

CODE-SWITCHING IN SESOTHO CLASSES IN LESOTHO: IMPLICATIONS FOR SESOTHO TEACHING AND LEARNING

MATSOKOLO MARIA RAMOKOENA
ANDREW TICHAENZANA MANYAWU

Matsokolo Maria Ramokoena, M.Ed, lecturer
Department of Language and Social Education
Faculty of Education
National University of Lesotho, Lesotho
e-mail: mankoramokoena@gmail.com, mm.ramokoena@nul.ls
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4458-2777>

Andrew Tichaenzana Manyawu, PhD, professor
College of Social Sciences, Theology, Humanities and Education,
Africa University, Zimbabwe
e-mail: deancssthe@africau.edu, manyawu67@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7005-1327>

Matsokolo Maria Ramokoena is a Sesotho Education lecturer in the Department of Language and Social Education in the Faculty of Education at the National University of Lesotho. She graduated with a first degree in African languages and the English language at the National University of Lesotho. She taught in various high schools in Lesotho where she gained her experience in language teaching. As a high school teacher, M. M. Ramokoena dealt with both Sesotho as the first and English as the second language. She further obtained a Master's degree in Sesotho Education. She teaches courses in Sesotho education and curriculum studies at the National University of Lesotho. She has worked with different teacher

associations of both languages. Currently, she remains a member of the Sesotho Teachers' Association. Her research interest includes language contacts. M. M. Ramokoena is passionate about the usage of proper Sesotho and conserving the culture of Basotho. She is particularly interested in language attitudes, in particular negative attitudes of today's youth towards their native African languages and ways to curb such attitudes where they occur so that these languages are not faced with the danger of extinction and code-switching (CS).

Prof. Andrew Tichaenzana Manyawu is a linguist who currently is working as Dean of the College of Social Sciences, Theology, Humanities and Education at Africa University in Zimbabwe. He holds degrees in linguistics and second and foreign language education from France and Lesotho. He is a polyglot who speaks six languages, including English and French, and four Southern African Bantu languages. A. T. Manyawu is a highly experienced foreign and second language teacher who has taught English, French and various linguistics and applied linguistics courses in various African countries and France. His research interests are critical discourse analysis (CDA), religious discourse, political discourse, second and foreign language education, and Ubuntu studies. He has published widely on these and other research areas.

ABSTRACT

A common feature of colonised nations is the co-existence within the same community of two or more languages, leading to bilingualism and even multilingualism as a characteristic of the citizens of such countries. This gives rise to a communicative strategy that is only available to bilingual people, that of code-switching (CS). Despite the fact that all interlocutors in Sesotho classrooms in government schools in Lesotho are speakers of Sesotho as a mother and/or first language, occurrences of CS in those settings have been noted. This article examines the use of CS by teachers and learners of Sesotho, a Southern African Bantu language spoken in Lesotho, in formal Sesotho lessons in selected government schools. All the teachers and learners who were the subjects of this study were competent speakers of Sesotho as their mother and/or first language. Qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews with the teachers, as well as lesson observation. Four (4) Grade 11 classes in four (4) schools were purposively selected as sites for the study. The study found that whereas CS does occur during formal Sesotho lessons, teachers are actually inclined to forbid and banish it from their lessons. Paradoxically, however, there are forms of CS that have become so naturalised in the Sesotho classroom that the teacher and learners do not even seem to notice that they have actually spoken English amidst a Sesotho lesson.

Keywords: code-switching, bilingualism, mother tongue, pedagogy, Lesotho, Sesotho

INTRODUCTION

Whereas all bilingual individuals and speech communities are loci for the perpetual jostling of the two or more languages that are available to them at all times, in formerly colonised nations, this ever-present need to choose between and among languages often has serious and far-reaching political, cultural and socio-economic implications. From a purely linguistic perspective, the co-occurrence of two or more languages within a given social setting gives rise to a communicative strategy known as code-switching (henceforth CS). Whereas many studies of this phenomenon focus on its use in the context of second or foreign language acquisition, this present article examines the use of CS among students and teachers of a dominant indigenous African language who are also mother or first-language speakers. The language was being taught in an African country where it is the mother tongue of the vast majority of the population. That country is Lesotho, the language in question is Sesotho, and the teachers and learners of it are indigenous Basotho who speak it as their mother and/or first language.

