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Original Research

Exploring the Role of Code-switching in Willingness to Communicate among Advanced Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

Using L1 in L2 has received controversial yet paradoxical attention in the history of foreign or second language acquisition. It was previously banned to use L1 but as the educational methodologies developed due to the modern exigencies, it valued using code switching in foreign or second language learning. This study intends to explore the roles of six advanced EFL students' code-switching on their willingness to communicate (WTC) in Iranian context. Participants were selected for the study, in the course of their language learning journey from the ILI institute, Guilan, Iran, during their class discussion, then underwent the interview. English was required to speak in the discussion but first language (Persian) was also allowed to be used by participants where code-switching was expected. Participant statements were documented, transcribed, and examined. The participants evaluated their own WTC for every statement; a stimulated recall interview was conducted to gather qualitative information. The findings illustrated the complex elements of WTC linked to the use of L1 via code-switching, indicating that the intentional and selective use of L1 can serve as a valuable and efficient technique in L2 conversational interactions.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate; Code-Switching; Advanced EFL Learners; Language Proficiency.

1. Introduction

Using L1 in L2 has undergone a contrastive shift from opposition to agreement in the language teaching context. The advent of the direct method provided a defensive guard against using L1. Still, as the teaching era progressed, a more lenient outlook was considered regarding using L1 in L2, until the emergence of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and beyond. It was believed that using L1 in L2 represents low language proficiency on the part of learners, something that Cook (2013) and Brown (2007) contrasted sharply, stating that code-switching in communication occurs implicitly between two advanced L2 learners sharing a common L1. On the other hand, Ellis (2007) raised the flag of a conservationist regarding using L1 in L2, arguing that it is a “controversial issue” (Ellis, 2008, p.801). His rationale for such complexity was that there were various theories of L2 acquisition regarding using L1 in L2. According to Grosjean (2010), code-switching is the phenomenon in which a bilingual or multilingual individual switches between different languages or dialects during a conversation. This is a significant language technique that aids in reducing feelings of anxiety and low self-worth in learners who question their English proficiency levels.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is defined as “underlying continuum representing the predisposition toward or away from communicating, given the choice” (MacIntyre et al., 2002, p. 538; cited in Brown, 2007). According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), various factors seem to affect an individual to predispose or avoid communicating. Asserting that communicative ability or language proficiency is not associated with high WTC. They proposed a number of cognitive-affective factors playing a part in leading learners to choose either side of this continuum. According to Gardner-Chloros (2009), code-switching is an inseparable(integrated) part of multilingual communities, resonating

numerous voices in disciplines ranging from sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics to applied linguistics. It has been echoed and corroborated that code-switching occurs within an individual conversation or utterance, as speakers alternate between two or more languages, demonstrating their linguistic competence and adaptability as multilingual speakers (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Since code-switching can assist and facilitate communication, it can fulfil several sociolinguistic functions, including creating in-group unity, negotiating power relations, and improving interpersonal communication (Gumperz, 1982). Hence, code-switching might even play a role in the willingness-to-communicate (WTC) of multilingual speakers, particularly in culturally-rich contexts where the use of different languages is characteristic of social interaction (Dörnyei, 2005). Moreover, some studies have pointed out that code-switching is beneficial in the practice of language learning, vocabulary development, and cognitive flexibility for bilinguals and multilinguals (Kharkhurin & Wei, 2015; cited in Lin, 2013). Code-switching and its relationship with WTC in this case can be addressed in a way that has relevance to the acquisition of the language and the learning of the learners, where the aim of the study is to develop oral skills and self-efficacy of students (MacIntyre et al., 2011). Differences in this respect may enrich language teaching approaches and broaden the possibilities for increasing learners' WTC in different language and cultural environments (Yashima, 2002). On the other hand, according to Cummins (2007) and Macaro (2001), for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it is essential to communicate in English, particularly in environments with minimal English exposure and daily interactions. The dominant method of teaching EFL, also known as ESL, has traditionally focused on using only the target language for instruction and preventing interference from the learners' first language to encourage thinking in the target language. Yet, L1 is commonly seen in foreign language classes through code-switching, with code-switching reflecting negatively (García & Lin, 2017; Grosjean, 1989; Wei, 2018). There is a lack of research that compares the effects of L1 and L2 usage, and even fewer studies examine the factors influencing learners' L1 use. This study aims to address the gap by examining the influence of L1 reliance on emotional dimensions among L2 speakers, with specific emphasis on their WTC in the target language. Thus, exploring and identifying the impact of code switching on the WTC can be beneficial and may enhance the comprehension of the social, psychological, and linguistic contexts involved in the communicative practices of bilingual speakers. Managing this dynamic relationship may allow researchers and practitioners to comprehend the key factors affecting the WTC among bilingual speakers and assist in improving their language learning experience.

