in general. Both Anders and Bella code-switch to a great extent when they teach grammar and Dana explains that she *always* speaks Swedish when teaching grammar. She tells her students that when they learn grammar they will only speak Swedish. Dana’s reason for code-switching when teaching grammar is that the grammar functions in English are very much alike those in Swedish and she wants to make use of all the grammar knowledge and terminology that the students hopefully possess in their mother tongue. If grammar teaching were conducted in English the students would for example have to learn a completely new set of terminology. Dana is the only teacher who is very clear that all her code-switching is well prepared and her switching to Swedish only occurs in three specific situations. When she teaches grammar, explains the content and purpose of the syllabus and also when she gives instructions to the national test since she thinks that this is the best way to make sure that all students understand. If she needs to switch to Swedish at any other point in her teaching, maybe to explain a grammatical term, even though she is not teaching grammar explicitly at that moment, she always starts with the phrase *I am going to switch to Swedish now* and then she continues the explanation in Swedish.

Bella code-switches when she teaches grammar but tries to say everything first in English and then in Swedish to make sure that everyone has understood. Erica sometimes code-switches when using grammatical terms that the students seem to struggle with; otherwise she does not have any specific topic areas where she deliberately code-switches. None of the teachers who initially said that Swedish does not belong in the English classroom realize that they are contradicting themselves as the interviews run along. It seems as if they look at code-switching in two different ways: one sort of code-switching that should be banished from the English classroom and one sort that fills an important function. Erica is the only teacher who does not share the other teachers’ code-switching habits. She has her focus on social functions and her code-switching is often done for her own sake rather than to make it clearer for the students. The Swedish national agency for education says that teachers can include Swedish in their teaching when and if they find it beneficial for the students but Erica’s switching seems to be more for her own convenience.

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3 “Eftersom jag är lärare i två främmandespråk tycker jag att det är svårt då jag ibland känner att jag inte riktigt är mig själv. Jag försöker prata engelska men ofta känns det som att jag måste pressa mig själv för att inte switcha för mycket.” (Erica)
When it comes to one-to-one situations inside and outside the classroom, all teachers except for Dana often code-switch but overall, they try to code-switch as little as possible. Dana is very firm on the fact that the three situations that she mentioned earlier, teaching grammar, explaining the syllabus and giving instructions to the national test, are the only ones in which she code-switches and that all her one-to-one conversations are in English. Cala explains that when she is outside her classroom she always speaks Swedish. Bella finds the students to be uncomfortable or slightly embarrassed if she tries to speak English with them in one-to-one situations and therefore she chooses to speak Swedish. Anders also points out a number of other situations where he might speak Swedish. Sometimes he has the same students in more than one subject and if he is talking to a student about both English and history he speaks only Swedish. If he has a weak student it could be necessary to explain something again to that student in Swedish, but then he only speaks to that student. He is also a mentor and if a student in his English class addresses him in the role of his or her mentor he allows them to speak Swedish. Erica also speaks Swedish when she talks to students one-to-one but does not give any explanation as to why.

When it came to the planning of and the purpose with their code-switching, four of the teachers pointed out that they had a clear purpose with their code-switching and only one of the teachers (Erica) pointed to her personal shortcomings in the target language proficiency when it came to code-switching. Erica says that it is never necessary to talk Swedish in her classes and it is her opinion that the students’ proficiency level is high enough to manage English-only teaching. Sometimes she is too tired and accidentally switches and she also switches when she gets angry. Furthermore, she explains that she often switches to Swedish when she talks about sensitive subjects. If there is a conflict in the classroom that needs to be sorted out, Erica lets her students switch to Swedish to avoid that they express themselves in a way that is not intended. Bella’s code-switching is never planned but when she does switch it always fills a purpose and she is strict never to replace English with Swedish:

*In some classes you almost never have to switch to Swedish but in some classes it is more important. That is, in some classes I have to take it in both English and Swedish. I never replace English with Swedish but say things first in English and then in Swedish.*

Cala is the only teacher who really emphasizes that she rarely code-switches and that she tries to code-switch as little as possible. She thinks it is important for the students to hear and speak English as much as possible. If the students do not understand she keeps on explaining until they understand. She thinks that the students can learn from this method and realize

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4 ”I vissa klasser behöver man nästan aldrig växla till svenska men i andra klasser är det mer viktigt. Jag menar, i vissa klasser måste jag ta det både på engelska och svenska. Jag ersätter aldrig engelska med svenska utan säger saker först på engelska och sen på svenska.” (Bella)
that there is always more than one way of saying something, a strategy that can be useful when they speak English themselves.