Having been a Sesotho teacher and a member of Sesotho Teachers Associations for more than fourteen (14) years, one of the authors of the present article observed how some teachers of Sesotho became agitated if a fellow teacher or learner used an English word, phrase or expression in their utterances. Reactions were often so aggressive that angry words were exchanged, with some even going as far as to claim that people who code-switched were tainting their language. However, it was equally observed that some teachers of Sesotho routinely resorted to CS in their lessons. The article accounts for the first phase of a study aimed at exploring the use of Sesotho as a mother/first language.

BACKGROUND

Lesotho is a country in the SADC region with a total of six languages, including sign language. However, the number of languages spoken in the country is not limited to these six languages, as in recent years the country has experienced an influx of people of Chinese and Indian origin who come into the country mainly for business and bring their languages along with them. Furthermore, in 2009, the Ministry of Education and Training decided to expand its repertoire of languages being offered in schools by introducing French as an elective subject (Makumane,

Fru 2021). This plethora of languages thus renders Lesotho a multilingual country (Kamwangamalu 2012).

The most dominant languages in the country are Sesotho and English. English has for centuries predominated in all formal domains, including education, while Sesotho has been primarily used in all the other less formal, less socio-economically important and less prestigious domains (Kolobe, Matsoso 2020, 2021).

CS refers to the use of two or more languages in one utterance. It is defined differently by different scholars and there seems to be a slight confusion as far as the distinction between CS, code-mixing and borrowing, with some scholars arguing that there is no difference between the terms (Myers-Scotton 1997; Appel, Muysken 1987) while others feel strongly that there is a difference, albeit a thin one. According to Semethe (2019), this is because there are different views concerning the length of the elements switched. Poplack and Meechan (1995) and Sankoff (2001) opine that CS and borrowing should be regarded as two different phenomena, while Semethe (2019) notes that many scholars consider it difficult to differentiate between the two in certain contexts. Muysken (1987) states that code-mixing and borrowing are actually different. This view is, however, somewhat contrary to the view stated in Appel and Muysken (1987) that it is difficult to separate code-mixing and borrowing.

CS in language classes in Lesotho is inevitable because teachers and learners have a large enough pool of languages to choose from for their interactive and communicative needs. The power and influence of the English language emanates from the country's colonial history whereby Lesotho was a protectorate and later a colony of Britain between 1868 and 1966, when it gained independence (Maliehe 2021). Lesotho's contemporary education system is therefore deeply marked by the colonial legacy of the country's former colonial master, Britain. One consequence of that legacy is that most people in Lesotho can speak both Sesotho (which is dominant among the country's indigenous African languages) and English well. The unification of the country around these two languages is reflected in the fact that Basotho of Isixhosa and Siphuthi origins can speak and understand Sesotho. So dominant is Sesotho that 85–90% of the country's population speak Sesotho as their mother tongue (Kolobe, Matsoso 2021) As a result of the country's colonial legacy, the co-existence of Sesotho and English in Lesotho is governed by policies around language and language in education, as well as perceptions of prestige, economic worth and various cultural factors.

Lesotho's language policy states that both English and Sesotho are official languages, with Sesotho also being a national language (Ministry of Education and Training 2009; Kolobe and Matsoso 2021). According to Kolobe and Matsoso, "even though the two languages are declared as both official in the country, their status [...] is defined by the roles that they play" (Kolobe, Matsoso 2020, 379). This means that both languages have been accorded the same status and are supposed to function equally in the country. However, in practice this is not the case, as English continues to be the dominant language in socio-economic domains that are considered important (Kamwangamalu 2012; Ministry of Education and Training 2021; Mpholle 2024).

