

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF LECTURER CODE-SWITCHING IN ESP CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY IN BAROMBONG MERCHANT MARINE POLYTECHNIC

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ABSTRACT

Effective classroom Communication is essential, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where language and technical knowledge must be integrated. However, the functional role of lecturer code-switching in an ESP classroom remains underexplored, particularly in vocational contexts where communication directly supports professional readiness. This study aims to investigate the discourse functions of lecturer code-switching in an ESP classroom at Barombong Merchant Marine Polytechnic. A qualitative case study design was employed, with data collected through classroom observations, interviews, audio recordings, field notes, and reflective journals. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This study contributes by extending code-switching research into an ESP context and addressing the need for effective instructional communication in vocational education. The findings revealed six key discourse functions of lecturer code-switching: (1) encouraging student responsiveness, (2) managing classroom activities, (3) explicating content explanations, (4) giving clear instructions, (5) clarifying difficult points, and (6) correcting student errors. These functions served to bridge comprehension gaps, support classroom management, and enhance student engagement in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. In conclusion, code-switching functions as a strategic pedagogical tool that enhances comprehension, classroom interaction, and instructional effectiveness in ESP classrooms.

Keywords: *Classroom Interaction, Code-Switching, Discourse Functions, ESP, Maritime English*

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching is commonly defined as the strategic alternation between two or more languages within a single sentence or extended discourse. This phenomenon occurs in the communication of bilingual and multilingual individuals, who often use multiple community languages in their cognitive processes and expressions. Similarly, Mustafa & Numaan (2024) stated that code-switching is one of the linguistic strategies employed by bilingual or multilingual communities to enhance the effectiveness and meaning of communication.

Moreover, several linguists and scholars have offered various definitions of code-switching. For instance, Pamuji et al. (2025) defined code-switching as the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a

conversation or even within a single utterance. Likewise, Nazri & Kassim (2023) defined code-switching as the linguistic phenomenon in which individuals alternate between two or more languages, or their respective varieties, within a single communicative interaction. According to Shafi et al. (2020), code-switching involves the use of multiple language variations within a single conversation. More recently, Al-Marzouki & Albeyali (2024) defined it as the simultaneous interaction of two or more languages by individuals during verbal communication. In conclusion, code-switching is a complex phenomenon influenced by linguistic variation and the characteristics of the communicative act. Consequently, it fulfills both strategic and functional purposes in multilingual conversation.

Despite the interest in multilingual pedagogies, particularly in maritime polytechnics, research on vocational maritime institutions remains limited in its exploration of the specific discourse functions of lecturer code-switching. Previous studies have predominantly focused on general EFL classrooms (e.g, Afriani, 2020; Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; Patmasari & Kamaruddin, 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Khafaga et al., 2024; Al-Marzouki & Albeyali, 2024; Tao et al., 2025), leaving a gap in understanding how ESP instructors employ code-switching to facilitate learning materials, content delivery, and classroom interaction. Therefore, this represents a significant gap in understanding how language alternation operates in ESP classrooms oriented toward specific professional fields such as navigation, engineering, and ship operations. Likewise, Setyowati (2023) stated that since ESP materials discuss the application of English across disciplines, code-switching is inevitable in this field of study. Instead of concentrating on teaching the rules of the language, instructors must provide clear explanations of the material to meet the specific needs of a particular class. Empirical studies have demonstrated that ESP classroom discourse rarely occurs entirely in a single language (Putri et al., 2020).