None of the five teachers had had to change much in their teaching after the new syllabus was introduced in 2011. They all agreed on it being a positive change, although their answers varied to some extent. Cala was the teacher who expressed the most positive reaction to this new guideline. Her response was: Finally! She had been stressing the use of English only in her teaching for many years and now she finally had something to refer to when the students questioned why they had to speak English all the time. Three of the teachers, Anders, Dana and Erica already code-switched as little as possible and therefore they had changed very little in response to the 2011 syllabus. Bella also appreciated the change but motivated herself a little bit differently from the others. She talked about the students with Swedish as their second or third language and the fact that it is easier for these students to go from their mother tongue directly to English than via Swedish. None of the teachers had asked the students what language they preferred in different situations.

**4.2 The students’ language preferences in the English classroom**

This section will present the results of the questionnaire. The main purpose of the questionnaires was to see what language the 96 students preferred in specific classroom situations.

As can be seen in Figure 1, a majority of the students (54%) preferred a combination of English and Swedish when learning grammar. Swedish was in fact the least preferred language alternative (13%) whilst one third of the students preferred only English. Consequently, teacher Dana’s decision only to speak Swedish when teaching grammar is only desired by about one in ten students. The other teachers code-switched parts of their grammar teaching if they found it necessary which is more in line with the majority of the students (54%) who preferred a combination of English and Swedish.
When the students were informed about a test almost half of them wanted their teacher to speak a combination of English and Swedish. Once again, Swedish was the least favored alternative chosen by only one fifth of the students. The group who wanted their teacher to speak only English represented little over one third of the students (see Figure 2).

If the students were to ask their teacher a question in Swedish, only one fifth of them would have wanted their teacher to answer them back in Swedish. Little over half of them wanted their teacher to use a combination of both English and Swedish and about one quarter of the students wanted their teacher to speak only English. Consequently, it seems as if many of the students want their teacher to use English, at least in combination with Swedish, even though they ask their question in Swedish (see Figure 3).
There were two classroom situations where a majority of the students preferred only English to be spoken; when their teacher gave general instructions and when they got their tests back. As can be seen in Figure 4, only two students wanted instructions to be in Swedish and one quarter wanted a combination of both English and Swedish. A majority (73%) of the students preferred English to be spoken. This could indicate that there is less risk for misunderstandings in these situations or that misunderstandings related to general instructions are less severe than those connected to other situations such as grammar instructions and test instructions. When the students got their results on a test, (see Figure 5), about half of the students (53%) wanted them in English. About a quarter of the students wanted their results in Swedish or in a combination of both English and Swedish.
In one-to-one situations where the students’ grades were discussed, half of the students preferred the teacher to use Swedish only (see Figure 6). This was the situation where Swedish was most popular among the students and it is interesting to note that all the teachers, except for Dana, actually claimed that they do code-switch in one-to-one situations. One quarter of the students preferred English in one-to-one situations and the remaining quarter wanted a combination of both.

In situations where the teacher explains something that the students do not understand at once, little over three quarters wanted their teacher to explain again in English but in a different way (see Figure 7). Only 10% each wanted their teacher to speak either English or Swedish. This is in line with Cala’s way of avoiding code-switching in situations where the students require further explanations and continue to explain until they understand.
Cook (2008:181) points out that code-switching is not helpful to students with a different L1 from the majority of the class and as Figure 8 shows there were actually four students who claimed that they understood less when their teacher spoke Swedish. According to Bella this is one important reason as to why she avoids code-switching as much as possible.

Figure 8. Teacher speaks Swedish in class (N=95).