2. Literature Review

This review synthesizes existing research along three interconnected themes: the evolving theoretical perspectives on code-switching (CS) in language learning, the multifaceted nature of WTC as a dynamic construct, and the converging evidence that links strategic L1 use to learners' communicative willingness.

2.1. The Evolving Perspective on Code-Switching: From Deficit to Strategic Resource

The role of the first language (L1) in second language (L2) learning has undergone a significant paradigm shift. Historically, monolingual approaches, such as the Direct Method, advocated for the complete exclusion of L1 from the classroom, operating on the principle that L1 interference hindered L2 acquisition and that its use signaled low proficiency (Cummins, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). From this perspective, code-switching was viewed as a linguistic deficit, a mere crutch due to insufficient L2 knowledge (Grosjean, 1989; Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

However, a substantial body of contemporary sociolinguistic and pedagogical research has challenged this monolingual bias. Scholars now posit that CS is a natural and pragmatic tool for bilinguals (Grosjean, 2010; Myers-Scotton, 1993), serving vital sociolinguistic functions such as building rapport, negotiating identity, and managing conversations (Gumperz, 1982). In educational contexts, this has translated into a recognition of CS as a potential scaffold for learning. Research indicates that the strategic use of L1 can reduce anxiety, clarify complex concepts, and facilitate metalinguistic understanding, thereby supporting the L2 acquisition process (Levine, 2003, 2011; Cummins, 2007). This is supported by studies in Iranian EFL contexts, where both teachers and students have reported positive perceptions of CS, viewing it as a beneficial tool for teaching and learning without necessarily leading to over-reliance (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Nazeri et al., 2021). This modern view culminates in the concept of translanguaging, which frames the learner's full linguistic repertoire as an integrated system for meaning-making, moving beyond the strict separation of languages (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015).

2.2. Willingness to Communicate: A Situated and Dynamic Construct

Parallel to the evolving understanding of CS, the concept of Willingness to WTC has been refined for L2 contexts. Initially conceptualized in L1 communication as a stable, trait-like predisposition (McCroskey, 1992), WTC was reconceptualized by MacIntyre et al. (1998) as a dynamic, situation-specific variable in L2 learning. Their heuristic model illustrates that a learner's WTC at any given moment is the product of a complex interplay of enduring factors (e.g., personality, intergroup climate) and transient, situational factors (e.g., topic, interlocutor, self-confidence).

This situational nature is crucial; a learner's willingness to speak can fluctuate dramatically within a single conversation. Kang (2005) identified psychological antecedents such as security, excitement, and responsibility as key drivers of these moment-to-moment changes. Subsequent research has consistently identified a range of situational variables that influence WTC, including familiarity with the topic and interlocutor, perceived communicative competence, and levels of language anxiety (Sato, 2019a, 2023b; Eddy-U, 2015). This reconceptualization positions WTC not as a fixed attribute, but as a volatile state highly sensitive to the immediate learning environment.

2.3. Bridging Code-Switching and Willingness to Communicate

The theoretical link between CS and WTC lies in the affective and cognitive factors that underpin both constructs. Strategic code-switching can directly influence several layers of MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid. For instance, by using L1 to fill a lexical gap or clarify a complex idea, a learner can effectively reduce anxiety (a situational layer) and bolster self-confidence (a motivational propensity), thereby positively influencing their immediate WTC.

This aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2007), which suggests that individuals adjust their communication to manage social interactions effectively. For EFL learners, CS is a form of accommodation to their own linguistic needs; it provides the flexibility to maintain communication despite L2 limitations, which can foster a sense of security and engagement (Shin & Milroy, 2000). Studies in various learning environments, including online settings, have shown that this flexibility can help sustain student participation and involvement (Huang & Leung, 2020). Conversely, it is also recognized that if CS stems from a persistent perception of inadequate L2 knowledge, it could negatively impact a learner's self-perception and long-term WTC.

Despite the established importance of both constructs and their plausible interconnection, there remains a scarcity of qualitative research that delves into the lived experiences of learners to understand precisely how and why CS influences their moment-to-moment WTC during L2 use. This is particularly true in EFL contexts like Iran, where communication in English outside the classroom is limited, making the internal dynamics of WTC within the classroom even more critical. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by qualitatively exploring the role of code-switching on the WTC of advanced Iranian EFL learners. It aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the prevailing situational and affective factors contributing to Iranian advanced speakers' high and low WTC using code-switching?
2. What are the reasons to propel one to use code-switching, and how do they associate with the WTC?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

This qualitative study employed a purposive sampling method to select participants who could provide rich, relevant insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants consisted of six Iranian EFL learners (three male and three female) aged 16 to 18, all enrolled in the Advanced 1 level at the Iran Language Institute (ILI) in Rasht. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate as it allowed for the selection of individuals who were experiencing the central phenomenon—using English at an advanced level in a classroom setting where CS might occur.

All participants were native Persian speakers, providing a homogeneous linguistic background for examining CS behaviors. Their advanced proficiency level is significant because it helps isolate CS as a strategic or affective choice rather than solely a result of low proficiency, a distinction highlighted by Cook (2013). While the study's primary focus was on situational WTC, participants' trait-level WTC was also assessed using the scale developed by McCroskey (1992)

to establish a baseline. As shown in Table 1, all participants demonstrated a moderate to high level of trait WTC (scores ranging from 56% to 70%), suggesting they were generally predisposed to communication, which makes the examination of situational fluctuations in their WTC particularly insightful.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics and Trait Willingness to Communicate (WTC) Scores*

Participant	Age	Gender	English proficiency level	Trait WTC (%)
Parisa	17	Female	Advanced 1 (ILI, Rasht, Iran)	60
Hadis	16	Female	Advanced 1 (ILI, Rasht, Iran)	56
Nora	17	Female	Advanced 1 (ILI, Rasht, Iran)	62
Arshia	17	Male	Advanced 1 (ILI, Rasht, Iran)	70
Amir	17	Male	Advanced 1 (ILI, Rasht, Iran)	58
Aria	18	Male	Advanced 1 (ILI, Rasht, Iran)	64

Note. ILI = Iran Language Institute. Trait WTC was measured using the scale developed by McCroskey (1992).

3.2. Instruments

This study primarily relied on a semi-structured interview to study the role of code-switching in Iranian EFL learners' WTC. This interview included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses from participants regarding their experiences and perceptions and preferences of code-switching and its likely role(s) on their WTC.

Interview Guide: The semi-structured interview included following questions:

1. In the class, there had been a few instances you noticed yourself switching between Persian and English; can you recall those specific instances of code-switching and indicate when, how, and why you thought it was necessary?
2. How did code-switching affect your willingness to communicate in English during the time?
3. Upon reviewing those instances of code-switching, how did those elements modify the individual's overall willingness to continue communication in English during the class?
4. Were there any specific moments during the class when code-switching made you feel more or less confident in speaking English?
5. How did you find using your L1 in your L2 speaking? Why did you use it? Why not? Did any of outlook (using L1 in L2 or not using L1 in L2) help you develop willingness to communicate?

3.3. Procedure

This research included two sessions where participants engaged in individual interactions with the researcher. Both sessions were recorded with audio recording device.

