

***Double-Talk: A Bakhtinian Take On the Code-Switching Practices Of English Language Teachers In China***

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**Abstract**

It is common in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts for teachers to code-switch between the students' first language and the target language. However, the extent to which and the ways in which such code-switching practices support student learning of English have yet to be subjected to scrutiny via the analytic lens of classroom discourse analysis. With the introduction of China's *National English Curriculum Standards for Nine-year Compulsory Education and Senior High School Education* in 2001, it is now timely to ascertain if these policy and curricular reforms have been effectively translated into classroom practice. Adopting the lens of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, this qualitative study aims to explore the extent to which and the ways in which code-switching practices among EFL teachers in China support student learning of English and reflect China's new curriculum goals. Data comprising 30 hours of audio-recorded classroom discourse of 8 EFL teachers from 2 middle schools in 2 different Chinese cities was examined. Findings reveal little evidence of dialogic interactions being generated or encouraged by teachers; instead, the teachers' code-switching seems motivated mainly by procedural imperatives rather than pedagogic principles. Code-switching was found to be typically focused on decoding and simple meaning-making tasks rather than developing a deep and critical understanding of the target language and culture. The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to EFL education in China and, more broadly, the role of teacher talk in promoting language learning and cognitive engagement.

Keywords: Bakhtin, Dialogue, Teachers' Code-switching practices, Chinese EFL Context

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## 1 Introduction

It is a common phenomenon in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts for teachers to code-switch between students' first language and the target language, as it is often assumed that this would ease novice learners into the target language. In fact, many researchers, such as Atkinson (1993) and Cook (2001), have argued for the use of the L1 in the L2 classrooms, which purportedly brings forth numerous benefits (see Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2005; Moore, 1996; Schweers, 1999; Turnbull, 2001). However, the extent to which and the exact ways in which such code-mixing practices support and contribute to student learning have yet to be examined via the analytic lens of classroom discourse analysis.

With the introduction of the *National English Curriculum Standards for Nine-year Compulsory Education and Senior High School Education* (NECS) launched more than a decade ago, this is a good time to find out if the paradigm shift intended by the curriculum reform has been effectively enacted by teachers in EFL classrooms in China. China's 8<sup>th</sup> curriculum reform (NECS) is distinct from earlier reforms (Zheng, 2012; Zhong, 2006). Being student-centric, the NECS focuses on students' learning and holistic development (Zhong, 2006). Three transformations were proposed namely, from "centralization" to "decentralization" in curriculum policy" from "scientific-disciplined curriculum" to "society construction-centered curriculum" and from "transmission-centred teaching" to "inquiry-centred teaching" (Zhong, 2006, p. 374). It aims to develop students into active, collaborative and reflective individuals by encouraging them to dialogue with themselves, the world and others (Sato, 2004; Zhong, 2006). Teachers are therefore expected to relinquish their authoritative position in class, co-construct knowledge with their students, and concentrate more on the teaching process rather than the acquisition of an examination-orientated outlook (Cheng, 2011; MOE China, 2001).

Such radical changes would require time to take root in the school system due to a variety of reasons (see Zheng, 2012; Zhong, 2006). For instance, China is historically an examination-oriented and authoritarian society and is heavily influenced by Confucianism (Cheng, Moses & Cheng, 2012). Influence from Confucianist values may result in teachers and students being less receptive towards lessons that are interactive, learner-centred and being less keen in embracing pedagogical approaches which "de-emphasize the transmission and mastery of authoritative knowledge" (Hu, 2002, p. 37).

This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study on the classroom talk of EFL teachers in China. The study aims to provide a better understanding of how Chinese EFL teachers' code-switching practices contribute to student learning and to ascertain the extent to which these practices reflect the goals of the NECS. The theoretical lens through which the study has been undertaken relates to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, which views dialogue as the principal means for meaning-making and learning. In this study, 'dialogism' is operationalized in how teachers move between Chinese and English in order to facilitate students' learning of the target language. It is hoped that the analysis will produce findings that can shed light on when and how (if at all) the code-switching practices of EFL teachers contribute to student learning. The implications of these findings will be discussed in relation to EFL education in China and, more broadly, the role of teacher talk in promoting language learning and cognitive engagement.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Code-switching in L2 classrooms**