The Lesotho Education Language Policy (Ministry of Education and Training 2019) stipulates that the mother tongue shall be used as a medium of instruction in all the lower grades of basic education (Grades R to 3), while English takes over from Grade 4 and is used as a medium of instruction up to tertiary level, whereas Sesotho continues to be taught only as a subject from Grade 4. This policy was adopted in the Lesotho Basic Education Policy (Ministry of Education and Training 2021), which states that the two languages must be used in that particular order in schools. Raselimo and Mahao (2015) posit that English is privileged over other subjects in the Lesotho curriculum and that this has remained so even after the publication of the curriculum and assessment policy, which is the curriculum framework that came before the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy was introduced. The first four years of basic education are therefore the only time that learners get to freely speak and practice Sesotho on school premises (Ministry of Education and Training 2009; 2021; Kolobe and Matsoso 2020; 2021). This is because, from Grade 4, the use of Sesotho outside and beyond the Sesotho class is strictly prohibited and schools do all they can to promote the use of English. If students are found speaking Sesotho on school grounds, they are punished. In almost every school, there is an "English Club" but there are no Sesotho clubs. There are many activities which are held in English all year long, some of which are even sponsored either by the government or various non-governmental organisations, whereas there is very minimal to no effort to accord Sesotho the same support.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This study is aimed at specifying the use of CS by Sesotho teachers in their classes and determining its impact on the teaching and learning of Sesotho. To attain this goal, the study sought to establish whether Sesotho teachers and their learners use CS during Sesotho lessons and evaluate the impact of any CS thus used on the teaching and learning of Sesotho in those lessons.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The researchers hope that the findings of this study will be useful in informing mother-tongue teachers worldwide about how they can make use of CS in their classes. It is also believed that teachers will be made aware that, as much as they may be against CS in their classes, they subconsciously employ it when the need arises. The authors also hope the study will be helpful in creating awareness among education policy-makers in all bilingual and multilingual countries that they should give learners and teachers the opportunity to choose the language they think helps them best achieve the objectives of their teaching and learning process and allow all the languages that co-exist in the country to become languages of education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To conduct the study, the following research questions were addressed:

- Do Sesotho teachers and learners use CS?
- How does CS impact the teaching and learning of Sesotho?

LITERATURE REVIEW

CS, as a phenomenon arising from language contact between English and Sesotho, has been a big issue in Lesotho, especially in classroom settings. Studies such as those by Khati (2006), Moloji (2008), and Semethe (2019) have investigated different aspects of the performance of CS between Sesotho and English in the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classroom. In this context, English functions as the matrix language or the main language of a conversation in which, according to Semethe (2009), the conversation was initially intended to be carried out before the

switch occurred, whereas Sesotho is the embedded language, that is, the less important language that is not expected to be used in that particular conversation.

Previous research has demonstrated the usefulness of CS in classes where English is used as a medium of instruction, as it can help learners who are not linguistically gifted and has been found to improve their understanding and performance in the target language. However, the implications of switching from Sesotho to English in a Sesotho lesson are unclear, as are the types of CS common in that setting. The present article explores these patterns of behaviour in order to determine whether they pose any threats to Sesotho both as a language and as a taught subject and examines whether CS offers any opportunities for the teaching/learning of Sesotho.

This study adopts Semethe's definition of CS as "an alteration of linguistic elements between two or more languages or codes" (Semethe 2019, 24). This definition is supported by Halmari (2004) and Josefsson (2010), who regard CS as denoting the use of two different languages within one episode of a conversation, and Khalema and Raselimo (2024), who note that it denotes the alternating use of two languages in the same conversation within and between grammatical boundaries. Bullock and Toribio (2009) and Jamshidi and Navehebrahim (2013) concur that CS is the alternation of languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent of a sentence and reflects the ability of bilinguals to move seamlessly between two languages. Nilep (2006) corroborates this but adds that the process of CS may also include linguistic and extra-linguistic elements such as identity, norms and culture. Kumar et al. (2021) add that in CS the speakers must retain the same topic even if they are switching codes. Semethe (2019) argues that CS is a language contact phenomenon found in highly bilingual communities. According to Grosjean (2000) CS is important because it allows the speaker to choose the language they feel best satisfies their need.

CLASSROOM CODE-SWITCHING

Classroom CS can be defined as the alternation of languages that happens inside a classroom. According to Mangila (2018), classroom CS can also be called pedagogic CS. Norrish (1997) describes it as a switch between two or more linguistic codes to facilitate the acquisition and comprehension of a concept or metalinguistic element in the continual progression of a structured

or unstructured learning event. Lin (2008) defines classroom CS as the alternating use of more than one linguistic code in the classroom by any of the classroom participants, including teachers, students, and teaching assistants.