In ESP classrooms, particularly those focused on vocational education, such as maritime English, code-switching serves not only as a linguistic choice but also as a pedagogical tool. Code-switching may be used to manage classroom interactions, explain technical content, give instructions, address affective needs, define unfamiliar or abstract terminology, deliver directions, and motivate students, thereby enhancing understanding and promoting a more inclusive learning

environment. It can also function as a deliberate communicative strategy (Ataş & Sağın-Şimşek, 2021; Zhang, 2021; Ferguson, 2003,2009; Cahyani et al., 2018; Setyowati, 2023). However, code-switching in ESP classrooms is not merely a random occurrence but rather a deliberate and nuanced communicative strategy used to facilitate comprehension, manage classroom dynamics, and foster a more inclusive learning environment (Ulfah et al., 2021). The situation, which highlights the complex relationship between language, teaching methods, and social settings, warrants careful study, especially at Barombong Merchant Marine Polytechnic, where students require specialized English skills for their maritime studies and future careers. Understanding the reasons behind code-switching, such as facilitating simple classroom communication, clarifying complex concepts, and introducing specialized terminology, is crucial for optimizing pedagogical practices (Narayan & Kuar, 2022). Consequently, the integration of code-switching in educational settings, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms, highlights its potential as an effective pedagogical tool (Almagableh & Yunus, 2022).

Furthermore, English, as the official language in the maritime sector, plays a crucial role in facilitating effective communication for shipping safety between shore and ship, ship and ship, and on board. Several studies emphasize the importance of English language competence as part of global maritime safety standards, essential for maritime safety, minimizing human error in ship operations, and reinforcing the need for context-sensitive instructional strategies in teaching Maritime English (Bocanegra-Valle, 2010; Lau et al., 2021; Smelikova & Penza, 2023). Moreover, Li et al. (2023) argue that Maritime English is a type of English used for specific purposes that differ from other specialized purposes in English. The purpose of learning and mastering Maritime English is to achieve effective communication between ships and shores, as well as between ships. Effective communication is crucial to ensuring shipping safety. Therefore, this aspect holds particular significance in vocational education contexts, such as maritime polytechnics, where students must acquire a strong understanding of both technical terminology and English language structures. It is essential to thoroughly analyze

the functions of code-switching in these environments to inform pedagogical practices and optimize student learning outcomes.

This study aims to analyze lecturers' code-switching as a pedagogical and interactional strategy in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom at Barombong Merchant Marine Polytechnic. Specifically, it investigates how a Maritime English lecturer strategically alternates between Indonesian and English to scaffold learning, manage classroom interaction, clarify maritime concepts, and enhance students' comprehension during instructional activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to investigate the discourse functions of lecturer code-switching in a Maritime English classroom at Barombong Merchant Marine Polytechnic. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate for this study because it seeks to explore the functional, contextual, and interactional nature of code-switching as it occurs naturally in classroom interaction. Rather than measuring variables quantitatively, this approach enables an in-depth understanding of how and why the lecturer uses code-switching as a pedagogical strategy to mediate meaning, manage interaction, and support learners' comprehension. A qualitative design was deemed suitable as it allows for an in-depth, contextualized examination of lecturer-student interactions and the pedagogical rationale behind language alternation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014). The research was conducted at Barombong Merchant Marine Polytechnic, a vocational institution in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, specializing in training cadets in maritime operations, engineering, and transport management. The participant was a female English lecturer with over nine years of teaching experience in Maritime English. She was selected through purposive sampling for her active engagement in ESP instruction and regular code-switching during classroom interactions.

Data were collected through classroom observations, audio recordings, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of the lecturer's reflective journal. The classroom observations were conducted across five instructional sessions to identify recurring pedagogical and interactional patterns of lecturer code-switching in the

ESP classroom. Data collection continued until discourse functions and interactional patterns became repetitive and no substantially new categories emerged, indicating data saturation. All data were transcribed and analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The credibility of the findings was established through triangulation and member checking.

RESULT

The lecturer employed code-switching systematically to fulfill pedagogical purposes. The most frequently observed functions were explicating content and giving instructions. Students responded positively, often indicating a greater understanding and increased confidence. Therefore, code-switching is particularly relevant when learners' English proficiency is limited, and the content complexity is high. The study highlights that in maritime ESP settings, code-switching enhances communicative clarity and student participation. This is particularly relevant where learners' English proficiency is limited, and content complexity is high.

