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Variations of Code-Switching in Arabic Classroom Interaction: Strategic Efforts in Managing Bilingual Instruction

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Abstract

Intensive Arabic programs in Indonesia are built on a contradiction: they are designed to maximize exposure to Arabic, yet they enrol beginners who cannot yet use Arabic to learn Arabic. This study examines how lecturers in one such program manage the boundary between Arabic and Indonesian during instruction, and what that management implies for language policy in comparable settings. A qualitative case study was conducted at the Language Development Center of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya. It combined nine weeks of classroom observation across eighteen beginner classes, in which 444 switch events were recorded, with semi-structured interviews with nine lecturers and eighteen students. Analysis proceeded interactively, with structural categories fixed a priori and pedagogical motives derived inductively. Rather than treating switching as a lapse in target-language discipline, the study argues that it is better understood as part of the instructional design of intensive programs. Teacher preparation and institutional language policy should therefore be organized around that recognition.

Abstrak

Program intensif bahasa Arab di Indonesia dibangun di atas kontradiksi: dirancang untuk memaksimalkan paparan bahasa Arab, tetapi menerima mahasiswa pemula yang belum mampu menggunakan bahasa Arab untuk mempelajari bahasa Arab. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana dosen pada salah satu program tersebut mengelola batas antara bahasa Arab dan bahasa Indonesia selama pembelajaran, serta implikasinya bagi kebijakan bahasa pada lembaga yang sebanding. Penelitian kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus dilakukan di Pusat Pengembangan Bahasa UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, memadukan observasi kelas selama sembilan minggu pada delapan belas kelas pemula, dengan 444 peristiwa alih kode tercatat, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap sembilan dosen serta delapan belas mahasiswa. Analisis berlangsung secara interaktif, dengan kategori struktural ditetapkan secara a priori dan motif pedagogis diturunkan secara induktif. Alih kode lebih baik dipahami sebagai bagian dari desain instruksional program intensif daripada sebagai kelalaian dalam disiplin bahasa target, sehingga penyiapan guru dan kebijakan bahasa lembaga semestinya disusun di atas pengakuan tersebut.

الملخص

تبنى برامج اللغة العربية المكثفة في إندونيسيا على مفارقة: فهي مصممة لتعظيم التعرض للعربية، لكنها تستقبل مبتدئين لا يستطيعون بعد استخدام العربية لتعلم العربية. تتناول هذه الدراسة كيفية إدارة المدرسين للحد الفاصل بين العربية والإندونيسية أثناء التدريس، وما يترتب على تلك الإدارة من دلالات لسياسة اللغة في المؤسسات المماثلة. أجريت دراسة حالة نوعية في مركز تطوير اللغة بجامعة سونان أمبيل الإسلامية الحكومية سورابايا، جمعت بين ملاحظة صفية امتدت تسعة أسابيع في ثمانية عشر صفا للمبتدئين سجلت فيها ٤٤٤ حالة تبديل لغوي، ومقابلات شبه منظمة مع تسعة مدرسين وثمانية عشر طالبا. وسار التحليل على نحو تفاعلي، مع تثبيت الفئات البنيوية مسبقا واستخلاص الدوافع التعليمية استقرائيا. ولا تنظر الدراسة إلى التبديل اللغوي بوصفه إخلالا بانضباط اللغة الهدف، بل ترى أنه يفهم على نحو أفضل بوصفه جزءا من التصميم التعليمي للبرامج المكثفة، ومن ثم ينبغي أن يبنى إعداد المعلمين وسياسة اللغة المؤسسية على هذا الاعتراف.

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Keywords: *Arabic as a foreign language; bilingual instruction; classroom interaction; code-switching; language policy*

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Introduction

Contemporary Arabic language pedagogy is caught between two commitments that do not easily coexist. One is methodological: the classroom is expected to approximate an immersion environment in which Arabic is the only legitimate medium, a position long treated as the mark of serious instruction (Brown, 2023). The other is sociolinguistic: in institutions where Arabic is taught as a foreign language, teachers and learners necessarily share another language, and interaction between them repeatedly crosses the boundary between the two (Adriosh & Razı, 2019; Green, 2018; Saou, 2022). What emerges in such classrooms is therefore not a departure from the method but a routine feature of it, and one that teachers manage in real time rather than by policy.