Session 1:

Discussion topic: Participants had a discussion (a concise speech) on the topic: "the role of advertisement." They discussed this topic from various viewpoints such as the role of the media, social media, the costs and benefits, the main methods of advertainments, the rationales behind the advertising methods. This task was scheduled in the course book and was a part of "Group work, the advertainment in your country" derived from page 51 of the ILI English Series Book, Advanced 1, student textbook. The rationale for this decision was that expressing personal views based on their comprehension of the subject could potentially improve their logic and speech structure.

The semi-structured Interview: After the discussive speech, a semi-structured interview was administered, exploring more thoroughly the subjects mentioned in their speech. Hence, while the main language of the communication was English, participants could switch to their first language, Persian to make it possible to record their probable code-switching act for further analysis. Substantially, after this session, every exchange of ideas, interactions, utterances, or even mimes or filling gap (s) pause both from participants and the researcher, was exactly transcribed. Throughout this procedure, statements were clearly numbered, and their definitions were grounded in justified research criteria.

Session 2:

Stimulated Recall Interview: In this phase, the participants were asked to explain the reasons behind any variations or swings in their WTC and their preferences to speak Persian. From time to time, during the explanation, the audio was paused to give the opportunity to recall more appropriately by listening to the records while referring to the transcript. It's important to highlight that this session was conducted in both English and Persian, to guarantee clear understanding and prevent any possible confusion. Additionally, it is important to note that participants provided clear consent for their participation and the recording of their discussions, maintaining confidentiality (ethical considerations) and allowing for potential evaluation by other viewers.

4. Results

All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed to ensure accuracy in capturing participants' responses. Elements affecting WTC variation in participants' L1 (Persian) were examined by analyzing information gathered from (interview) stimulated recall. The participants were requested to clarify the factors contributing to the increase and decrease of their WTC while using Persian in contrast to the typical stable condition. The data were examined qualitatively in relation to earlier studies (Eddy-U, 2015; Sato, 2019, 2023). Using MAXQDA, a thematic analysis was done to categorize and schematize and generalize the patterns observed and derived from the interviews. Inspired by the study done by Sato (2023), we used and outlined the data analysis in the following stages. In the first stage, Data Preparation and organization, the transcript data were entered to the MAXQDA software to ensure the proper organization. In the Coding and Categorization stage, a coding system was developed for later hierarchical analysis. In the final stage, Analysis and Interpretation, the coded data were explored to identify the patterns and themes for further interpretation and discussions. Having provided a comprehensive means to investigate qualitative data, this method was chosen for its theoretical adaptability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Due to the in-depth thematic analysis of the stimulated recall interview, it revealed several factors that enhance WTC, including *engagement and enthusiasm in the subject, mastery over the subject, the chance to express personal views and experiences, and the impact of conversation partners on personal feelings of security*. On the other hand, elements contributing to a reduction in WTC comprised *inadequate English knowledge, feelings of anxiety, paucity ideas and self-confidence in the subject, and disinterest in the subject*. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify patterns and themes within the data.

Table 2. *Factors Enhancing WTC while Using Code-Switching in Discussions*

Factors	Illustration and Exemplification
Engagement and enthusiasm in the subject	Participants are engaged actively in speaking with interest " <i>the topic was interesting and engaging for me</i> "
Mastery over the subject	Participants have feeling of mastery and confidence in the subject " <i>I was highly motivated to speak because I had a sort of confidence in what I was wanted to talk</i> "
The chance (opportunity) to express personal views and experiences	Participants willingly talk about their personal viewpoints and experiences " <i>I was frankly willing to say what really was in my mind</i> "
The impact of conversation partners on personal feelings of security	Participants feel secure while having interaction with the partners " <i>I was really delighted and felt secure when the partners or teacher gave me the -شاخ های مجازی- (influencers) because they implied and accepted my use of Persian in English</i> "

Table 3. *Factors Leading to Reduction in WTC while Using Code-Switching in Discussions*

