

Functions of Code-switching in Bilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

The significance of role of code switching and code mixing in classrooms where medium of instruction is second/foreign language is approved reality. Observations of bilingual/multilingual classrooms show that teachers use code switching and code mixing in different situations for different purposes. This study aims at knowing the functions of CS (code switching) and CM (code mixing), use teachers in classrooms and the significance of the functions. The data for this study would be collected from teachers, teaching at intermediate level, of government and private colleges, using survey technique. The data would be analyzed statistically using SPSS software. The finding of this study would develop awareness about the use of CS and CM in bilingual classrooms. This study is significant as it would create flexibility in teaching methodologies of teachers.

Keywords: Code, Code switching, code mixing, SL, FL

1. Introduction

In bilingual/multilingual societies, mixing of languages is a common phenomenon. In countries like Pakistan, a multilingual society, the code mixing is frequent part of speeches. In bilingual/multilingual classrooms of Pakistan where students and teachers know two or more languages, code mixing is common. In Pakistan where English language is given the status of compulsory subject and is used as medium of instruction at school and college level, teachers/educators certainly use code switching and code mixing. Martin-Jones (2003:6) explains that it is the routine of bilingual teachers and students to use code-switching as a helping tool to keep the flow of classroom talk. Another use of code-switching is the segregation of different types of communication: to indicate the change between brain storming and the start of the lesson; to draw the difference between the talk about managing classroom and talk regarding lesson topics; to point out a specific listener; to differentiate between reading a text from the discussion about the text.

Switching from one language/code to another is known as CS and mixing two or more languages/codes in one utterance is known as CM. Different scholars suggested different definitions of code, code switching and code mixing. Garden-Chloros (2009) explains "code is understood as a neutral umbrella term for languages, dialects, styles/registers, etc." (p.11). Code-switching is exchange of two or more languages within a statement or a discussion. (Hoffmann 1991:110). Mayers-Scotten (1993) illustrates both concepts as: happening of code switching is inevitable when a bilingual exchanges two languages while conversing with other bilingual whereas code mixing is the convergence of vocabulary items of different languages in a sentence.

Code switching is a topic of great interest. A great number of researchers have done research on it with different view points. This study is interesting to know the functions of code switching and code mixing in the class rooms. Teachers use code switching and code mixing in different situations to perform different activities. Karen Kow (2003) enumerated in her paper some feasible situations for code switching. Given are the few conditions,

- lack of one word in either language
- Some ideas are expressed easily in native language
- For clarification of misinterpretation
- To develop influence of communication for effective purpose
- One wishes to express group solidarity

Different researchers listed different functions of code switching and code mixing. Baker, C. (2006) listed the different functions of code switching. He says that code switching can be used to emphasize an important notion, to substitute the unfamiliar word in second language, to explain notion having no cultural identity with other language, to release tension and create humour, to introduce new topic.

Concerning the role of code switching and code mixing, there are different view points. Some say it a low strategy used by the teachers not proficient in target language use. They are of the view that it damages the proficiency of learners. Those teachers who favour the communicative technique in the classroom of foreign language learning do not tolerate even a single word of mother language. The advocators of target language view it as not compulsory for learners of target language to comprehend every word said by the teacher and they think that the process of learning is damaged by switching to the mother language. (F. Chambers, 1991; Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Macdonald, 1993). Some others take it as a useful tool in classrooms. Those who favour it take it as

an effective strategy in multiple aspects. Cook (2001) considers the use of code switching a natural response in a bilingual classroom. Probyn (2010) takes it a useful strategy to get desirable ends.

2. Literature View

According to Gumperz code switching is “the juxtaposition within the same speech ex-change of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems” (p.59). Cook takes it a process of “going from one language to the other in mid-speech when both speakers know the same languages” (p.83). Lightbown defines it “the systematic alternating use of two languages or language varieties within a single conversation or utterance” (p.598). In simple words, shifting from one language to another language during a speech is known as code switching while mixing of two or more languages in a sentence is identified as code mixing.

Much debate has been done on the issue of functions of code switching. These functions consist of translation of new words that are unknown, explanation of grammatical rules, class administration (Mingfa Yao, 2011), clarification (Ajmal Gulzar, 2010), stressing important notions, creating understanding and harmony with students, and assisting in apprehending by referring words of others.(Liu Jingxia, 2010; Eda Üstünel & Paul Seedhouse, 2005).