TYPES OF CODE-SWITCHING

According to Kasim et al. (2019) and Yildiz and Su-Bergil (2021), there are three (3) major types of CS. The first is inter-sentential CS, where the first sentence is completed and the speaker starts the next sentence in a different language. The second is intra-sentential CS, where the speaker shifts between two codes within the same sentence. The third is tag switching, where a speaker adds tags of one or two phrases into their statement. According to these authors, tag switching is a very common type of CS. Blom and Gumperz (1972) classify occurrences of CS in two categories: situational and metaphorical. According to them, situational CS involves a change in situational factors such as setting, topic and participants, while metaphorical CS occurs when the speaker deliberately shifts language codes to signal a new domain.

Whereas the literature has mostly focused on languages other than Sesotho and on the acquisition of foreign and second languages, often in settings dominated by languages other than the target language, this study is concerned with the learner's mother and/or first language – Sesotho – within a Sesotho language community.

REASONS FOR CODE-SWITCHING

Generally, people switch codes for a variety of reasons, including accommodating or excluding others. People may decide to switch to a different language if another person has joined the conversation and the original speakers want to shut them out. On the other hand, it may be to accommodate the person being spoken to, especially in cases where the addressee does not know the language that was initially being used. According to Narayan (2009), attention should be paid to the motives and determinants of CS. Motives include the need to coin new terminology and concepts, the tendency to imitate a more powerful group and the tendency to create a special jargon in closed groups. In this case, Sesotho teachers might switch to English in their classes because of the desire to imitate the native speakers of the language. Determinants include modernisation, economic development, prestige, ethnic and linguistic diversity,

nationalism, cultural threat, national character and the existence of a regulatory linguistic establishment. Those who support CS may be doing it for reasons such as prestige and linguistic diversity, while those who are against it may feel that the donor language poses a threat to their language and their culture as a whole. Matei (2009) points out that some aspects of communication may differ depending on geographical area, social class, gender, age and level of communication. This could mean that CS amongst learners is influenced by one or more of those factors.

There may be many reasons teachers and learners or any other participant in a classroom setting may decide to code-switch. It could be to clarify a concept or to bring order in a chaotic classroom. A teacher may grab the attention of the learners by switching to a language different from the one being used in class up to that point. Narayan (2019) highlights the fact that teachers utilise CS to bridge the language gap between them and their learners. According to Muthusamy et al. (in Khalema, Raselimo 2024), teachers may employ CS to emphasise important points and ensure the clarity of the content being taught.

Malindi et al. (2023) argue that CS is used for distinct reasons such as communicative functions, to fill in a lexical gap and for emphatic statements, among other uses. Hoffman (1991), Holmes (1992) and Kasim et al. (2019) concur that CS has nine (9) functions, namely, conversational, interjections, loan words, message qualification, transfer of subconscious markers, proper nouns, quotations, message reiteration, and personalisation versus objectification. Sert (2005) adds that sometimes teachers use CS to build solidarity and affinity with their learners.

Scholars who advocate the use of CS in classrooms (Limoso 2002; Mangila 2018; Bullock and Toribio 2009) observe that CS has advantages for learners. Limoso (2002) found that CS facilitates cooperation and understanding. Bullock and Toribio (2009) corroborate this, stating that CS fills linguistic gaps, expresses ethnic identity and achieves particular discursive aims.

Garcia and Lin (2016) argue that CS is an effective teaching instrument for teachers to pass on messages to their learners in a manner that they can understand, and that it contributes to the academic use of the second language (L2). This is echoed by Suganda et al. (2018) (in Khalema, Raselimo 2024), who claim that CS is recognised globally as an instrument that can help improve mutual understanding between learners and teachers. It is thus evident that in a second-language learning environment, CS can be a valuable asset. However, it is still unclear whether the same

positive effect can be translated into a Sesotho – or any other mother-tongue – learning environment. Littlewood and Yu (2011) raise concerns that while it may have some positive attributes, CS crowds the target language and therefore has unfavourable effects on the learning process. This concern is supported by Ferguson (2003), who asserts that one other reason for avoiding CS is its “interference” with the target language. If Sesotho teachers continually use English in their lessons it can have a negative impact, as learners may never get to know the words, sentences or phrases which are said in English. Indeed, going forward, they may learn to integrate those English words or phrases in their utterances in Sesotho.