Research on classroom code-switching has moved a long way from treating the phenomenon as interference. The structural typology that still organizes most descriptions distinguishes inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching, each placing the boundary between languages at a different point in the utterance (Alazzam & Alamaren, 2022; Poplack, 1980; Poplack & Meechan, 1998). Alongside this descriptive work, a pedagogical literature has documented what switching accomplishes: it repairs breakdowns, marks shifts in footing, and allows a teacher to keep a lesson moving without abandoning the target language altogether (Grant & Nguyen, 2017; Hanafiah et al., 2021; Youssef, 2016). Accounts grounded in second language acquisition supply a further rationale, since comprehensible input and a lowered affective filter are both compatible with limited use of the first language (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). Work on translanguaging has reframed the alternation as a resource for meaning-making rather than a concession (Dostal et al., 2023; Liu & Fang, 2022; Lu et al., 2025).

This literature nevertheless retains a binary vocabulary. Switching is either a communicative shortcut or a pedagogical deficit, and the argument is conducted largely through attitudes rather than through the distribution of forms actually produced in class. Two consequences follow. First, evidence from Arabic remains thin. Most classroom studies concern English as a foreign language, and where Arabic is examined the focus tends to fall on anxiety or on curriculum design rather than on how the three structural types are distributed in interaction (Hasan & Masruroh, 2024; Maghfurin & Ebeed, 2026). Second, the binary framing obscures the possibility that the distribution itself carries information, and that the way one type gives way to another inside a single lesson may be more revealing than the presence or absence of switching. The gap addressed here is therefore empirical and structural: the distribution of the three forms within Arabic intensive instruction remains thinly documented.

The setting in which this gap becomes visible is the Language Development Center of the Faculty of Tarbiyah, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya. In the odd semester of 2025/2026, first-year students enter a full year of Arabic matriculation before beginning their disciplinary coursework. Arabic and Indonesian are not close relatives, and the diglossic distance between formal Arabic and the varieties students encounter outside class widens the gap further (Suleiman, 2023). Under such conditions an unqualified insistence on Arabic tends to produce anxiety rather than competence (Horwitz et al., 1986; Bahri et al., 2026). How much Indonesian a lesson can absorb is therefore a practical question for teachers rather than a matter of principle.

Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine classroom code-switching practices in its naturalistic setting (Creswell, 2009). This approach allows for an in-depth, contextual investigation of code-switching as a dynamic linguistic phenomenon embedded within a bounded system: the intensive Arabic program at the Language Development Center (P2B).

The primary data consist of oral utterances exhibiting tag-switching, inter-sentential, and intra-sentential code-switching extracted from real-time interactions. Data were collected across 18 beginner-level intensive Arabic classes (averaging 25 students per class) taught by 9 lecturers (2 holding a doctoral degree and 7 holding a master's degree) with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 8 years. Over the observation period, 444 code-switching instances were recorded and orthographically transcribed.

To triangulate these findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 27 key informants, comprising all 9 lecturers and 18 representative students (1 per class). The protocol was constructed from relevant literature on classroom code-switching and Arabic pedagogy and validated through expert review by two senior scholars in Arabic sociolinguistics and language pedagogy. The sample of lecturers represents exactly 50% of the total Arabic language development lecturers at the Tarbiyah Faculty, selected via purposive sampling based on their active assignment in teaching the intensive Arabic matriculation program during the study period. For the students, 1 representative was selected from each of the 18 classes based on classroom interaction dynamics and background proficiency.

To examine pedagogical motives in depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions covering the lecturers' conscious rationale for code-switching as well as the cognitive and emotional triggers they experienced during instruction. Key interview questions for lecturers included prompts such as: "*What specific language-learning difficulty triggers your decision to switch from Arabic to Indonesian during instruction?*" and "*How do you perceive students' comprehension and emotional responses when you employ code-switching in the classroom?*" Student interviews contained parallel questions focusing on their perceptions of lecturer code-switching for their language comprehension and learning anxiety.