'Code-switching' is a term which has been used in the field of sociolinguistics in various ways and its meaning has also evolved over time. Traditional conceptions of code-switching or code-mixing allude to a person who is proficient in more than one language and is able to switch between these languages "in contextually appropriate ways with rhetorical and social significance" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 10; Romaine, 1989). However, in a bid to stay abreast with contemporary forms of multilingualism, scholars have attempted to redefine or extend the meanings of code-switching, acknowledging the possibility of individuals code-switching without bilingual competence (Canagarajah, 2013). Despite these differences in conceptualization, it is generally agreed that code-switching involves the switching between two or more languages in a variety of contexts for various purposes or effects.

In the context of the L2 classroom, teachers often find themselves engaged in discussions over whether or not to weed out the use of L1 in the teaching of the target language. Proponents of Krashen's (1981) theories on the natural order of acquisition and the hypothesis of comprehensible input would advocate the exclusive use of the target language in L2 classrooms. However, researchers like Auerbach (1993), Cook (2001) and Schweers (1999) would advise against this, citing a range of reasons for and benefits in using the L1 to facilitate or ease learners into the target language. The favoured teaching practice - amongst teachers in the United States and possibly round the globe - is maximizing the use of the L2 without the exclusion of the L1 (Grim, 2010).

#### **2.1.1 Theoretical justification for the use of L1 in L2 classrooms**

The theoretical framework which justifies the use of L1 is typically supported by sociolinguistics and multilingual competence models (Grim, 2010). The sociolinguistics model highlights that code-switching is ubiquitous in bilingual or multilingual societies. Individuals from such societies would typically code-switch to deliver their intended message (Grim, 2010). Therefore, researchers or educators should not preclude the usage of the L1 in L2 classrooms as teachers might intentionally choose to code-switch to the students' L1 in order to gain their acceptance and cultivate understanding (Grim, 2010; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Furthermore, the multilingual competence model proposes that two or more languages co-exist in the minds of bilinguals or multilinguals (Grim, 2010). Researchers who subscribe to the view of languages not being distinctly separated but are tightly interwoven in a multilingual learner's mind further justify or legitimize the mixing of languages during instruction (Grim, 2010).

#### **2.1.2 Functions and benefits of code-switching**

Numerous researchers have vouched for the use of the L1 in L2 classrooms by surfacing various benefits (see Auerbach, 1993; Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Cook, 2001; Kern, 1994; Liu, 2010; Macaro, 2005; Ross, 2000; Schweers, 1999). Researchers who have conducted research in various ESL/EFL contexts are largely in agreement on the functions or roles of the L1 in L2 classrooms (see Cheng, 2013; Cook, 2001; Duff & Polio, 1990; Grim, 2010; Levine, 2003). These functions include switching to the L1 to teach or talk about the abstruse features of the L2 language, engage in comparisons between the first and target languages and their accompanying

cultures, engage in comprehension checks, clarify or ensure understanding of instructions, subject matter or lexical items, give feedback to students, establish rapport, manage the class, and so on (see Atkinson, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 2001; Grim, 2010; Jiang, 2004; Lin, 2013; Liu, 2010; Macaro, 1997; 2001; Nzwanga, 2000; Pennington, 1995; Tang, 2002; Wilkerson, 2008).

For instance, Liu (2010) sought to identify the functions of the use of L1 in her mixed-methods study conducted in the EFL classroom of Chinese universities. Motivated by the desire to see if the findings of similar studies conducted in English-speaking countries are replicated in the EFL context of Chinese universities, she found that the L1 functions observed, such as “translating vocabulary items, explaining grammar, managing class and building close relation with students” (Liu, 2010, p.21), were generally consistent with what was found in previous studies, such as Levine (2003) and Macaro (1997). Additionally, her study also identified factors that were important in the teachers’ decisions to switch to the L1. These factors, which aligned with what Duff and Polio (1990) found, include differences between the L1 and L2, “lesson contents and objectives” as well “as department policy of the TL use” (Liu, 2010, p. 21). Liu (2010) found that students’ English proficiency was the principal factor for teachers decide to code-switch to the L1.