Factors	Illustration and Exemplification
Inadequate English knowledge	Participants feel that they don't have sufficient English proficiency to communicate which serves as a hindrance to use Persian word(s) or phrase (s) <i>"I guessed I don't have the appropriate word equivalent and sometimes grammatical structure(s) to convey what I wanted to say correctly"</i>
Paucity of ideas and self-confidence in the subject	Participants don't have any idea and assurance to say <i>"I didn't have any relevant points to say and I was not sure of its relevance, so it decreased my enthusiasm to talk"</i>
Feelings of anxiety	Participants feel anxious if they use Persian <i>"I thought that if I used Persian structures or vocabulary in my speech, the teacher might think I was not ready to take part in the discussion and consider me a weak student."</i>
Disinterest in the subject	Participant didn't like the topic <i>"I lost my motivation because I was disinterested in the topic area"</i>

In the following table we come across to the reasons the participants switched to Persian while speaking English. Participants utilized their first language (Persian) due to the *insufficient English knowledge, the interviewer's employment of Persian (indirect acknowledgment of using Persian), clarification, the explicit expression of meaning or concepts and emphasis on content, and keeping originality to get the notions or ideas over*. Table 3 presents definitions and illustrations derived from the analysis stimulated recall.

Table 4. *Reasons for Persian (L1) Use in L2 (English)*

Factors	Illustrations and Exemplifications
Insufficient English knowledge	Participants think that they don't have adequate English proficiency to take part in communication and discussion. <i>"I thought I don't have enough vocabulary or grammatical knowledge to say what I wanted to say, so I prefer to use Persian equivalents"</i>
The interviewer's employment of Persian (indirect acknowledgment of using Persian)	Participants feel that since the teacher or interviewer used L1 in L2 it is normal to do so. <i>"The teacher used Persian in class discussion for some words or parts from time to time, so I used Persian."</i>
Clarification, explicit expression of meaning or concepts and emphasis on content	Participants purposefully use the Persian language to give the clear picture of what they want to say making sure of giving intended meaning. <i>"I thought Persian word or structure can convey my points better, so I switched to Persian to get my point over"</i>
Keeping originality to get the notions or ideas over to the audience	Participants think the only way to keep the intended original contextual meaning is to use the Persian language in L2(English) <i>"There was no choice but to use Persian equivalent since I thought there were no good and appropriate English equivalent."</i>

The first research question investigated the prevailing situational and affective factors contributing to Iranian advanced speakers' high and low WTC using code-switching. Upon the discussion session the students attempted to speak in their L2 but occasionally used their L1 for specific reasons. After demonstrating that participants' WTC fluctuated

during the exchanges, the emotional and situational factors influencing speaking in one's L1 were explored. The information gathered from the interactions and the data collected by analyzing the stimulated recall interview focused on the following thematic analysis.

Table 5. *Factors of Low WTC of Students' Use of First Language (L1) into L2 (Code-Switching)*

Factor	Parisa	Hadis	Nora	Arshia	Amir	Aria	Total
Inadequate English knowledge	6	4	5	5	7	11	37 56%
Lack of ideas and self-confidence in the subject	3	-	2	4	-	6	15 %22
Feelings of anxiety	3	2	2	-	2	5	12 %18
Disinterest in the subject	1	-	-	-	-	1	2 3%
Total	13	6	9	9	9	31	66

Note: When several factors were indicated for a statement, each of them was counted. In some cases, the participant did not know the answers.

Table 6. *Factors of High WTC of Students' Use of First Language (L1) into L2 (Code-Switching)*

Factor	Parisa	Hadis	Nora	Arshia	Amir	Aria	Total
Engagement and enthusiasm in the subject	4	6	10	5	5	8	38 44%
Confidence or mastery in the subject	1	1	-	-	-	1	3 3%
The opportunity to express personal views and experiences	7	6	8	8	7	4	40 %45
The impact of conversation partners on personal feelings of security	1	-	-	2	1	3	6 %7
Total	13	13	18	15	14	16	89

Note: When several factors were indicated for a statement, each of them was counted. In some cases, the participant did not know the answers.

Qualitative analysis of the factors revealed that *Inadequate English knowledge* was the most factor for low WTC. After that *paucity of ideas and self-confidence or mastery, in the subject* was the second contributing factor for low WTC while using code-switching (L1 in L2). By the same token, *engagement and interest in the subject* and *the opportunity to express personal views and experiences*, were dominant factors contributing to high WTC in students using code-switching (using L1 in L2).