Data collection ran from 13 October to 12 December 2025. Each classroom observation session lasted 90 minutes, and each interview lasted 60 minutes. Participants and data sources were selected through purposive sampling and were recruited through formal administrative coordination with the Language Development Center and through direct classroom engagement. Lecturers were eligible if they held an active appointment as an Arabic lecturer at the center during the research term and had at least one year of matriculation teaching experience. For students, one representative was selected from each of the eighteen classes on the basis of classroom interaction dynamics and background proficiency.

To minimize observer bias, the researcher assumed a non-participant observer role as an external academic colleague not directly involved in teaching at the institution. Data interpretation was conducted by the primary researcher, who possesses formal academic training in Arabic language education. Observations were audio-visually recorded and transcribed orthographically. Transcription marked the language of origin for every word, retained code-switches without translation, and used a three-dot ellipsis for omitted material; Arabic segments are reproduced in Arabic script and Indonesian segments in roman script, so that the boundary between languages remains visible on the page. Following the observation sessions, the researcher mapped each form of code-switching against the specific instructional context and situational dynamics in which it occurred.

Data analysis was conducted interactively following the model of Miles and Huberman (1994), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The initial coding process was performed by the primary researcher. To ensure consistency and analytical reliability, emerging codes and categories were regularly discussed and refined through peer debriefing with research colleagues,

reaching consensus on final thematic classifications. The unit of analysis was defined as a single code-switching utterance per speaker turn, segmented by natural pauses and functional boundaries. Structural categories (inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and tag-switching) were determined a priori from Poplack's (1980) framework, while pedagogical motives emerged inductively. The analysis proceeded in three repeated steps: initial data marking, category grouping, and core theme identification. Analytical consistency was maintained by cross-checking categories with research colleagues, and any interpretive discrepancy was resolved by re-examining the original transcripts together until consensus was reached.

Ethical approval was granted by the institutional ethics committee prior to data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers and students, who were briefed on the scope of the study, its voluntary nature, and the confidentiality measures applied; no financial or material incentives were provided. Recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher, identifiers were replaced with codes at the transcription stage, and the material will be destroyed five years after publication. To mitigate the Hawthorne effect, the researcher maintained a prolonged field presence and used ongoing consent protocols, establishing rapport before recording began so that participants could resume their ordinary instructional behavior.

Results

Based on the results of observations and the analysis of Arabic classroom interaction transcripts, it was found that code-switching is not random linguistic interference, but rather a patterned speech strategy. The findings are categorized into the following two main sections.

Variations of Code-Switching in Arabic Classroom Interaction

Inter-Sentential Switching

Inter-sentential switching refers to a language switching event that occurs between two distinct sentences. In this phenomenon, one sentence is uttered completely in one language, and the subsequent sentence is delivered in another. An illustration of the form can be seen in Figure 1.

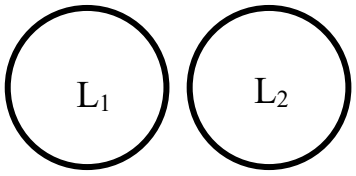


Figure 1 Illustration of Inter-Sentential Switching

Based on Figure 1, it can be understood that circles L1 and L2 each represent a distinct language system or code. In this context, for example, L1 refers to the students' native or dominant language *(Indonesian, or a local language),* while L2 designates the target language being learned (Arabic). The solid lines of each circle indicate that, structurally, both languages possess separate and independent grammatical rules, vocabulary, and phonetic systems. The form of inter-sentential switching can be observed in the following findings:

T: طيب هل فهمتم عن أساليب الترحيب؟ - *sudah faham tentang ungkapan tadi?*

S: إن شاءالله....