In spite of the numerous studies on code-switching to identify the functions, benefits and factors pertaining to code-switching practices among EFL teachers, little has been done to examine the extent to which and the ways in which such practices actually support student learning or not via the analytic lens of classroom discourse analysis. One framework within which classroom discourse can be analysed is dialogic education.

## **2.2 Dialogic education**

There is a burgeoning interest in dialogic education amongst researchers and much has been done in examining the role of dialogue in classrooms across various disciplines such as Science, Mathematics and English (see Alexander, 2001, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Haworth, 1999; Lyle, 1998; Mercer & Dawes, 2010; Mercer & Sams, 2006; Mercer, Dawes & Staarman, 2009; Skidmore, 2000). These researchers have identified a myriad of benefits in dialogic instruction. These include attaining better results for standardised tests, boosting critical thinking amongst students, developing language and problem-solving skills, and has the “potential to enable student voice to be accessed and legitimated” (Alexander, 2005c; Lyle, 2008, p. 233; Mercer & Dawes, 2010). They typically draw their inspirations from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of education as well as Bakhtin’s “conception of dialogue as the root of thought and language” (Xu, 2012; Higham et al, 2013, p. 2).

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory has spurred researchers to conduct studies on children’s talk that require collaborative interaction, since he asserts that all forms of learning takes place in sociocultural and historical contexts (Lyle, 2008). Bakhtin too acknowledges the connection between the individual and the social (Lyle, 2008; Xu, 2012), and recognizes the mediating role of language in identity formation and cognitive development (Xu, 2012). However, Bakhtin’s perception of dialogue goes beyond verbal interactions by arguing that even individual thoughts are dialogic since “thinking occurs through appropriating and using social forms of speech that are imbued with the accents, values and beliefs of previous speakers and speech

communities” (Renshaw, 2004, p.4; Xu, 2012). In other words, written and verbal utterances are always “two consciousness, two language intentions, two voices and consequently two accents participating in an intentional and conscious artistic hybrid” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 360; Lyle, 2008).

Bakhtin sees monologic discourse and dialogic discourse as binary opposites (Lyle, 2008). Monologic discourse is characterized by features akin to traditional instruction, in which teachers are knowledge holders empowered to transmit knowledge to students who are perceived as passive receivers of knowledge (Stewart, 2010). In contrast, dialogic discourse “creates a space for multiple voices and discourses that challenge the asymmetrical power relations constructed by monologic practices” (Lyle, 2008, p. 225). Researchers like Alexander (2005c) and Stewart (2010) contend that Bakhtin’s theories are transferrable to classroom pedagogy. Alexander (2005c) posits 5 principles of dialogic teaching, namely, collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful (p.14). Teachers are no longer depicted as sole knowledge proprietors, as students’ ideas are taken into consideration and built upon collaboratively with the teacher and other students (Alexander, 2005c, 2006; Lyle, 2008).

### **2.2.1 Application of Bakhtin’s Dialogism to EFL contexts**

An increasing number of researchers have conducted studies based on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism in EFL contexts. These studies ranged from determining the amount of authoritative and persuasive discourse in EFL contexts to examining the type of questions asked by teachers in EFL contexts (Ghasemi, Adel & Zareian, 2015; Xu, 2012). For instance, Xu (2012)’s qualitative study is based on Bakhtin’s conception of dialogue. She examined the type of questions asked by teachers who taught an Intensive Reading (IR) course for EL students pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree at the Harbin Institute of Technology, China. Three female instructors participated in the study and a total of 564 questions were coded. From her coding analysis, it was found that IR classes were predominantly monologic in nature. The teachers frequently asked questions to elicit facts or recite information derived from texts. Students rarely asked questions and, if they did, they would ask content-oriented questions pertaining to texts that they have read rather than to propose (or counter-propose) ideas that might challenge the knowledge being presented in textbooks. Students therefore have “little ownership and voice in the meaning making process of reading the text” (Xu, 2012, p. 104). Xu explained this phenomenon on the basis of teachers’ perception of their learners’ low language proficiency and their preference for a unilateral transmission of knowledge due to institutional pressures like the need to complete a syllabus within a stipulated time frame (Xu, 2012).