Table 7. *Factors of L1 Use in L2 (Code-Switching), Frequencies, and Degree of Willingness to Communicate*

Factors	Parisa	Hadis	Nora	Arshia	Amir	Aria	Total
Insufficient English knowledge	8 %18.5	7 %16.2	9 %21	7 %16.2	6 %14	6 %14	43
The interviewer's employment of Persian (indirect acknowledgment of using Persian)	5 %14	6 %16.5	4 %11	7 %19.4	6 %16.5	8 %22	36
Clarification, explicit expression of meaning or concepts and emphasis on content	2 %20	1 %10	2 20%	1 %10	3 %30	2 %20	10
Keeping originality to get the notions or ideas over to the audience	3 %13	3 %13	3 %13	6 %46	3 %13	5 %21	32

Note: When multiple factors are reported for a statement, each one was included in the count.

Regarding the second research question, this study investigated the motivations for code-switching and their relationship with WTC. As illustrated in Table 7, *the interviewer's employment of Persian (indirect acknowledgment of using Persian)*, *keeping originality to get the notions or ideas over to the audience*, *clarification, explicit expression of meaning or concepts and emphasis on content* were the most important factors contributing to the use of L1 in L2 (code-switching) among the students in this study. Since the number of students (participants) in this study are few, the effect size is small, and the results must be interpreted cautiously.

Table 8. *Factors of Low WTC of Students' Use of First Language (L1) into L2 (Code-Switching)*

Factors	Parisa	Hadis	Nora	Arshia	Amir	Aria	Total
Inadequate English knowledge	6	4	5	5	7	11	37 56%
Lack of ideas and self-confidence in the subject	3	-	2	4	-	6	15 %22
Feelings of anxiety	3	2	2	-	2	5	12 %18
Disinterest in the subject	1	-	-	-	-	1	2 %3
Total	13	6	9	9	9	31	66

Note: When several factors were indicated for a statement, each of them was counted. In some cases, the participant did not know the answers.

Table 9. *Factors of High WTC of Students' Use of First Language (L1) into L2 (Code-Switching)*

Factor	Parisa	Hadis	Nora	Arshia	Amir	Aria	Total
Engagement and enthusiasm in the subject	4	6	10	5	5	8	38 %44
Confidence or mastery in the subject	1	1	-	-	-	1	3 %3
The opportunity to express personal views and experiences	7	6	8	8	7	4	40 %45
The impact of conversation partners on personal feelings of security	1	-	-	2	1	3	6 %7
Total	13	13	18	15	14	16	89

Note: When several factors were indicated for a statement, each of them was counted. In some cases, the participant did not know the answers.

Qualitative analysis of the factors revealed that *Inadequate English knowledge* was the most factor for low WTC. This is followed by *paucity of ideas and self-confidence or mastery, in the subject* as the second contributing factor for low WTC while using code-switching (L1 in L2). By the same token, *engagement and interest in the subject* and *the opportunity to express personal views and experiences*, were dominant factors contributing to high WTC in students using code-switching (using L1 in L2).

Table 10. *Factors of L1 Use in L2 (Code-Switching), Frequencies, and Degree of Willingness to Communicate*

Factors	Parisa	Hadis	Nora	Arshia	Amir	Aria	Total
Insufficient English knowledge	8 %18.5	7 %16.2	9 %21	7 %16.2	6 %14	6 %14	43
The interviewer's employment of Persian (indirect acknowledgment of using Persian)	5 %14	6 %16.5	4 %11	7 %19.4	6 %16.5	8 %22	36
Clarification, explicit expression of meaning or concepts and emphasis on content	2 %20	1 %10	2 %20	1 %10	3 %30	2 %20	10
Keeping originality to get the notions or ideas over to the audience	3 %13	3 %13	3 %13	6 %46	3 %13	5 %21	23

Note: When multiple factors are reported for a statement, each one was included in the count.