T: قبل نختتم دراستنا اليوم هل هناك السؤال؟ - *apakah ada pertanyaan?*

S: مافي أستاذة

Overall, the utterances between the teacher and the students serve as a clear example of inter-sentential switching. This occurs when the language transition takes place at sentence boundaries, where one sentence is completed entirely in one language, followed by the next sentence in another language. These utterances demonstrate that code-switching is not merely coincidental but is a systematic communication strategy.

Through inter-sentential switching, the teacher maintains exposure to the target foreign language (L2) while simultaneously ensuring the comprehensibility of the material through the instructional native language (L1) without violating the grammatical rules of either language.

Tag-Switching

Tag-switching is a type of code-switching in which a speaker inserts an interjection or an emphatic phrase (tag) from one language into a sentence that is otherwise spoken entirely in another language. An illustration of the form can be seen in Figure 2.

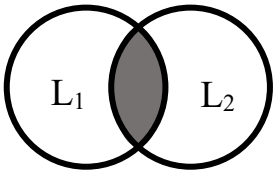


Figure 2 Illustration of Tag-Switching

The figure illustrates that the gray area in the center does not represent a complete language shift, but rather signifies a tag (a label or marker). The large circle (L1 or L2) represents the primary language system being used to construct the sentence (the matrix language). Meanwhile, the intersecting area (gray) represents elements from another language that are *"attached"* or inserted. These elements are extra-sentential in nature, meaning that if the gray element were to be removed, the main sentence would remain grammatically intact. The form of tag-switching can be observed in the following findings:

T: طيب نمرة الثانية، أجبي أختي أوليا، هل أحمد يعرف معلومات عن تامن ميني إندونيسيا إنداه؟

S: *hmmm* معلومات *itu* معنه ماذا أستاذة؟

T: *loh*، معلومات ما معنه؟ أنظري إلى المفردات الجديدة

S: *ohhh* أحمد لا يعرف معلومات عن تامن ميني إندونيسيا إنداه أستاذة.

Overall, the utterances between the teacher and the students illustrate tag-switching at the points where affect is managed rather than content. The elements that qualify are the interjections "*hmmm*", "*loh*", and "*ohhh*": each stands outside the Arabic construction, and each could be removed without leaving an ungrammatical sentence behind. Their work is relational. They mark hesitation, mild reproach, and sudden recognition at precisely the moment the student falters, and they do so without adding a single item of content. The same extract also contains lexical insertions of Indonesian inside Arabic clauses, but those belong to the intra-sentential pattern discussed below and are not counted as tags here. Tag-switching is thus the smallest of the three forms in frequency and the most purely affective in function.

Intra-Sentential Switching

This is a sociolinguistic phenomenon in which a speaker switches or mixes two or more languages within the same sentence. The language shift typically involves the insertion of elements at word or phrase boundaries, generally without a pause or hesitation that would signal production difficulty. An illustration of the form can be seen in Figure 3.

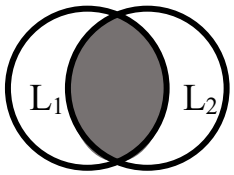


Figure 3 Illustration of Intra-Sentential Switching

In contrast to tag-switching, which only affects the periphery of a sentence, intra-sentential switching occurs within the clause or the sentence itself. The large gray area indicates that both languages blend at the syntactic level. Words from L1 and L2 intertwine to form a single cohesive sentence, and the blurred boundary

signifies that there is no clear separation between the beginning and the end of each language; the speaker switches in the middle of a phrase or clause. The form of intra-sentential switching can be observed in the following findings:

T: جرى الحوار بين إبراهيم المالزي، *mas fahmi* ما الفرق بين ماليزيا وماليزي؟
S: لا أعرف *dzah*
T: إذا ماليزيا يعني *negaranya*، إذا ماليزي *berarti orang malaysia*. إندونيسيا *berarti negaranya*، إندونيسي *berarti orang Indonesia*

By strategically utilizing code-switching, the teacher facilitates understanding of complex concepts in Arabic (L2) by drawing upon Indonesian (L1), thereby reinforcing comprehension without diminishing exposure to L2.