Poplack (2001) suggests that there are three different approaches to CS: the sociological approach, the psychological approach and the structural approach. This study aligned itself with the structural approach which is the one that is explained further here. The structural approach looks into the extent to which a second language (L2) is integrated into a first language (L1) or the other way round. It determines intra-linguistic CS as internalised grammatical system or subsystems of bilingualism (Poplack 1980). Panhwar and Buriro (2020) describe how structuralists consider CS to be the juxtaposition of sentences or sentence fragments, each of which are internally consistent with the morphological and syntactic rules of the lexifier language.

The authors of this paper felt that the structural approach to CS was best suited for this study because the way sentences are constructed (in terms of word order) is the same in both English and Sesotho, as both languages follow the subject–verb–object (SVO) pattern. Thus, most of the alternations that happen between these languages are rule-governed and, in most cases, show that the speakers are somehow competent in the two languages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by the matrix language frame model and Hymes’s (1962) ethnography of communication. According to Semethe (2019), the matrix language frame model was developed by Myers-Scotton (1993). Myers-Scotton (2005) asserts that this model predicts the structures that are allowed to occur within a code-switched clause. The model claims that there is an imbalance in the roles played by the languages in CS given that one language is the source of the grammatical structure that governs the bilingual clause. The main language of the conversation, which is the source

language, is therefore called the matrix language, while the donor language is called the embedded language. In this present study, Sesotho, which is the target language, is considered the matrix language since it is the official language of instruction and general communication in the Sesotho language class, while English (and any other language that may be used) is considered the embedded language.

According to Farah, "ethnography of communication in the study of language must concern itself with describing and analysing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences" (Farah 1998:125). Farah goes further to explain that the focus of the ethnography of communication is on the speech community and the way communication is patterned and organised within that community.

This study examines the use of Sesotho and English (as well as any other language that may be used) in the study of Sesotho as a mother and/or first language in Sesotho speech communities in Lesotho. By adopting the ethnography of communication framework, the study mobilises a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive approach to its exploration of the Sesotho classes under investigation, not a prescriptive one.

RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation in order to build an in-depth understanding of use of CS in formal Sesotho lessons at high school level. As means of data generation, semi-structured interviews and classroom observation were used. Kothari (2010) asserts that when observation serves a formulated research purpose, it must be planned and recorded to allow checks and control so as to ensure the validity and reliability of the data and the findings. Semi-structured interviews were considered useful because they are somewhat flexible and allow the participants to respond freely to the questions asked. McIntosh and Morse (2015) note that in semi-structured interviews participants have the freedom to answer questions as they wish and a researcher may probe those answers. They further assert that semi-structured interviews allow for individual responses from people regarding their experiences.

These assertions are corroborated in Morse and Field (1995). DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) point out that when engaging in participant observation, the researcher takes part in the everyday activities of a particular group as a way of learning how they do things. This is reinforced by Flowerdew and Martin (2005), who state that participant observation seeks to understand the ways of life of real people from the inside, in the context of their everyday and authentic experiences.

Four (4) high schools in Mafeteng, Lesotho were purposively selected as sites for the study. The study population included all the teachers and learners of Sesotho in those schools. All in all, the four schools have a total of 1930 learners, all of whom take Sesotho as a subject. The study sample comprised four (4) Grade 11 Sesotho teachers and their Grade 11 learners, numbering a total of 120 learners. The size of the classes that were sampled varied from 25 to 33 learners. The learners were aged between seventeen (17) and twenty (20). Sixty percent (60%) were girls while the remaining forty percent (40%) were boys. The teachers included three (3) females and one (1) male between the ages of 39 and 46. They were all included because they taught the targeted language at the selected schools: the gender ratio was not planned. The authors chose to focus on Grade 11 because it is a terminal, high-stakes class: at the end of that year, the performance of the four-year-long teaching/learning process is evaluated and assessed via the school's graduation examination, administered by the Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL).

The following questions were used in the semi-structured interviews:

- Do you or your learners ever code switch in your Sesotho classes? If yes, why? If not, why?
- Can you give examples of non-Sesotho words and/or phrases that often come up in your classes?
- In which topics is CS likely to happen, in your opinion and why?
- Who uses CS more, teachers or learners? Any idea why?
- Do learners understand some concepts better when they are explained in English? If so, which ones?
- Do you think CS poses any threat to Sesotho teaching and learning? Is so, in what way?