The analysis of classroom interactions, audio recordings, lecturer reflections, and interview transcripts revealed that lecturer code-switching in the Maritime English ESP classroom served multiple discourse functions. These functions were not incidental but rather deliberate and context-sensitive strategies employed to support pedagogical goals, enhance learner comprehension, and maintain instructional flow.

In the specific context of vocational maritime education, where students are required to master both technical content and English communication, lecturer code-switching emerged as a pragmatic solution to bridge the linguistic and conceptual gaps frequently encountered in ESP learning environments. By integrating Indonesian with English, the lecturer was able to scaffold understanding, clarify complex instructions, manage class dynamics, and reduce students' affective barriers.

The following sections present a thematic breakdown of the six core functions identified in the study, each supported by descriptive data and transcription.

A. Encouraging Students to be More Responsive

Code-switching serves as a tool to enhance student responsiveness and promote active participation in the lesson. For example, during several moments in the lesson, the lecturer elongated the final words of her sentences. By elongating and raising the intonation on the last words of questions, students were encouraged to complete the response slots with the correct words or answers.

Table 1. Encouraging Students to Be More Responsive

Function	Description	Transcription
Encouraging Responsiveness	Switching to L1 to get the students' attention.	Able-bodied is responsible for steering the ship <i>mengemudikan....</i>
	Switching to L1 prompts students to answer or participate.	second officer <i>atau mualim dua</i> . Tugasnya adalah navigation equipment <i>atau peralatan...</i>
	To reduce students' anxiety, create a welcoming environment, and increase learner talk, particularly among students with low English proficiency.	

The lecturer used code-switching by elongating and raising the intonation of the last word of her utterance. It was used to encourage students to engage with the explanation and capture their attention during the learning process. This strategy aimed to reduce students' anxiety, create a welcoming environment, and increase learner talk, particularly among students with low English proficiency.

B. Variety in Classroom Management

This category involves classroom management (sitting arrangement, teaching-learning activities, and time-saving strategies). In this situation, the lecturer used code-switching when grouping the students. The lecturer used code-switching in managing the class. The lecturer switched languages when checking the number of group discussions to manage the class and avoid a noisy situation while the students searched for their groups. The students can be controlled easily

by using Indonesian, which the lecturer chose because it is well-mastered by the students. Therefore, the lecturer modified the code to ensure the students understood her instructions when managing the class.

Table 2. Variety in Classroom Management

Function	Description	Transcription
Classroom Management	Switching L1 to manage the class and to avoid a noisy condition	So, around five to six people in one group. <i>Jadi sekitar enam lima sampai enam orang dalam satu group</i>
	Switched language when checking the numbers of the group discussion To manage classroom interaction smoothly and maintain engagement.	you move here ((ask the student to move)). Two groups of four people. <i>Dua grup hanya empat orang</i>

C. Explicating Content Explanation

An explanatory content explanation is used by the lecturer to understand the students' needs and their comprehension, and to clarify the content of learning through explanation. The lecturer mostly used this category in teaching and learning activities. When explaining grammar, translation, and other materials, the lecturer adjusted the language to make the explanation clear so that the students would understand.

When giving an example, the lecturer switched the language to explain the use of the subject, verb, and adverb in teaching grammar. Therefore, the lecturer employed code-switching in teaching grammar to facilitate students' understanding by providing clear explanations with relevant examples.

Table 3. Content Explanation

Function	Description	Transcription
Content Explanation	Switching L1 to make the explanation clear and to clarify it. To ensure a clear conceptual understanding of technical content.	I sleep in the cabin every night, <i>di sini maksudnya adalah subjek yah. Sleep itu adalah kata kerja, yah. in the cabin itu keterangan tempat dan ini keterangan waktu. Nah untuk He di sini juga adalah subjek, clean adalah kata kerja, yah. the class...objek, every morning.</i>
	Switching L1 was intended to give the students an understanding of the meaning of the word	<i>cerobong asap. Flag artinya bendera and this is mast yang artinya tiang. And this is hatch. Hatch yang artinya lubang palka, yah. Ini adalah beberapa bagian dari parts of ship. So far do you understand?</i>

The lecturer uses code-switching in explanations when students appear to have difficulty understanding the material. Therefore, the explanation is adjusted through language use to ensure the learning objective is achieved.