## **3 Research Aims**

Despite studies like Xu (2012), which examined classroom discourse from the theoretical lens of Bakhtin’s dialogism, little has been done to investigate the common feature found in many EFL classrooms, namely code-switching. In a way, code-switching can be seen as a kind of dialogic interaction between the L1 and the target language, whereby the use of one code illuminates and interanimates the other. ‘Dialogism’ in this study is therefore operationalized not so much in the dialogue that transpires between the expert teacher and novice learner, but in how teachers shuttle between Chinese and English in order to facilitate the interanimation of the two languages. It is argued that such ‘double-talk’ in the EFL classroom would contribute to the goals of the NECS by helping learners negotiate between their first language and

target language, in order to let them experience and embrace the English ‘language in its concrete living totality’ (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 181).

Specifically, the study seeks to address the following questions:

- 1) What are the functions of teacher code-switching in EFL classrooms in China?
- 2) To what extent does teacher code-switching help students to develop and negotiate links, both linguistic and cultural, between their L1 and target language?

#### **4 Research Design**

The study adopts a qualitative approach to analyse EFL classroom discourse data in 2 middle schools in China. One is a large city situated in a prosperous region, while the other is a relatively small city situated in a more remote part of the country with a large minority population. The classroom discourse data was audio-recorded, transcribed and coded by paying close attention to the teachers’ code-switching behaviors in order to ascertain plausible functions and effects of using for the L1 in the EFL classrooms.

##### **4.1 Participants**

A total of 8 middle school EL teachers participated in the study. All participating teachers have attended teacher training programmes, either a three-year diploma course or a four-year undergraduate course. One is a male teacher while the rest are females. Their teaching experience ranged from one to 7 years. Participation in the study was voluntary and informed consent from the teachers and their students was obtained prior to data collection.

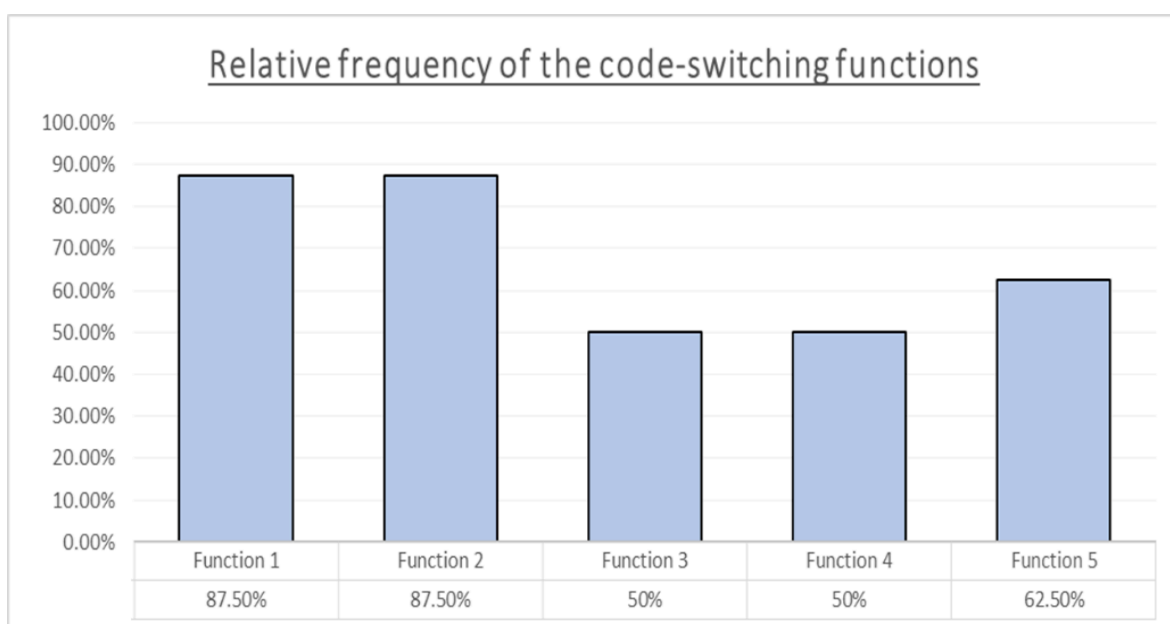
#### **5 Analysis of findings**

From the analysis of the classroom data, it was found that the code-switching functions of the 8 participating teachers generally reflect and corroborate the findings of previous studies (e.g. Cook, 2001; Franklin, 1990; Grim, 2010; Liu, 2010; Pennington, 1995; Polio & Duff, 1994). Table 2 presents the 5 main types of code-switching functions instantiated in the data and Figure 1 shows their relative frequency.