After conducting observations and collecting data on the verbal interactions between lecturers and students during the learning process, various forms of hybrid language use were identified. Theoretically, this phenomenon is classified into three primary types of code-switching: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag-switching. Based on the analysis of the collected data, a total of 444 occurrences of utterances containing code-switching were identified across 18 observation sessions, an average of just over 24 instances per session. The sample is therefore adequate for describing structural variation across sessions and for comparing the relative weight of the three forms, though it is not large enough to support claims about change over time.

These data provide an overview of the linguistic strategies most frequently employed by speakers to bridge material comprehension, maintain communication fluency, and express pragmatic attitudes within the classroom. The frequency distribution and percentage of each type of code-switching are visualized in Figure 4.

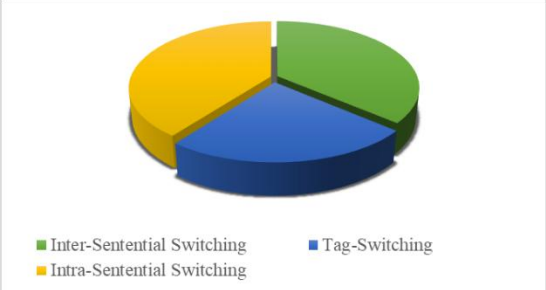


Figure 4 Frequency Distribution of Each Type of Code-Switching

Based on the diagram presented in Figure 4, intra-sentential switching represents the highest proportion at 39.6% (176 occurrences), where lecturers frequently use Indonesian as the primary frame of speech (matrix language) while inserting Arabic terminology as the embedded language. This pattern signifies the lecturers' efforts to domesticate technical terms into a structure familiar to students, rendering abstract Arabic concepts more concrete during discussions. However, intra-sentential switching does not completely overshadow inter-sentential switching, which follows closely at 36.3% (161 occurrences). This narrow margin of only 15 occurrences (3.3%) demonstrates a relatively balanced distribution between the two primary structural types rather than an overwhelming dominance. Tag-switching accounts for the remaining 24.1% (107 occurrences). Rather than relying on a single switching mode, lecturers employ a flexible, dual-focused strategy: using intra-sentential switches for immediate lexical scaffolding during continuous explanations, while deploying inter-sentential switches to deliver distinct directives and complete conceptual re-explanations.

Strategic Efforts in Managing Code-Switching

Based on the results of observations and interviews with the lecturers, it was found that the dominant use of intra-sentential code-switching is part of a deliberately designed instructional strategy. Lecturers make

systematic efforts to ensure that code-switching does not hinder Arabic language acquisition, but instead serves as a stepping stone toward students' linguistic independence. Table 1 presents a visualization of the lecturers' strategies in managing code-switching to achieve the learning objectives:

Table 1 Matrix of Lecturer Strategies in Code-Switching

Strategy Dimension	Form of Lecturer Effort	Pedagogical Objectives
Linguistic Control	Limiting the use of Indonesian only to crucial situations (e.g., abstract concepts).	To reduce students' dependency on direct translation.
Input Management	Sustaining Arabic as the frame of instruction while allowing Indonesian to carry lexical content.	To create a sustainable language immersion ecosystem.
Active Methodology	Integrating language games and interactive activities.	To lower affective filters (barriers) and increase student engagement.
Cognitive Simplification	Developing simple strategies in teaching *naḥw* (grammar) through term-based code-switching.	To ensure mastery of language structures is achieved without excessive cognitive load.

The presentation of these data demonstrates a conscious effort by the lecturers to facilitate a gradual transition. As revealed in an interview with the lecturers of the intensive Arabic program at the Tarbiyah Faculty, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, on December 6, 2025:

> *"Efforts to enhance Arabic language learning are carried out by maintaining Arabic as the primary language; however, we implement a communicative approach where the use of Indonesian is restricted to specific situations to reduce students' dependency on translation, particularly when explaining complex naḥw (grammatical) structures."*