Code switching has also been received criticism but much has been delivered in its favour. Teachers meet in classrooms with such students as are totally unaware of the language, medium of instruction. In such cases the only helpful tool is the native language that is switched or mixed with foreign language by the teachers.

Teacher’s “code-switching is an effective teaching strategy when dealing with low English proficient learners”(Badrul Hisham Ahmad, 2009, p. 49). Li (2000) does not consider it inefficiency of bilingual speaker while speaking with other bilingual rather she takes it as a routine characteristic.

3. Research Methodology

The researcher of this study selected, cross-sectional survey technique as a tool to collect the data from the sample of population comprises on the bilingual teachers. The variables of this questionnaire are formed to collect the precise information related to the issue, this study interested in. Researchers interested in education research use survey research commonly. The researchers get information from people, large in number by asking questions. Gulzar (2010) quotes (Fraenkela & Wallen, 2000) putting questions about the issue to explore is known as survey. According to Gulzar (2010) Oppenheim (1992) clarifies the need of this design of research in the following words:

To investigate the link between variables, survey is done. There is similarity between laboratory test and survey design as in both the aim is the investigation of a particular hypothesis.

A considerable debate has been done on this interested issue, code-switching in classrooms of foreign language, around the world. Code-switching serves many pedagogical purposes in bilingual classrooms. Flyman-Mattson and Burenhult (1999) advocate that “teachers switch code whether in teacher-led classroom discourse or in teacher-student interaction, may be a sophisticated language use serving a variety of pedagogical purposes” (p. 25)

According to Martin-Jones (1995) the role of CS in bilingual classroom is:

Whilst the languages used in a bilingual classroom are bound to be associated with different cultural values, it is too simplistic to claim that whenever a bilingual who has the same language background as the learners switches into shared codes, s/he is invariably expressing solidarity with the learners. Code-switching is employed in more subtle and diverse ways in bilingual classroom communication. Teachers and learners exploit code contrasts to demarcate different types of discourse, to negotiate and renegotiate joint frames of reference and to exchange meaning on the spur of the moment (p. 98).

Liu Jingxia (2010) states the functions of code-switching in Chinese classrooms. She says the functions of code-switching are: “translation of unfamiliar words”, “explanation of grammar”, “managing class”, “ helping students apprehending difficulties” and “indicating sympathy and friendship to students”, “putting stress on important notions”, “citing sayings of others”, “shifting topics”, “getting students’ concentration”, “assessing the understanding”, etc.

Gulzar (2010) enumerates the different functions of code-switching, which include: “i. Linguistic insecurity, ii. Topic switch, iii. Affective functions, iv. Socializing functions, v. Repetitive functions.” According to the study of Guthrie (1984) Chinese code-switching serves five functions: i. translation, ii. we code iii. procedures and directions iv. clarification, and v. for checking understanding.

Olmedo-Williams (1981 in Soodeh Hamzehlou, Adlina Abdul & Elham Rahmani 2012) “describes nine categories of CS from her study of language mixing in classroom settings. These categories include emphasis, sociolinguistic play, clarification, accommodation, lexicalization, attracting attention, regulating behavior, and miscellaneous switches. She believes that lexicalization and clarification are related to the ability to express oneself better in the other language on a given topic.”