Figure 9 shows that when students do not understand instructions the most common strategy (40%) to bridge the information gap is to ask a friend in Swedish. One quarter of the students would ask their teacher in English and another quarter would ask a friend in English. Interestingly, only four percent of the students would ask their teacher in Swedish. This would indicate that in the more informal situations where a student asks another student for help, they seem to code-switch to a larger extent. However, in the more formal situation of asking the teacher for help they speak English which conforms to findings of Lin (2013).
As can be seen in Figure 10, almost nine out of ten students wanted their teacher to make them speak more English when they are in English class, which seems to be in line with the teachers’ effort to code-switch as little as possible. According to Erica it is never necessary to code-switch in her class since the students’ proficiency level is high enough for them to be able to handle English-only teaching.

When the students were to declare what language(s) their teacher spoke in English class, about three quarters of them (77%) said that their teacher spoke mainly English but sometimes Swedish. About a quarter said that their teacher only speaks English (see Figure 11). Originally there were two more alternatives to this question: “Mainly Swedish but sometimes English” and “Only Swedish”. None of the 95 students chose any of these alternatives, which further indicates that the teachers had succeeded well with their intention to code-switch as little as possible.
To conclude, many of the students preferred a combination of Swedish and English in many situations, mainly those who could be seen as a little more complex than others. Grammar instructions and test instructions are examples of such situations while more general instructions were preferred in English. Their teachers try to code-switch as little as possible and their view on themselves as mainly English speaking seems to correspond to the students’ opinion. A majority of the students (88%) wanted their teacher to make them to speak more English. Even though many of them might have chosen Swedish or a combination of Swedish and English in some of the situations in the questionnaire this last result would indicate that they want to be encouraged to speak English rather than fall back on Swedish or a mixture of Swedish and English.

5. Discussion

Four out of the five teachers said initially in the interviews that they did not believe that code-switching had a place or function in the English classroom. Later on in the interviews it became clear that they not only used code-switching when teaching English but also believed it had an important function and regarded it as an important tool. All the teachers seemed to take a somewhat defensive position in the interviews and my own analysis of their behavior was that they were afraid of giving the “wrong” answer. The guidelines in The Swedish national agency for education’s syllabus are quite straightforward when it comes to code-switching, stating clearly that English should be used as far as possible. None of the teachers mentioned what the commentary material says about this specific instruction. This does not mean that none of them have read it, but what it does show is that they do not refer to it when trying to defend their code-switching. The commentary material clearly allows the teachers to code-switch if they find it is necessary and fills an important function in their teaching.
The teachers are all very experienced, four of them having taught for more than 20 years and the fifth teacher for more than 13 years. They all teach in different ways and code-switch to a varied extent but I would say that this is rather more connected to the fact that we are all different as individuals rather than one teacher’s method being better than the other’s. Erica’s somewhat different positioning to code-switching and the fact that she many times did it for her own sake does not necessarily represent a “negative” version of code-switching. It rather seemed to me that she was the teacher who was most comfortable in her answers and that she has found her way of teaching English and that this way worked well both for her and her students. While Erica’s answers were clearly not in line with the current syllabus, the other teachers’ answers were. In their case it is impossible to speculate whether their answers had been skewed to conform to the current syllabus or if they indeed reflected the personal preferences of these teachers. It was interesting to see that when the teachers who were native speakers of English said that you did not need to code-switch at the meeting in 2012, it made the native speakers of Swedish take a position where they defended their code-switching and claimed it to be necessary. However, when they were interviewed about their own methods and teaching routines, they were much more careful to express the necessity of code-switching.

Regarding the students, they seemed to realize that they should speak as much English as possible and if they asked a question in Swedish only one fifth would want their teacher to answer them back in only Swedish. In the more informal situations where one student asked another for help, they seemed to code-switch to a larger extent. However, in the more formal situation of asking the teacher for help they spoke English. In the situation where a student did not understand something at once more than three quarters of the students wanted their teacher to explain again in English but in a different way. Even though this might be a situation where it would be easy for the teachers to code-switch the students’ answers indicate that the teachers should not. Furthermore, almost nine out of ten students wanted their teachers to make them speak more English in class. This would indicate that even though many students, in different situations, would prefer their teacher to speak Swedish there seems to be a consensus among them that English is what they should speak even though they sometimes might prefer Swedish. Since the teachers seem to be intent on code-switching as little as possible this agrees with the students’ wish to be made speaking more English.

According to Cook (2001), code-switching is an important tool for both teachers and students when teaching and learning a second language. All teachers who participated in this study
seemed to agree with this view since most of their code-switching served the purpose of facilitating their students’ learning. At the same time, the syllabus clearly states that they should speak as much English as possible, which is what they claim to do.