Table 2: Code-switching Functions

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Function</b>
1	Clarifying meaning
2	Giving instructions
3	Explaining grammar
4	Conducting translation exercise
5	Giving feedback

Figure 1 Relative frequency of code-switching functions



### 5.1 Clarifying Meaning (Function 1)

It was found that 7 out of 8 (or 87.5%) of the EFL teachers in this study used the L1 to clarify the meanings of words or sentences in the target language. This could be motivated by their desire to be efficient in their teaching, since the L2 learners of this study would have a reasonably well-established lexical and conceptual L1 system which the teachers could tap on to clarify meanings in the L2 (Cook, 2001; Jiang, 2004). The following examples illustrate the different ways by which the teachers endeavoured to clarify the meaning of target words. The words in brackets represent a translation of the Chinese words used by the teachers.

#### *Example 1: Explicating phenomenon*

T: So we say “we should protect our environment from being polluted”, right?  
 So after seeing so many pictures about pollution, there is a cartoon showing that phenomenon.  
 这儿 (*here*) phenomenon means 现象 (*phenomenon*), OK?

#### *Example 2: Comprehension Checks*

- 1 T: This man is holding certificate.  
 Do you know certificate?  
 Certificate. 证书 (*certificate*).  
 This certificate reads “wining a scholarship fifty-five thousand.”  
 So...can you guess what does scholarship mean?
- 2 S: 奖学金 (*scholarship*) ?
- 3 T: Yes! Right! 奖学金 (*scholarship*).  
 So, wining a scholarship  
 So read after me. Scholarship.

In example one, the teacher immediately provides a translation to elucidate the meaning of a L2 target word (“phenomenon”). Similar instances like example one, as argued by Moore (1996), could aid in facilitating communication or averting communication breakdowns. Example 2 illustrates the teacher’s attempt in engaging in comprehension checks (in this case of the words “certificate” and “scholarship”). Such instances provide students with opportunities to hone receptive skills - like reading skills which include word recognition and comprehension. This finding is consistent with Grim (2010), who has categorized such occurrences as instances of delayed translations. He asserts that delayed translations are much more pedagogically sound when compared to providing bilingual glosses immediately (Grim, 2010). This is because students would be given more time to notice lexical forms as well as process the meanings of L2 words before they get translated (Grim, 2010).

## 5.2 Giving instructions (Function 2)

Another major function of code-switching as instantiated by the teachers in the study relates to instruction giving. 7 out of 8 teachers switch to the L1 to translate L2 instructions, a phenomenon observed by researchers as well (e.g. Atkinson, 1987; Cook, 2001; Grim, 2010). In this case, it could be interpreted that the teachers’ code-switching was motivated by procedural purposes rather than to facilitate the interaction and interanimation of the two languages.

Examples 1 and 2 are excerpts extracted from different lessons taught by different teachers.

*Example 1 : Giving English instruction before Chinese translation*

- T: So take out your worksheet, and see Part One.  
In Part One there are five five eh...  
Yes, there are five words here, and I will play the tape and you listen to it.  
Then give me your answer.  
Which one is truth and which one is false.  
大家做一道判断正误的听力题 (*Let’s complete a listening task which requires us to decide if it’s true or false*)。

*Example 2 : Giving Chinese instruction before English translation*

- T: 那你看这个词啊(*Then, look at this word ah*) look at this word, now  
后面加了个(*At the back, add a*) ‘s’说明它是(*and it would be*)?

These examples of instruction giving which involve code-switching could primarily be motivated by the teachers’ desire to convey instructions lucidly to the students in an efficient and effective manner. This is especially so when some of them have revealed, for instance during a post-lesson conference, that they perceive their students to be weak in English. This perception could have motivated them to tap on the L1 (Chinese) as a resource to provide students with Chinese instructions that would aid the students’ understanding of what is required or expected of them.