The aforementioned data confirm that code-switching in this classroom operates as a deliberate pedagogical strategy rather than a random linguistic habit. Lecturers do not allow language shifts to occur haphazardly; instead, they utilize code-switching as a structured instrument to support communicative goals. In this classroom, pedagogical code-switching takes the form of a purposeful, teacher-led alternation between languages designed to enhance input comprehensibility, manage classroom interaction, and facilitate complex learning objectives. By integrating language games and structural simplification, lecturers successfully ensure that curriculum objectives — namely, the mastery of Arabic in both structure and function — are achieved, even though students still require target-language scaffolding in certain areas. This demonstrates that strategic code-switching variations actually strengthen conceptual understanding (such as *naḥw*) without eliminating exposure to the target language. Ultimately, this approach represents a sophisticated sociolinguistic adaptation designed to ensure that the learning process remains inclusive for students with diverse proficiency levels.

Discussion

Based on the frequency data presented, this section discusses how the variations in code-switching forms correlate with the instructional strategies implemented in the classroom. The relatively balanced distribution among intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching indicates that the use of hybrid language is not merely an accidental linguistic pattern, but rather a pedagogical instrument used by lecturers to achieve communicative effectiveness. The three forms did not appear in the order a taxonomy would predict. As Figure 4 shows, intra-sentential switching was the most frequent at 39.6%, inter-sentential switching followed closely at 36.3%, and tag-switching accounted for the remaining 24.1%. A purely quantitative reading would rank them and stop there. A variationist account would not, since the proportions are themselves the finding: the relative weight of each form records the conditions under which speakers select one over another (Poplack, 2020). Read as a sequence, however, the distribution looks less like a ranking than like a division of labor, in which each form occupies a different position in the utterance and therefore performs a different instructional task.

Intra-Sentential Switching: Lexical Scaffolding Inside the Sentence

Intra-sentential switching was the most frequent form, at 176 occurrences, and it fell in a consistent position: inside the clause, where terminology is at stake. When a lecturer keeps the Indonesian frame and inserts Arabic nouns or verb phrases, as in the extract under Figure 3, the technical vocabulary is separated from the syntax that carries it. Students meet the Arabic term without having to process an entire Arabic sentence around it. Sahib et al. (2021) describe this configuration as the point where the matrix language absorbs embedded material without losing its own structure, and the same pattern recurs here whenever naḥw terminology is introduced. The instructional gain is that lexical access improves while the sentence remains parseable. The cost is equally clear: exposure to Arabic syntax is confined to short fragments rather than full sentences, so a lesson can sustain a high proportion of Arabic lexis while offering very little practice in Arabic sentence construction.

Inter-Sentential Switching: Framing and Directive

Inter-sentential switching accounted for 161 occurrences, and these fell at the joints of the lesson — a directive, a re-explanation, a change of task — rather than where a single word was missing. Because the boundary falls between sentences, each unit remains grammatically complete, and the switch becomes a way of changing footing rather than of inserting a word. In the extract under Figure 1, Arabic carried the framing move — the question, the instruction, the transition to a new task — while Indonesian carried the paraphrase that made the frame intelligible. This is the pattern Grant and Nguyen (2017) report in Vietnamese universities and Youssef (2016) reports in Cairo: the target language retains the structural role of the lesson, and the first language is admitted as commentary on it. The pedagogical consequence is that exposure to Arabic syntax survives in complete units, which is precisely what intra-sentential switching cannot supply. The two forms would then be complementary rather than competing, and the narrow margin between them suggests that both functions were continuously required rather than that the lecturer was indifferent.

Tag-Switching: Affective Modulation at the Edge of the Utterance

Tag-switching accounted for the remaining 107 occurrences, and it differed from the other two in kind rather than only in frequency. It consists of elements that sit outside the grammatical construction — interjections, particles, calls for attention — and that can be removed without damaging the sentence. Their function is relational rather than referential, which makes tag-switching the least obviously instructional of the three. In the extract under Figure 2, “hmmm”, “loh”, and “ohhh” mark hesitation, mock reproach, and dawning comprehension; they regulate the emotional temperature of the exchange at the moment the student falters. Horwitz et al. (1986) identify that faltering as the observable face of foreign language anxiety, and Kalkan (2026) reports the same association between anxiety and achievement. Tag-switching does not reduce the amount of Arabic in the lesson; it reduces the cost of producing it.