6. Conclusion

One of the aims of the present study was to investigate when and why teachers code-switch and the results indicate that most of the code-switching done by the five teachers in this study is both well prepared and has a clear purpose. The teachers tended to code-switch in those situations that are most represented in earlier research such as grammar instructions and in one-to-one situations. It is not very likely that their code-switching pattern is due to them having read this research but it does show that the teachers’ experiences conform to what researchers have found in other teachers’ teaching. Four of the teachers generally code-switched in order to clarify their teaching whilst one of the teachers mainly switched for social reasons or due to her shortcomings in L2 proficiency. When it came to the students, they preferred a combination of Swedish and English in situations such as grammar explanations and test instructions. In one-to-one situations and grade discussions they preferred Swedish. Moreover, they tended to want their teacher to make them speak more English. There was a consensus between the teachers’ and the students’ views when it came to in what areas the teachers code-switched. A remarkable fact though, is that none of the teachers claimed to ask the students about what language they prefer in different situations. Although experience is an important asset when being a teacher, much can be learnt by asking the students what they prefer and taking their opinions into account when planning to use code-switching in one’s teaching.

The area of code-switching in upper secondary school can indeed be researched further. It would be interesting to investigate the amount of unintentional code-switching among English teachers in upper secondary school and to see the extent to which their code-switching activities are planned ahead. It would also be interesting to study the teachers who are native speakers of English and see if and how they code-switch. This could be done by a combination of classroom observations and interviews.
References


Appendix A

Interview questions

- Male ( ) Female ( )
- What are your subject(s) beside English?
- How many years have you been teaching?

1. What do you think about the use of Swedish in the English classroom, in general?

2. In what situations do you choose to speak Swedish?

3. Are there times and situations when you always speak Swedish? When and why?

4. Are there advantages in changing the language to Swedish in your teaching?

5. Are there times and situations when you never speak Swedish or try extra hard not too? When and why?

6. Are there disadvantages in changing the language to Swedish when you teach?

7. Are there times when you speak Swedish when it was not planned ahead?
   When does this occur? What situations make you switch into Swedish?
   Why do you use Swedish in those situations?

8. Is your choice of language different if you are talking to the whole class or with a single student?

9. Is your choice of language different depending on which one of your classes you are teaching?

10. Are there advantages when students switch to Swedish when you teach?

11. Are there disadvantages when students switch to Swedish when you speak?

12. Are there situations when you encourage students to speak Swedish?

13. In the new syllabus for English it is said that teaching should as far as possible be conducted in English. What has this new guideline meant for your teaching?
Appendix B

This questionnaire is set to research what language you as a student prefer in the English classroom and is a part of my C-essay in English. The participation will be made anonymously and is also voluntarily. Thank you for your help!

I am taking

- English 5
- English 6

I am

- Male
- Female

My mother tongue is

- English
- Swedish
- Other

1. When my teacher explains grammar I want him or her to use

- English
- Swedish
- A combination of both

2. When my teacher gives us instructions I want him or her to use

- English
- Swedish
- A combination of both

3. When my teacher informs us about a test I want him or her to use

- English
- Swedish
- A combination of both

4. When my teacher gives me my result on a test I want him or her to use

- English
- Swedish
- A combination of both

5. When my teacher and I discuss my grade I want him or her to use

- English
- Swedish
- A combination of both
6. When I don't understand instructions I
- Ask a friend in Swedish
- Ask a friend in English
- Ask the teacher in Swedish
- Ask the teacher in English
- I don't ask

7. When my teacher speaks Swedish during English class I feel that I
- Understand better
- Understand less
- I understand as well when he or she speaks English

8. When I ask a question in Swedish I want the teacher to answer me in
- English
- Swedish
- Both are okay

9. If my teacher explains something that I don't understand I want him or her to
- Repeat the explanation
- Explain again in English but in a different way
- Explain in Swedish

10. When I'm in English class I want my teacher to
- Make me speak more English
- Allow me to speak Swedish

11. My teacher normally speaks
- Only Swedish
- Mainly Swedish but sometimes English
- Mainly English but sometimes Swedish
- Only English