7 out of 8 of the teachers showed a preference for giving instructions in L2 *before* providing translations in L1. In contrast, only 2 out of 8 (or 25%) of the teacher participants chose to give instructions in Chinese (L1) *before* they provided the equivalent instructions in English (L2). That the majority preferred to give instructions in the target language first followed by the translation in the students' L1 is significant. This would encourage students to attempt to decode the meaning represented in the L2 before checking if their decoding was correct when the teacher gives the translated version in their L1. This pedagogic opportunity would be lost if the teacher had given the instructions in the L1 first, as students would be less keen to pay attention to the repeated L2 translation of the instructions since they already know what is expected of them. For this reason, Grim (2010) stresses the importance of maximizing target language input via instructions giving. In the same vein, he recommends that inexperienced teachers should not be overly dependent on the L1 to provide comprehensible instructions (Grim, 2010); instead, they should hone their skills in conveying instructions in the L2 so as to ensure that students have more exposure to the target language.

### 5.3 Giving Feedback (Function 5)

Another frequent use function of code-switching as seen in this study is using the L1 to give feedback to students. This could be construed as an attempt by teachers to provide students with feedback in a 'real' or authentic manner, which students can relate to more easily than if the feedback were given in a foreign language (Cook, 2001, p. 416). Examples 1 and 2 are exemplars of such occurrences extracted from different lessons conducted by the same teacher.

#### *Example 1 : Giving Feedback*

- 1 S: H 是 (*is*) Soup.
- 2 T: H 应该是什么呀 (*should be*)? //Green tea.
- 3 Ss: //Green tea.
- 4 T: Green tea 哦, 有错误了哦 (*Oh, there's a mistake*).

### Example 2 : Giving Feedback

- 1 S: In my group, Wang Haiqing has been to an amusement park.  
He went-, he went there last month.  
Wei Min has been to a water park.  
He went to there last year.  
Liang Rundi has been to-, has been to a space museum.  
He-, she went to there last year and- and- and me, and I-, I-, I have  
been the-, I have been to an aquarium.  
I went to there last-, three days ago.
- 2 T: Ok, good, sit down please.  
Yes, now so and also one mistake 有一个小小错误(*there's a minor  
mistake*).  
听出来了吗 (*Are you able to identify it*) ?  
Yah. At here. It is went there or went to there?
- 3 Ss: Went there.
- 4 T: Yah. Went there or went to there?
- 5 Ss: Went there.
- 6 T: Yah. Read after me. Went there.

The above examples illustrate the teachers' attempt at providing feedback in the students' native language to convey a sincere or genuine desire to help their students improve by correcting their answers or sentence constructions. In so doing, the teacher could be attempting to create a conducive learning environment that is non-threatening so as to encourage students, especially the weaker or more diffident ones, to participate in the lesson.

However, example 1 exemplifies a typical follow up move provided by teachers which focus on providing "feedback about the task" rather than feedback on the "processing of the task" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 90). Hattie and Timperley (2007) argue that teachers should provide feedback on the *processing* or how students make sense of the task and not merely on the product or outcome of the task. They cite studies which have shown that feedback at the processing level is more productive than feedback provided at the task level, as it would enhance deeper learning (e.g. Balzer et al., 1989). In the case of example 1, the teacher should therefore focus on *how* the student had arrived at the erroneous answer ("soup") and not merely on giving what the correct answer ought to be ("green tea").

### 6 Discussion of findings

The code-switching functions identified in this study largely corroborate with those identified in earlier studies. They echo the generally pragmatic and efficient motivations behind teachers' code-switching behaviours; at the same time, they also reflect their desire to ease EFL learners into the target language. Close analysis of the data reveals that EFL teaching in the Chinese classroom typically concentrates on practices like pronouncing an unfamiliar word and knowing its meaning. This positions learners merely as code-breakers or meaning-makers, rather than learners who can use a newly acquired word or structure in specific contexts (meaning-users) or even question or challenge its usage in particular situations to serve particular purposes (meaning-analysts). This aligns with the four levels of competencies