The Cycle: How Each Switch Sets Up the Next

Taken separately, these findings add up to a typology. Read together, they suggest a cycle. A tag lowers the affective threshold at a moment of hesitation; an intra-sentential insertion then supplies the missing term inside a familiar frame; and once the term is in place, an inter-sentential switch re-establishes the Arabic frame for the next task, until the student’s next hesitation calls for another tag. Each move creates the condition for the next. The evidence for the sequence is indirect, since the corpus was coded by utterance type rather than as a continuous record, so the cycle is reconstructed from the distribution and from the lecturers’ accounts rather than observed turn by turn. If the reconstruction holds, however, the proportions are not a stylistic preference but an equilibrium, the point at which three moves balance the competing demands of comprehensibility, exposure and affect.

The same reading accounts for a feature of the data that a frequency count alone leaves unexplained. Intra-sentential switching dominates not because lecturers prefer it in the abstract, but because lexical gaps are the most frequent occasion for switching and the least disruptive to repair. Where the occasion is different —

a new task, a misunderstood instruction, a student who has stopped responding — the other two forms appear. The choice of form appears to follow the occasion, and that is what would distinguish planned pedagogical switching from habitual mixing (Cahyani et al., 2018; Bell & Payant, 2024).

The interview record points in the same direction without settling the question. Asked what triggered a switch, the lecturers described occasions rather than preferences: a term that would not land, a student who had gone quiet, an instruction that had to be repeated in full. Their accounts were organized around situations in which Indonesian became necessary, not around a proportion of Arabic to be maintained. That is what the cycle would predict, since decisions taken at the level of the next move leave the aggregate distribution as a by-product rather than a target. Table 1 is the lecturers' own summary of those decisions, organized by strategy rather than by moment. Only one exchange is reproduced above; the summary given here condenses the remaining interviews rather than quoting them.

The Strategies Behind the Distribution

Table 1 records four strategies that the lecturers described, and each corresponds to a decision about where a switch may fall. Linguistic control, the decision to reserve Indonesian for crucial situations such as abstract concepts, sets the boundary that produces the intra-sentential pattern: it fixes in advance the point at which a switch becomes permissible. Input management works at the level of the frame, sustaining Arabic as the language of instruction while allowing Indonesian to carry lexical content, which is what the inter-sentential extracts show at the joints of a lesson. Active methodology, the use of language games and interactive tasks, lowers the affective threshold and may therefore reduce the occasions on which a tag is needed. Cognitive simplification, teaching *naḥw* (grammar) through term-based switching, uses the same lexical insertion as the first strategy but directs it at a named object rather than at vocabulary in general.

Read together, the four strategies describe a division of labor among the forms rather than four independent techniques, since each names a condition under which one form becomes the appropriate move. The evidence for this reading comes from the lecturers' own account, and self-report is its weakest link: a strategy named after the fact is still a reconstruction. What can be checked is the correspondence between the named strategy and the position of the switch in the extracts, and on that point the accounts and the transcripts agree.

The Counter-Case and Its Alternatives

The account so far has treated the distribution as an achievement. A substantial literature reads the same facts as a cost. Turnbull (2001), who accepts that the first language has a role, argues that it should nonetheless be rationed so that the target language remains the default, on the ground that extensive use of the first language reduces learners' contact with the language that instruction exists to supply. Crawford (2004) reviews the same debate, which turns largely on what counts as sufficient exposure. On that view the equilibrium described above would be a liability rather than an achievement: in most of the 176 occurrences coded as intra-sentential, Indonesian supplies the syntax while Arabic appears as lexis, so that the lesson rehearses Arabic words rather than Arabic sentences. The present study cannot adjudicate the point. It recorded the organization of talk, not its yield; no measure of learning was taken, and the interviews report what teachers intended rather than what students gained. What the evidence supports is that the practice is internally coherent, not that it is optimal.