D. Giving Clear Instructions

The lecturer provided instructions in this category by translating them from English into Indonesian. Providing clear instructions was difficult because the English-language instructions were challenging for students to understand. As a consequence, students may make mistakes in completing the task or fail to complete it until the lecturer repeats the instructions in Indonesian. The lecturer translated it directly into Indonesian as a time-saving strategy; if the lecturer had repeated the instruction in Indonesian, the students might have completed the task immediately. The lecturer ensures that students understand the instruction. To start the activity, the instructions will not be repeated continuously to save time during the teaching process.

Table 4. Giving Clear Instructions

Function	Description	Transcription
Giving Instructions	Clarifying task instructions in L1 after giving them in English. To prevent confusion and support autonomous task performance.	That is all the types of vessels that I showed you, and now prepare a paper. <i>Kalian siapkan satu kertas</i> and draw the picture ship. <i>Sekarang kalian gambarkan sebuah kapal</i> based on your imagination. You can draw the picture of the ship, and then you must define the ship, yeah. <i>Jadi di atasnya itu sebuah kapal kalian gambarkan sebuah kapal terserah menurut</i> based on your imagination and then give the definition. for example, you draw a tug boat or passenger ship, <i>gambarkan dulu kapalnya</i> , and then below the picture give the definition passenger ship is a ship that carries passengers, for example. Understand, <i>Paham</i>
	Clarifying instructions or task steps using L1 for better comprehension. Saving time, the instructions will not be repeated continuously	I will point you one by one and you must choose what subject that use auxiliary do or does. <i>Saya mau tunjuk satu-satu, kalian tentukan subjek ini menggunakan</i> do atau does. For example. <i>Saya bilang I, kalian langsung jawab</i>

E. Clarifying a Certain Point

The other function of code-switching used by the lecturer in the classroom was to add specific words to the explanation, which improved comprehension of a particular point. The lecturer switched from English to Indonesian. The lecturer switched to a simpler language to facilitate the students' comprehension. The lecturer translated the word into English to clarify the point in Indonesian. The lecturer believed that code-switching was essential to clarify her statements and convey the intended meaning in Indonesian, thereby helping the students understand the essence of the message.

Table 5. Clarifying a Certain Point

Function	Description	Transcription
Clarifying Points	Providing clarification on misunderstood points. Using L1 to restate or emphasize misunderstood content. To enhance comprehension by offering alternative explanations.	reefer <i>biasa disingkat</i> Reefer. This ship carries perishable food. <i>Kapal ini mengangkut makanan yang gampang busuk. Seperti apa?</i>

F. Correcting Students' Errors

The lecturer used code-switching when correcting the students' mistakes. The lecturer corrected her students' answers and statements, translating English utterances into Indonesian to help them refine their responses, as they had difficulty distinguishing between the words "true" and "false." The lecturer adjusted the language in this study to either correct the students' pronunciation errors or address their mistakes in answering the lecturer's questions. The lecturer also employed code-switching to prevent the students from repeatedly making the same mistake.

Table 6. Correcting Students' Errors

Function	Description	Example (Translated)
Correcting Errors	Providing clarification on misunderstood points. Offering corrective feedback through L1 to ensure clarity and comfort. To reinforce correct usage and avoid repetition of errors.	<i>bukan bui</i> , buy (baca baI), yeah. S: tugbut T: bukan tuk but tapi tugboat ' ((tʌgboʊt, not tuk but but tʌgboʊt)

DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed that lecturer code-switching in the Maritime English classroom served a range of pedagogical and communicative functions, including managing classroom discourse, providing content, and supporting learner affect. The lecturer's use of code-switching was contextually motivated and pedagogically strategic. Each function helped students' engagement with ESP content, bridged linguistic gaps, and ensured clarity during classroom activities.