5. Discussion

This study sought to qualitatively explore the situational and affective factors influencing WTC among advanced Iranian EFL learners when they engage in code-switching. The findings reveal a complex interplay between learners' linguistic resources, affective states, and the classroom context, moving beyond mere frequency counts to explain the reasons behind the patterns.

5.1. Factors Influencing Low WTC and the Role of Perceived Deficiency

The most prominent factor leading to low WTC and triggering CS was inadequate English knowledge. This finding resonates with the traditional, deficit-based view of CS (Gardner-Chloros, 2009), but our qualitative data provides nuance. Participants did not use CS merely out of laziness; they switched to L1 when they felt a gap between their intended meaning and their L2 capacity to express it. This perceived linguistic deficiency created a cognitive and affective barrier, directly lowering their WTC by increasing anxiety and reducing self-confidence. This aligns with MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model, where perceived communicative competence is a primary driver of WTC. Furthermore, a paucity of ideas and self-confidence in the subject matter also significantly reduced WTC. This underscores that WTC is not solely a linguistic issue but is also deeply tied to content knowledge and personal assurance, supporting Kang's (2005) emphasis on psychological antecedents. When learners felt they had nothing substantive to contribute, their willingness to engage, even with the aid of CS, plummeted.

5.2. Factors Enhancing WTC: CS as a Strategic and Affective Tool

Conversely, the factors that enhanced WTC paint a picture of CS as a positive, strategic tool. High WTC was most strongly associated with the opportunity to express personal views and experiences and high engagement and enthusiasm in the topic. When learners were passionate about the subject, they were driven to communicate complex ideas, and CS served as a bridge to overcome momentary linguistic hurdles. This finding supports the claims of Levine (2003) and Cummins (2007) that L1 use can increase engagement and facilitate the expression of authentic meaning. In these instances, CS was not a sign of failure but a strategy to maintain the flow of communication and articulate nuanced, personal content, thereby actually sustaining a high level of WTC.

5.3. Reasons for Code-Switching: Beyond Linguistic Shortfalls

Addressing the second research question, the reasons for CS extend beyond compensating for a lack of knowledge. While insufficient English knowledge was a key reason, participants also switched to Persian for clarification and emphasis, and to keep the originality of their intended meaning. This demonstrates a metacognitive awareness where learners consciously chose L1 to ensure precision and cultural authenticity, echoing the findings of García and Wei (2014) on translanguaging. Furthermore, the interviewer's employment of Persian legitimized the practice, creating a safe "translanguaging space" (Wei, 2018) where CS was normalized. This reduced anxiety and made participants feel more secure, directly influencing their WTC positively. This contrasts with the anxiety reported by some participants who feared being judged for using L1, highlighting the critical role of the teacher/instructor in shaping classroom language culture.

5.4. Synthesis and Implications

The results present an apparent paradox: CS is triggered by feelings of linguistic inadequacy (lowering WTC) but is also used as a strategic tool to maintain communication when engagement is high (supporting WTC). This duality is central to understanding the relationship. The key differentiator is whether CS is perceived by the learner as a strategy for meaning-making or as a sign of failure. In learning environments where CS is stigmatized, its use is likely to correlate with low WTC and anxiety. In environments where it is accepted as a legitimate tool, as our findings and those of Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015) suggest is possible in Iran, it can be a powerful asset for sustaining communication and expressing complex ideas.

6. Conclusion

This research explored the WTC of advanced Iranian EFL learners of when using their L1 through code-switching. Main contributing factors to low WTC while using L1 in L2 in the form of code-switching were inadequate *English knowledge*, *paucity of ideas*, *mastery and self-confidence in the subject*, *feelings of anxiety*, and *disinterest in the subject*. On the other hand, *engagement and enthusiasm in the subject*, *confidence in the subject*, *the chance(opportunity) to express personal, views and experiences and the impact of conversation partners on personal feelings of security* were considered the highest contributing factors of WTC while using L1 in L2 in the form of code-switching.