This reading is not the only one available, and three alternatives deserve to be stated rather than dismissed. The first is habit: bilingual lecturers in East Java move between Indonesian, Javanese and Arabic in everyday academic life, and part of what appears in class may be the routine continuation of that practice rather than a decision taken for the lesson. The second is institutional norm: where the surrounding faculty treats code-switching as unremarkable, individual lecturers have little reason to monitor it. The third is individual style: some teachers are conversational by temperament and others formal, and the distribution may partly record that difference rather than a pedagogical calculation.

The interviews speak to the first explanation more directly than to the other two. Lecturers described their switching in purposive terms and could name the situations in which they permitted Indonesian, which is difficult to do with a habit one has not noticed (Adriosh & Razı, 2019). But retrospective accounts are reconstructions, and a teacher who explains a switch as strategy may be supplying a reason after the fact. What the data support is narrower than a global verdict: the distribution is compatible with deliberate design, and the design is more plausible for the structured moves than for the tags. That distinction, rather than a claim that every switch was planned, is what the evidence will bear.

What This Means for Arabic Instruction

Arabic adds a complication that the English-language literature does not face. The distance between formal Arabic and the spoken varieties means that a student's first language and the classroom register are separated by more than one boundary, so the lecturer is in principle managing three codes rather than two (Suleiman, 2023; Youssef, 2016). The competence at work is not two monolingualisms placed side by side (Cook, 2016). The present corpus codes Arabic and Indonesian without distinguishing formal Arabic from the spoken varieties, so this dimension is not measured here; it frames the interpretation rather than forming part of it. Where the curricular goal is reading competence in formal Arabic, however, switching into Indonesian may protect comprehension at the cost of contact with the register being taught. The cycle described above is therefore not neutral with respect to the curriculum: it favors lexical and affective goals over syntactic ones. Recognizing this does not condemn the practice, but it does mean that the balance should become a conscious curricular decision rather than an emergent property of classroom pressure.

Conclusion

The study set out to establish how code-switching varies in an intensive Arabic classroom and how the lecturers who work in it manage that variation. The contribution of this study is to have shown that the three structural forms of code-switching are not interchangeable. Each answers a different instructional problem, and the boundary between languages falls where that problem is located: inside the clause for terminology, between sentences for framing, and outside the construction for affect. What looks like a frequency distribution is therefore better understood as a division of labor, and the balance among the three is maintained because each move repairs a different kind of failure.

That claim is bounded by the conditions under which it was produced. A single institution, nine lecturers and one academic term cannot separate pedagogy from the regional bilingual habit in which it is embedded, and the interviews report intentions after the event rather than in it. Coding was carried out by the primary researcher and checked through peer debriefing, but no formal inter-coder coefficient was computed, so the boundary between adjacent categories rests on a single analyst's judgment. The corpus also records what lecturers did, not what students learned: no achievement measure was collected, so the argument concerns the organization of instruction rather than its outcomes. Finally, the count should be read as the switches that were recorded and transcribable rather than as a census of every alternation in the twenty-seven hours observed, and it does not distinguish formal Arabic from the spoken varieties.

Two lines of work follow. The first is comparative: applying the same distributional analysis across proficiency levels and institutions would establish whether the rhythm described here belongs to Arabic instruction or to this program alone. The second is interventional: if the three forms do different work, teacher preparation can be organized around matching form to occasion, and the effect of that preparation on classroom interaction can be tested directly. Until such evidence exists, the practical implication is narrow: instruments used in teacher supervision should record which form is used and when, rather than how much Arabic was spoken. Behind that narrow recommendation lies a broader shift: the question worth asking is not how much Arabic a lesson contains, but which failure each switch is answering. Framed that way, the choice between immersion and the first language becomes a question of design rather than of discipline.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Declaration of AI Use

The authors used ChatGPT, a generative AI tool developed by OpenAI, to assist with language refinement and the editing of academic text. The tool was not used as a substitute for the authors' research, data analysis, or scholarly judgment. The authors reviewed and verified the final manuscript and take full responsibility for its content.

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