

The Functions of Code Switching in ESL Classrooms of Sindh University

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Abstract

There are number of problems and issues regarding the use of first language (L1) in learning English language. In the English language classroom, both teachers and students seem not sure about the L1 use in the classes. Moreover, there is no policy communicated to the teachers and students of Sindh University regarding the code switching.

The present study aims to investigate the patterns and functions of code switching in English language classrooms. The context of the study was University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Data was collected through classroom observations and semi structured interviews. Teachers' and students' code switching was analyzed thematically. It was found that code switching was done for different purposes including translation, repetition, clarification of instructions, and socializing. The study also found that for teachers, there is no policy communicated to them for using code switching in their classes.

Introduction

The language is the ability to gain and utilize multifaceted system of interaction. Pakistan is a multilingual country where more than two languages are regional languages and English has gained the status of Second language in the country. It is not only used in the market but, homes, courtrooms, hospitals and educational institutes of Pakistan are also under the influence of English language. Almost all of the schools in Pakistan are using English as a medium of instruction.

The review of the related literature showed that speakers in multilingual and bilingual countries choose specific code during their conversation and they may also switch the code from one to another; this switching from one language to another is known as code-switching (Wei, 2013). Investigating the notion of code switching in diverse social and linguistic settings, most of the scholars' view was typically on types of code switching and its purposes (e.g., Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 2001; Poplack, 1980).

Code Switching

Though many researchers have defined the code switching (Nilep, 2006; Bullock and Toribio, 2009) yet code switching does not have a specific definition. Recently, Gardner-Chloros, (2009) has also stated it as the use different languages or dialects in the same speech by bilingual speakers. On the other hand, Bullock and Toribio (2009) explain it as the capability of bilinguals to alternate between their two languages without any effort. Cook (2013) recommended a new term debating that an 'L2 user' is one who is actively using a language other than their first language (L1) whatsoever their level of competence and this may be chosen term over bilingual. In spite of the ambiguity of what is expected by Cook's arguments 'actively using' this recommended term seems to cover participants of the present study.

Functions of Code Switching in Classroom

There are many studies focused on the functions of code switching in classroom (Van Lier, 1996; Moore, 2002). Auer (1998) remark that code switching occurs for a reason which might be social or communicative. Code switching can be extensively used as an interactional instrument (Gumperz, 1982; Dahl, 2010; Yamat, 2011). Code switching fulfills many social and academic functions in the classroom including clarifying subject content, explaining instructions, and confirming assistance. Moreover, code switching performs more than one function. For example, if a student in class speaks to teacher in English and says “INSHALLAH” in Arabic as in the sentence below:

Teacher: you need to work hard in Syntax.

Student: I will surely work hard **INSHALLAH**

Teacher: Good Luck

In the above example one might suggest that students switch code for cultural and religious reasons, yet it might be treated as communication purpose, learner might not be able to say it in English. This becomes difficult to decide whether it fulfills the function of communication or religious.

Framework for Studying Code Switching Functions

Since 1980s, an increasing number of scholars have focused on the purpose of code switching in an EFL classroom. Ferguson (2009), for example, suggests that purpose of code switching can be sited into three classes. 1) Code switching for construction and transmission of knowledge, 2) Code switching for classroom administration, 3) Code switching for social relations. It should be recognized that when observing at these functional classifications, the classification of code switching could be difficult and not essentially straight forward. Raschka, (2009) refers the difficulty of classifying the classification of code switching to many causes; including the locus and interval of the switch that can affect its purpose, as well as the nature of the switch when activated by another narrator, particularly teacher.

In this case, students tend not to vary the code used by their teacher or they respond the code used by the teacher, code switching may also occur as an outcome of more than one reason (Dahl, 2010).

Research Questions

Q1. What patterns of code switching are used in an EFL classes?

Q2. What purposes do these patterns of code switching serve in the classroom?

Research Design

The qualitative method was used to conduct the present study.

Sample

In order to find out the answers of the above stated questions, a case study was employed in the present study. The data was collected from four different classes of Sindh University. The tools of the study were classroom observation and interviews taken from four different teachers of Sindh University.

Data Collection

The data collection phase took place in the remedial classes of English. The English department of Sindh University is responsible to conduct these classes in the entire university. The aim of this course is to provide students the basic English language skills

which help them in their other courses also. This course is compulsory for first year students of the University.

The data was collected from four different remedial classes of four different teachers. Firstly, the classes were observed. Secondly, teachers were interviewed. Moreover, the duration of each class was 50 minutes and interview lasted for 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by using content method analysis. The present study is qualitative and it does not include the statistical analysis of the data. The main reason behind choosing the qualitative approach in present study was the difficulty in counting the number of occurrences of code switching.

The present study finds the illustrations of code switching and explores what functions they serve. The analysis was done by using discourse analysis method. Allwright and Bailey (1991) explain that discourse analysis is a method of analysis in an educational setting where spoken content of teacher and student is analyzed. Firstly, the analysis starts from observation in which the conversation of teacher and student was focused and the instances of code switching between Sindhi and English were analyzed. Poplack (1980) is of a view that types of code switching help in recognizing the occurrences of code switching in the interaction. Each class observation lasted for 40 minutes. The total data was transcribed from observation which was of 160 minutes. The language used in classroom interaction was English that switches to Sindhi at different timings of the lectures.