conceptualised by Luke and Freebody (1999) in their ‘four resources model’. By providing students with literal translations of target words and engaging in comprehension checks, the teachers in the study are merely providing students with a means to engage in simple meaning-making rather than meaning application or critique (Anderson & Freebody 1981; Zeegers, 2006). Moreover, it is evident from the data that students are typically asked to repeat the target language after the teacher in chorus (“so read after me”). They have few opportunities to practise using the target language in new or authentic contexts which would enhance their understanding of the cultural context within which language use is necessarily embedded (Rush, 2004). An examination of the overall code-switching practices adopted by the EFL teachers in the study suggests little evidence of dialogic discourses being generated or encouraged by teachers. This is because teachers’ code-switching practices are often motivated by procedural imperatives to ensure that students understand and are able to carry out instructions efficiently, rather than by pedagogic principles that enhance learning of the target language. These practices do little to develop students’ ‘thinking, imagination and innovation’, ideals which are enshrined in the NECS (MOE, 2001). Despite the NECS’ initiation in 2001 of a curriculum that proposes a paradigm shift from traditional, authoritative, knowledge-based transmission to a problem-solving, experiential and student-centred mode of teaching (Zheng, 2012), there is manifestly a disjuncture between government policy and classroom practice. The findings of this study reveals a gap that needs to be filled if EFL teaching in China is to move beyond the deeply entrenched practice of “Chinese traditional receptive learning” (Zheng, 2012, p.8) to the ideals envisioned in the NECS.

To achieve this, educators need to grapple with multiple issues surrounding the backwash effects of examinations, a possible clash of eastern and western educational ideologies, and inadequate professional support for teachers in China. In addition, the tendency among many EFL teachers to equate their students’ low linguistic proficiency with their inability to engage in productive dialogic discourses is something that needs to be addressed, since a deep engagement in meaning is not necessarily dependent on or limited by one’s linguistic proficiency as argued by Luke and Freebody (1999). Indeed, if EFL teachers continue to limit their students’ opportunities to practise and use the language in code-breaking or literal meaning-making practices rather than challenging them with more engaging and eminently more meaningful language-using activities, their belief that their students are weak will probably be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, teachers should be equipped with the skills and strategies to nurture students to be active, collaborative and reflective individuals by encouraging them to have dialogues with themselves, the world and others (Sato, 2004; Zhong, 2006). More fundamentally, teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their own discursive practices and behaviours in the classroom. This could be facilitated through recordings (audio or video) of their own teacher talk to raise their awareness about what is taking place and unfolding in their lessons while they teach and the effects of their talk on students’ uptake. While EFL teachers are generally encouraged to maximise target language input in the classroom, this does not preclude the use, albeit judiciously, of the L1 even in the new NECS curriculum (Zhang & Liu, 2014). Such use could be to encourage students to reflect on and thereby enhance their understanding of the situated use of target words and structures in particular contexts. This would not only encourage flexibility and even creativity in the use of the target language, but also enhance cross-cultural awareness which is also one of the express goals of the NECS. This will cultivate students who

can appreciate the nuances of meaning not only of the target language but also invite them to appreciate those of their mother-tongue to arrive at a deep understanding that language is not just a pragmatic tool for communication but a social and cultural product.

## **7 Conclusion**

While the findings from this small-scale, qualitative study cannot be generalised across the vast EFL landscape in China, what we have seen from the excerpts illustrated here does raise some alarm bells. Although it was not the intention to compare the code-switching practices of the teachers from the two Chinese cities, which are differentiated in terms of their relative wealth and access to more modern forms of educational technology and expertise, what is interesting and perhaps counter-intuitive is that there is no significant difference between their practices. Neither was there evidence to suggest that the more experienced teachers were able to encourage more productive dialogues than their novice counterparts. Again, due to the small sample size of the data, one should refrain from drawing definitive conclusions from this. However, what remains clear from the data is how deeply entrenched practices and values that promote the ‘repeat after me’ mode of language teaching are resistant to change even after more than a decade of educational ‘reform’ catalysed by the NECS. To borrow a metaphor used by Cuban (1993), the NECS is akin to the “hurricane winds” sweeping across the sea “tossing up twenty foot waves”, but while the “surface turbulent waters swirl, on the ocean floor there is unruffled calm” (cited in Curdt-Christensen and Silver, 2013, p. 246). But if the double-talk that EFL teachers traditionally favour can go beyond procedural or pragmatic imperatives to the kind of dialogic interactions that Bakhtin envisaged, then perhaps policies can finally penetrate beneath the ‘unruffled calm’ to effect deep-seated and enduring changes in classroom practices.

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