These findings align with previous studies that underscore the multifunctionality of code-switching in EFL and ESP settings (Ferguson, 2003; Putri et al., 2020; Canagarajah, 1995; Khafaga et al., 2024; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Jingxia, 2010; Promnath & Tayjasanant, 2016; Ulfah et al., 2021); Zhang, 2021. The use of L1 as a tool was particularly evident in moments of conceptual explanation and error correction, supporting the idea that code-switching, when used purposefully, does not hinder but rather enhances learning.

Moreover, the use of code-switching to manage classroom dynamics reflects the lecturer's responsiveness to learners' needs and the classroom's linguistic realities. This confirms Canagarajah (1995) assertion that multilingual pedagogies can be more inclusive and effective in diverse educational contexts. Moreover, Zhang (2021) similarly notes that code-switching is used to provide translations, clarify confusing sentences, build closer interaction in the classroom, create humor, attract students' attention, and impose discipline. The results also contribute to understanding how ESP lecturers in vocational institutions balance content delivery and language instruction. Several functions of lecturers' code-switching were identified in the data obtained from recordings and interviews.

An initial function identified was encouraging students to be more responsive. The lecturer used code-switching by elongating and raising the intonation of the last word of her utterance, which can encourage the students to respond to the material. This finding is consistent with Taufiq et al. (2022), who argued that code-switching can be an effective strategy for encouraging students to participate in classroom interactions. Similarly, Temesgen & Hailu (2022) emphasized that code-switching performs affective functions such as building rapport, expressing empathy, and reducing learner anxiety, all of which can

encourage participation and willingness to take risks in English use. Moreover, code-switching can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, which may lead to increased student participation and engagement. When students feel that their linguistic backgrounds are acknowledged and valued, they tend to participate more actively in classroom discussions and learning tasks.

Variety in classroom management is the second function, which examines how the lecturer uses code-switching to manage or delegate instructional tasks, including organizing group work. According to Saxena (2009), Code-switching is an effective pedagogical strategy in the classroom, ensuring a consistent flow of student responses and promoting inclusive participation in discussions and activities. Afriani (2020) argues that Code-switching can be viewed as a strategy to facilitate understanding and support learning, especially in a classroom setting. Another important function is classroom management, in which code-switching is used to issue commands, give instructions, or address disciplinary issues. Therefore, code-switching serves to manage the class, supporting a smooth teaching and learning process, and fostering a positive intrapersonal relationship in the classroom.

The following function explicates content explanation. The lecturer used code-switching when explaining the material to meet students' needs and enhance their comprehension, thereby clarifying the learning content. The lecturer mostly used this category in teaching and learning activities, especially when explaining grammar, translation, and other materials. This was also supported by Turnbull & Arnett (2002), who argue that teaching grammar lessons provides a rationale for not using the target language exclusively, as students might find comprehension challenging. This approach aims to prevent an inefficient learning process stemming from their limited proficiency. Moreover, code-switching can help students better understand complex concepts by explaining them in their native language or a more familiar language (Shafi et al., 2020). This is particularly useful in technical fields, such as maritime studies, where a precise understanding of terminology and concepts is crucial. Therefore, using code-switching to explicitly explain the material can help students understand the lesson more easily.

Furthermore, another function of code-switching is giving clear instructions. Given the challenges inherent in instructing students, code-switching may help the lecturer provide clearer instructions, thereby facilitating comprehension. This strategy enables the conveyance of messages and the emphasis of specific issues, ensuring that students fully grasp both the explanation and the instruction (Herawati & Fitriani, 2021). The fundamental objective of these instructions is to ensure students successfully engage with and complete specific activities. Consequently, the greater the clarity and the more comprehensive the support provided by the lecturer, the higher the probability of successful student task execution, thereby optimizing learning outcomes. Thus, when delivering instructions to students, code-switching can effectively enhance their understanding.