DATA ANALYSIS

The data from the class observations and interviews was transcribed. Similar words and phrases which kept occurring in all the observed classes were put together so that they could later be used to form an opinion. The data from the teachers was written up separately from that of learners in order to establish whether the two groups use CS in classroom interactions and, if they do, the extent to which they do so. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to solicit teachers' views about whether they think CS poses any threat to the teaching and learning of Sesotho.

In an attempt to corroborate and validate the data from the interviews, classroom observations were also conducted. The data was then described, leading to the conclusion that teachers do code-switch but to a very minimal degree.

Next, information from the interviews with teachers was compared to observations from their classes in order to corroborate the information they shared. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the observations: responses were grouped in accordance with the research questions and similar answers were later put together and used in association with the data from the interviews to inform the study's conclusions. According to Jowsey et al. (2021), thematic analysis makes it easy for researchers to understand what people do and say in their social context.

Discourse analysis was used to analyse the data collected through interviews. According to Brown and Yule (2003), discourse analysis is basically the analysis of language in use, so this method was very helpful in determining whether Sesotho–English CS might indeed be a problem in Sesotho education and comparing how the two languages are used in that setting. Knott et al. (2022) state that discourse analysis is concerned with the role of language in society, with special attention paid to the clear or indirect dimensions of language and power.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Class observations and teacher interviews were used to gather data pertaining to use of CS during Sesotho lessons. A triangulation strategy was used to compare data from the semi-structured interviews with the four (4) teachers with data from classroom observations of their Sesotho lessons. We begin by reporting the results of the semi-structured interviews.

When asked whether they use CS in their classes, all four (4) teachers responded that they do. They explained that most of the time they did not do it deliberately, that it just happens, and that they sometimes did not even realise that they had used CS. They said that they used it because it was a natural way of communicating to their learners in a manner that they could understand.

Asked whether their students used CS, one teacher indicated that her students code switched all the time. Another teacher claimed that her students never code-switched, but her claim was contradicted by observation of the same teacher's classes, in which the learners did, in fact, resort to CS.

When asked if CS depended on the topic being taught, teachers opined that topics such as composition and grammar caused them to code switch most often because learners struggled to understand some concepts in Sesotho, compelling the teachers to resort to English to clarify the concepts. When asked whether learners understood some concepts in the Sesotho classes better when they were explained in English, teachers responded that this was indeed the case. They suggested that this might be because learners were more exposed to English than they were to Sesotho.

On the question of whether they thought CS poses any threat to Sesotho teaching and learning, the teachers indicated that CS was by no means a threat to Sesotho teaching and learning, especially if it was used minimally. In fact, they believed that CS could actually be a good strategy to facilitate teaching and learning of Sesotho.

Findings from the interviews with the Sesotho teachers were then compared with findings obtained through observing their lessons. Data collected from the class observations revealed that CS by teachers was relatively minimal and that the embedded language used was English in all the instances of CS noted. Teachers also reported that they used CS when explaining some concepts to their learners, especially when they suspected that the learners may struggle to understand what they mean in Sesotho. For example, in trying to explain different parts of a composition to learners, one teacher opted to use the noun climax instead of its Sesotho equivalent *sehlohlo* and the English noun suspense instead of its Sesotho equivalent *ho sia mmali a khaletse litaba*. Another teacher used the English noun newspaper instead of its Sesotho equivalent *koranta*.