Code switching instances used in interaction were mostly at the time of instructions or solving the problems which students were face during the class. Code switching falls in three types intra-sentential, inter-sentential and tag switching (Poplack, 1980). Firstly, inter-sentential code switching takes place between sentences, clauses and turn takings. In the present data, inter sentential code switching occurs when explaining or instructing the comprehension exercises. Teachers and students both were involved in inter-sentential code switching. Secondly, intra- sentential code switching is switching within the sentences. In the present data this type of code switching was seen when evaluating the exercises, checking grammar and having feedback. In this type of situation the base language is Sindhi but the examples given are in English.

Functions of teachers' Code Switching

Code switching in English classrooms performs various functions. The functions of teachers' code switching include affective functions, for repetition, classroom management and many more.

Affective functions

While delivering the lecture, teachers may face problems in conveying certain concepts and ideas. These problems seem to disturb the teachers, whether they are in the class or outside the class. One of the most common reasons for code switching is for affective purpose. Affective functions are those functions where teacher and students express their emotional feelings like 'anger'. The data of the present study shows affective functions in teachers' code switching where they express their feeling in first language rather than English.

Extract:

Student: May I drink water?

Teacher: how many times will you go?

Student: Maam..

Teacher: Maam... **Cha mtlb Maam** (What do you mean by?).

In the above extract teacher switches code and repeats the word ‘Maam’ that seems that she loses her patience as the student does not seem to respond well. When interviewed, the teacher expresses her views, (I did not know about that). This extract shows that how teachers use first language unconsciously when expressing their feelings. Mujiono (2013) reports that English language teachers switch code for unfriendly feelings. Though, such switches for affective functions are not found sufficient enough in the present data.

Socializing Functions

Socializing function was seen in the classroom where teachers code switch to break a silence or to create a friendly environment in the class. In this study, code switching to Sindhi for greeting or breaking the silence was analyzed under the heading ‘socializing functions’.

Extract:

Teacher: Time is over... **Bas khatam kayo hany** (Finish it now).

In this case the teacher commented on this usage was similar to attract the attention of the students. This way of getting the students’ attention seems to be a polite way which performs socializing function. Uys and Van Dulm (2011) report that English language teachers use first language in the classroom for creating friendly environment in the class or for making humor. As an English language teacher this is my own personal experience also. Using first language in the classroom helps to create humor and releases the tension of the students.

Repetitive Functions

Teachers use code switching for repetitive functions also. The use Sindhi appear to serve the linguistic function which means to clarify the instructions or the task provided to the students. The repetition of the teachers perhaps aims to make sure that students understand the instructions.

Extract:

Teacher: **Page no: 26 te acho sab...** (come one page no 26)

Student: How are teacher?

Teacher: I’m good.

Teacher: **Students Page no: 26 kholyo...** (come on page no 26)

Discussion

The present study investigated the patterns of code switching and the function they perform in English language classes. In order to investigate the above stated purpose, four remedial English classes were observed of different teachers at Sindh University. In total around 160 minutes data was transcribed.

The results suggested that both teachers and students employed code switching for different functions and using variety of patterns. The most observed pattern of code switching was the discourse markers in Sindhi. The most frequent thing observed was the content delivery, which was in English but the overall explanation of the content was mostly done by switching the code into Sindhi. The purpose of using first language was to make students understand the content, to give them instructions and examples and to turn the moods of the students or to create humor. This would specify that English is used to deliver the content of the lesson but to manage the overall understanding of the content teachers switch the code. This switching would help to enable communication.

Conclusion

Teachers switched code for different purposes. The above stated functions seem to cover, social, pedagogical and management functions. Moreover, L1 seems to be the part of teachers' teaching methodology to teach the target language. It might be argued that when looking at the teachers' code switching, these functions may directly or indirectly serve the pedagogical functions. Teachers may use code switching for social functions also.

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Appendix: 1
Extracts of Teachers' Code Switching

Teacher 1
Remedial English
Classroom Observation

Teacher is greeting in Sindhi

- Student: Maam Paani pi achan (May I drink water?)
Teacher: How many times will you go?
Student: Maam
Teacher: Maam,, Cha mtlb Maam (what do you mean by Maam?)
Teacher: Time is over... Bsstudentskhtm kayo hanyae papers dio (Finish it now and give me papers)
Teacher: come on Page no. 26
Teacher: Page no. 26 te achosb (come on page no 26)
Teacher: Page no. 26 kholyo (open pg no)

Appendix: 2
Interview transcripts with a teacher

1. Interviewer (I): Starting with a general question, what do you know about code switching?
2. Teacher (T): Code switching is the phenomenon of shifting a language from L1 to the target language.
3. I : Hmmm, what is your view regarding that? In the classroom
4. T: I think it depends on the level of learner, if you have brighter students so the chances of code switching would be very less and if you have slow learners chances would be high.
5. I: okay, what about students' side?
6. T: from learners' side, I think, as a teacher if I switch code, slow learners would feel good in that.
7. I: and what about the brighter students,, what if they switch code?
8. T: ohh yes for them I think it's normal, because they have the knowledge.
9. I: What is the purpose behind your code switching as a teacher?
10. T: I as a teacher code switch because of multiple reasons, sometimes for clarifying the topic some times for making instructions clear and creating a relaxed environment in the class.
11. I: thanks a lot for your kind co operation
12. T: Thanks.