Another identified function was to clarify certain points. In ESP classrooms, lecturer frequently employs code-switching for various discourse functions, each serving a specific pedagogical purpose. One common function is to provide reiterations or clarifications by switching to the students' native language to rephrase complex instructions or explain abstract concepts (Naibaho et al., 2021). This strategy ensures that students grasp the core meaning of the content, even if they struggle with the English terminology. Moreover, Khonakdar & Abdolmanafi-Rokni (2015) stated that code-switching can be used to clarify points that learners may have difficulty understanding because they are not familiar with the problematic aspect of the material. The lecturer can use code-switching to clarify misunderstandings and provide additional explanations in a language that students understand well. Likewise, Ulfah et al. (2021) stated that words or statements are frequently reiterated directly to emphasize the intended meaning or to clarify previously delivered statements in the students' first language. This immediate clarification can prevent confusion and ensure that students grasp the material being taught. Therefore, the lecturer employed code-switching in the classroom to facilitate understanding by bridging the gap between the target language and the learners' mother tongue, to capture their attention, and to help them grasp important concepts.

Finally, it is used to correct students' errors. The lecturer corrected the students' answers by adjusting her language to help them understand their mistakes.

It was apparent that the lecturer in this study code-switched to correct students' pronunciation errors or to address their mistakes in answering the lecturer's questions. The lecturer also used code-switching to prevent students from repeatedly making the same mistake. Harmer (2001) also suggests that it is essential to praise students for their successes and to correct them for their mistakes. In this way, a lecturer's positive attitude can dramatically improve students' performance, regardless of their level or the types of errors.

The function's results showed that the lecturer mostly used code-switching. It would be assumed that the function was used to provide the necessary knowledge for the students to clarify, because the students' English proficiency was lower. It was very important to clarify and to explain the material explicitly so that the meaning of the utterance was clear. Moreover, the present study found that the lecturer used code-switching in the ESP classroom. The lecturer used it to translate from Indonesian to English and vice versa. The lecturer switched to Indonesian to ensure the students understood what she said (i.e., to explain) or to verify their understanding of the words used in that activity. Therefore, the lecturer's tasks were not only to teach the students but also to ensure they understood the material.

In Maritime English Instruction, where vocational learning demands both mastery of specialized maritime terminology and effective communicative competence in safety-related contexts, code-switching functions as a pedagogical and interactional strategy that helps cadets comprehend technical content, negotiate meaning, and participate more effectively in classroom interaction.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the discourse functions of lecturer code-switching in a maritime English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom in Indonesia. Six primary functions were identified, all of which contributed to more explicit instruction, better classroom management, and enhanced learner engagement. The findings affirm the strategic use of L1 in ESP teaching and suggest that code-switching, far from being a deficiency, is an asset in multilingual instructional contexts. Future research may expand to include comparative studies across multiple ESP disciplines.

This study explored the discourse functions of lecturer code-switching in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom at Barombong Merchant Marine Polytechnic. The findings identified six main functions: (1) encouraging student responsiveness, (2) managing classroom activities, (3) explicating content explanations, (4) giving clear instructions, (5) clarifying difficult points, and (6) correcting student errors.

These functions demonstrate that code-switching was used not arbitrarily but as a strategic pedagogical tool to scaffold students' comprehension and facilitate classroom interaction. The lecturer alternated between Indonesian and English not only to simplify instruction but also to respond to students' affective and cognitive needs, especially in a context where English proficiency was still developing.

The findings suggest that code-switching, when applied purposefully, can contribute to more effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction, particularly in vocational maritime institutions. It is recommended that ESP lecturer training programs include guidance on strategic code-switching, especially in multilingual learning environments. Future research may explore how lecturer code-switching operates across multilingual vocational classrooms and investigates its contribution to technical terminology acquisition, classroom interaction in ESP instruction, and students' longitudinal development of communicative competence in Maritime English.

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