Observed usage of CS suggests that it was used by both the teachers and their students to underpin strategies to sustain, maintain and evaluate rapport during classroom interactions. For instance, in one lesson, learners say “Yes, teacher” in chorus in response to variations of their teacher’s questions aimed at checking if they understand what has just been said. Examples of her utterances include “*Akere rea utloana?*” (Do we understand each other?) and “*Akere lea bona?*” (Is it clear?/ Do you see?). The most frequently used variation of the question, however, is the much shorter “*Akere?*” (Isn’t it?/ Right?). In these instances, use of the English utterance “Yes, teacher” by the learners is embedded between two utterances in Sesotho by the teacher, making such uses of the phrase instances of intersentential CS. A peculiarity of this recourse to CS is that, linguistically, it is completely unnecessary, as the learners are entirely capable of producing the Sesotho equivalent of the English utterance “Yes, teacher” (*E ea tichere/mosuo*), since it belongs to basic Sesotho. This type of CS must therefore be regarded as an integral part of established and naturalised classroom discourse. We are therefore faced with the paradox of Sesotho pedagogical discourse being comprised of a mixture of Sesotho and English. So naturalised was this type of CS that occasionally, the teacher elicited the learner response “Yes, teacher” by resorting to the English question “Right?”. Another teacher frequently used the single word utterances “Right?”, “Ok?”, and “Yes?” in one lesson to check learners’ understanding and maintain their attention.

Other types of CS that were noted were tag CS and intra-sentential CS. Learners systematically called their teachers either “Teacher” or “Madam” and never once used the Sesotho equivalents of those terms. These terms were used at the beginning of an utterance to draw the teacher’s attention or signal that the learner was addressing the teacher, as in “Teacher, *ke kopa ho botsa ...*” (Teacher, may I please ask ...). Another example is “Madam, *ho na le meqoqo ena eo ereng*, Madam, *ha e felella e ke e felile kalehare*, Madam” (translation: Madam, there are some stories which when they end, Madam, leave the reader hanging, Madam). In this utterance, the embedded polite formal address term madam is used thrice in a sentence whose matrix is Sesotho, punctuating the sentence at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Similarly, the formal English term sir is used to address male teachers in Sesotho classes. This is quite peculiar given that, in any other social setting, all Basotho people use the terms *ntate* and *mme*, which are the Sesotho equivalents of the English sir and madam respectively,

even when addressing their interlocutors in English. Indeed, the typical Mosotho, young or old, never uses the English terms sir and madam in a Sesotho conversation in any situation outside of formal education institutions. This is therefore a case of generalised and naturalised CS whereby the embedded term is actually treated as a borrowed word that now constitutes an element of the Sesotho pedagogical discourse. Using such terms therefore no longer constitutes CS for Sesotho teachers and learners in the context of their classroom interactions since they now function as ordinary elements of Sesotho language, at least in educational settings.

A peculiar instance of intra-sentential CS was when teachers resorted to explicit translation, as in the following example: “*ka senyese mane re re* they leave us in suspense”. Such reliance of Sesotho to English translation suggests that the teacher assumes that her learners had learnt the concept in question in English and therefore only needed to transfer it to the Sesotho context. This is an instance of learners’ mother or first language assuming the status of a foreign or second language, to the extent that the concept being learned – or at least the discourse about it – originates from the embedded and, in this case, second language of the learners and their teacher.

While spontaneous use of CS by learners not only went unsanctioned by the teachers but also seemed to cause no concern at all for any of the four (4) teachers observed, explicit requests by learners to express themselves in English were systematically denied. Here is an exchange in which a learner struggles to express the notion of literary devices in Sesotho and asks to say it in English:

Table 1. Interaction between a learner and a teacher in a Sesotho class

Speaker	Transcription of recorded utterance	English translation
Learner	Madam, <i>joale mantsoe a a tlameha hoba makae?</i>	Madam, so how many words should there be?
Teacher	<i>Mantsoe a fe?</i>	Which words?
Learner	<i>A na e re bouang ka oona.</i>	The ones that we are talking about.
Teacher	<i>Ke mantsoe a fe ona ao?</i>	Which words are those?
Learner	Madam, <i>ke kopa ho hlalosa ka Sekhooa.</i>	Madam, can I explain in English?
Teacher	<i>U hlanya ha ka kang!</i>	Are you that mad?

This exchange illustrates the fact that learners have acquired more metadiscursive competence (such as grammatical terms) in English than in Sesotho and are inclined to rely on it, at least in cases of extreme difficulty, in their Sesotho lessons. However, for the teacher, explicit discussion of CS seemed to elicit diglossic considerations, leading to knee-jerk recall of the official instruction to use only Sesotho in Sesotho lessons. Thus, whereas the teacher's reaction to the learner's request to resort to English suggests that using English in a Sesotho lesson is taboo and should never be considered, the same teacher accepted the learner calling her Madam throughout the above exchange. This underscores the notion that some types of CS have become so naturalised in Sesotho pedagogical discourse that the interlocutors do not even notice instances of them, meaning that they are now effectively bona fide elements of Sesotho for pedagogical purposes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were compared against those from studies by Semethe (2019), Mangila (2018), Kumar et al. (2021), Malindi et al. (2023) and Khalema and Raselimo (2024).