The qualitative examination of participants' language, their exchanges with the researcher, and the stimulated recall interviews uncovered a multifaceted and evolving connection between L1 especially for those teaching fairly skilled students who have the same native language. At first, although the main language should be L2, the use of L1 should be allowed or even encouraged, depending on the situation. Thus, students can draw on all of their linguistic knowledge while learning (e.g., García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015) to convey authentic meaning, as this could improve their WTC. Secondly, because code-switching due to language constraints negatively impacts WTC, L2 interactions should be designed to avoid making learners feel insufficient in their L2 abilities. This is what the research shows on this topic. In sociocultural language theory, the importance of offering feedback or support and scaffolding the environment for learners has been strongly advocated by researchers (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). In conclusion, as Lightbown and Spada (2013) have suggested, the use of L1 vocabulary or expressions through code-switching that is closely linked to an individual's culture, values, or traditions ought to be encouraged in L2 conversations. This can also increase empathy with partners or interlocutors who share the same native language.

The findings of this study can enhance our comprehension of the intricate connection between learners' use of L1 and their WTC, offering valuable recommendations for the thoughtful utilization of a diverse range of languages. However, a few cautious points should be noted. One of them is that the sample size of the study was limited, and all six participants were highly proficient English learners who were highly motivated to communicate in English. Furthermore, the dialogue among the participants and their interaction with the researcher in the initial session might not have been sufficient for data analysis, complicating the extrapolation of findings to wider EFL contexts.

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Information on Informed Consent or any Data Privacy Statements

This study was done at the institute level (ILI) with the participants written consent and no-harm policy.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Board Approval Statements

This study was done at the institute level with the participants written consent.

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Appendices

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

Sources

McCroskey, J. C. (1992). Reliability and validity of the willingness to communicate scale. *Communication Quarterly*, 40, 16-25.

McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1987). Willingness to communicate. In J. C. McCroskey & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Personality and interpersonal communication* (pp. 119–131). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Directions: *Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume you have completely free choice. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the space at the left of the item what percent of the time you would choose to communicate.*

(0 = Never to 100 = Always)

- _____ 1. Talk with a service station attendant.
- _____ 2. Talk with a physician.
- _____ 3. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
- _____ 4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.
- _____ 5. Talk with a salesperson in a store.
- _____ 6. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
- _____ 7. Talk with a police officer.
- _____ 8. Talk in a small group of strangers.
- _____ 9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.
- _____ 10. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.
- _____ 11. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
- _____ 12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
- _____ 13. Talk with a secretary.
- _____ 14. Present a talk to a group of friends.
- _____ 15. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
- _____ 16. Talk with a garbage collector.
- _____ 17. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
- _____ 18. Talk with a spouse (or girl/boyfriend).
- _____ 19. Talk in a small group of friends.
- _____ 20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

Scoring:

Context-type sub-scores--

Group Discussion: Add scores for items 8, 15, & 19; then divide by 3.

Meetings: Add scores for items 6, 11, 17; then divide by 3.

Interpersonal: Add scores for items 4, 9, 12; then divide by 3.

Public Speaking: Add scores for items 3, 14, 20; then divide by 3.

Receiver-type sub-scores--

Stranger: Add scores for items 3, 8, 12, 17; then divide by 4.

Acquaintance: Add scores for items 4, 11, 15, 20; then divide by 4.

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Friend: Add scores for items 6, 9, 14, 19; then divide by 4.

To compute the total WTC score, add the sub scores for stranger, acquaintance, and friend. Then divide by 3.

All scores, total and sub-scores, will fall in the range of 0 to 100

Norms for WTC Scores:

Group discussion >89 High WTC, <57 Low WTC

Meetings >80 High WTC, <39 Low WTC

Interpersonal conversations >94 High WTC, <64 Low WTC

Public Speaking >78 High WTC, <33 Low WTC

Stranger >63 High WTC, <18 Low WTC

Acquaintance >92 High WTC, <57 Low WTC

Friend >99 High WTC, <71 Low WTC

Total WTC >82 High Overall WTC, <52 Low Overall WTC

Sources

McCroskey, J. C. (1992). Reliability and validity of the willingness to communicate scale. *Communication Quarterly*, 40, 16-25.

McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1987). Willingness to communicate. In J. C. McCroskey & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Personality and interpersonal communication* (pp. 119–131). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.



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