Analysis of the data from this study focusing on CS in Sesotho classes revealed that both teachers and learners use CS in their classroom interactions in which the embedded language is English. If teachers and learners use CS, as this study has shown they do, this could suggest that poor performance among Sesotho learners could be improved if teachers employed more CS.

Since teachers are responsible for implementing curriculum policies, their belief that CS can have positive impact on the teaching and learning of Sesotho suggests that policy-makers should consider allowing the use of whichever language both teachers and learners are comfortable with in their daily pedagogical processes.

The study also revealed that teachers do not believe that CS harms Sesotho as a language in any way. However, findings from a similar study by Semethe (2019) focused on Sesotho–English CS reveal that even though all changes in the structure of Sesotho are influenced by the use of English, they are in fact there. As Semethe notes, "Sesotho's susceptibility to change correlates strongly with age: both the length of time contact between Sesotho and English has existed, and the generation in which change is mostly found." The findings from the teachers' interviews in this study contradict

Semethe's point, because the teachers we interviewed stated that they did not think CS between Sesotho and English will change Sesotho at all.

This study revealed that CS is habitual among Sesotho teachers, and that sometimes they are not even aware that it has occurred. Mangila (2018), who studied a similar phenomenon in the context of the Philippines, found that although teachers do use CS in their language classes, it was rare for language acquisition and habitual purposes. This is also interesting because the data from the class observation in this study reveal that the teachers *did* code switch when it was clear that learners did not understand what they were saying.

Kumar et al. (2021) studied the effectiveness of CS in a language class in India. Their findings are aligned to what has been discovered in this study: that CS is mostly used to interpret complex ideas, translate questions and check students' understanding. It is mentioned in this study that Sesotho teachers are inclined to forbid the use of the use of CS in their classes. The findings of Kumar et al. (2021) also reveal negativity amongst teachers towards the use of CS in their classes. However, as the results of this study and Kumar et al. (2021) show, despite their stated aversion to it, teachers in fact use CS themselves to help their learners understand better. This suggests that CS does actually help learners to improve their marks. However, CS must be used with caution so that it does not overshadow the target language.

Malindi et al. (2023) who studied the same phenomenon in the teaching and learning of mathematics in South Africa asserts that it is impossible to avoid CS in teaching learners who speak languages other than English as their first language. Even though the scenarios are different here, the two studies are however in consensus that CS is natural in teaching and learning processes, especially in a bilingual or multilingual society.

Khalema and Raselimo (2024) indicate that, as a teaching strategy, CS improves geography learners' understanding by improving their knowledge of subject-specific terminology. Geography is among the subjects taught in English, but teachers sometimes have to switch to Sesotho to ensure that learners understand the content being given to them. This is not very different from what was revealed by the findings of this study: that Sesotho teachers switch to English to explain some concepts which seem to be difficult for learners. As shown in the interviews with the teachers, as much as it may be a good strategy, CS needs to be used minimally. They also advise against over-reliance on CS as

they say it may have negative effects on the target language of Sesotho itself.

CONCLUSION

This article reported the findings of the first phase of a broader study of CS in Lesotho. It acknowledges that a peculiarity of Lesotho's bilingualism is that CS emanates from the British colonial legacy. The study focused on the use of CS in the formal teaching and learning of Sesotho as a mother tongue and/or the first language of all the interlocutors involved. It was found that although CS does occur during formal Sesotho lessons, teachers are actually inclined to forbid and banish it from their lessons. Paradoxically, however, there are forms of CS that have become so naturalised in that teachers and learners do not even seem to notice that they have actually spoken English in a Sesotho lesson.

The authors recommend that a study similar to this one but with a larger population should be conducted to collect more comprehensive data on this phenomenon. They also recommend further research on Sesotho teachers' attitudes towards CS in their Sesotho classes, comparing the influence each of these two languages has on the teaching and learning of the other.

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