3.1 Analysis of functions of code switching in bilingual classrooms

Variables	Number of Subjects	%	Mean	S.D.
1. Starting New Topic				
Agree	24	60	1.4250	
Strongly Agree	15	37.5		
Disagree	1	2.5		
Strongly Disagree	0	0		
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0		
Total	40	100		
2. Lack of Vocabulary				
Agree	15	37.5	2.1750	1.1068
Strongly Agree	9	22.5		
Disagree	10	25		
Strongly Disagree	6	15		
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0		
Total	40	100		
3. Emphasis				
Agree	21	52.5	1.6250	.86789
Strongly Agree	16	40		
Disagree	1	2.5		
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5		
Neither agree nor disagree	1	2.5		
Total	40	100		
4. Clarification				
Agree	22	55	1.5500	.78283
Strongly Agree	16	40		
Disagree	1	2.5		
Strongly Disagree	0	0		
Neither agree nor disagree	1	2.5		
Total	40	100		
5. Translation				
Agree	22	55	1.6250	.80662
Strongly Agree	12	30		
Disagree	5	12.5		
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5		
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0		
Total	40	100		
6. Friendly environment				
Agree	18	45	2.2000	1.43581
Strongly Agree	9	22.5		
Disagree	6	15		
Strongly Disagree	1	2.5		
Neither agree nor disagree	6	15		
Total	40	100		
7. Assessing the understanding of students				
Agree	22	55	1.7250	1.03744
Strongly Agree	11	27.5		
Disagree	5	12.5		
Strongly Disagree	0	0		
Neither agree nor disagree	2	5		
Total	40	100		
8. Repetition				
Agree	21	52.5	1.9250	1.14102
Strongly Agree	5	12.5		
Disagree	12	30		
Strongly Disagree	0	0		
Neither agree nor disagree	2	5		
Total	40	100		

Total	40	100		
9. Explaining grammar				
Agree	21	52.5		
Strongly Agree	15	35		
Disagree	4	10	1.6500	.86380
Strongly Disagree	0	0		
Neither agree nor disagree	1	2.5		
Total	40	100		
10. Managing class				
Agree	17	42.5		
Strongly Agree	12	30		
Disagree	6	15	2.0250	1.16548
Strongly Disagree	3	7.5		
Neither agree nor disagree	2	5		
Total	40	100		

Starting new topic

The analysis shows that 24 subjects (60%) agreed with this function, starting new topic, of code switching. 15 subjects (37.5%) strongly agreed and 1 subject (2.5%) disagreed with the use of this function. No subject strongly disagreed and no subject remained neutral about this function. 1.4250 was the mean of the sample of this variable and .54948 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Teachers give significance to code-switching while switching the new topic as they want to make the understanding of students clear as much as possible. They do not take risk to convey everything in the target language. Flyman-Mattson and Burenhult (1999) quote two reasons: the teachers do not want students to misunderstand the message as it is very important, or they used code-switching to get the attention of the students.

Lack of vocabulary

The analysis shows that 15 subjects (37.5%) agreed and 10 subjects (25%) strongly agreed to the use of this function. 10 subjects (25%) disagreed and 5 subject (12.5%) strongly disagreed while no subject gave any response. 2.1750 was the mean of the sample and 1.10680 was standard deviation of this variable.

While communicating on particular topics, bilinguals face difficulties in choosing suitable words to speak at the moment. Aichuns (n.d.) says they are not bilingual in true sense as they acquire skills in the target language. There is possibility that at the moment of speaking, they do not remember the requisite word. Consequently, they move to the collection of lexemes of native language and choose the required words to express his views.

Emphasis

The result of the analysis shows that 21 subjects (52.2%) agreed and 16 subjects (40%) strongly agreed to the use of this function in bilingual classrooms. 1 subject (2.5%) disagreed and 1 subject (2.5%) strongly disagreed to the use of this function. 1 subject (2.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 1.6250 was the mean of the sample and .86789 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Code-switching is used to give emphasis. Some points, teachers think, need emphasis. They want to convey them effectively and properly. Consciously or unconsciously, they switch from target language to the mother language. Sometimes, they feel the need of citing the saying of native culture to stress the point, for this purpose the do code-switching. Eldridge (1996) asserts that “messages are reinforced; emphasized or clarified where the messages have already been transmitted in one code but not understood” (p. 303).

Clarification

The analysis shows that 22 subjects (55%) agreed and 16 subjects (40%) strongly agreed to the use of his function. 1 subject (2.5%) disagreed and no subject strongly disagreed. I subject (2.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 1.5500 was the mean of the sample and .78283 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Aichuns (n.d. in Ajmal Gulzar 2010) says the anxiety of teachers about the unknown vocabulary items instigate them to code-switching. When teacher feels that students are not apprehending the meanings in target language vocabulary, then s/he translates in Chinese language for clarification. Eldridge (1996 in Gulzar 2010) asserts that when messages are not comprehended in one language (target language) they are explained in other language (mother language).

Translation

The result of the analysis shows that 22 subjects (55%) agreed and 12 subjects (30%) strongly agreed to the use of this function. 5 subjects (12.5%) disagreed and 1 subject (2.5%) strongly disagreed. No subject remained neutral to the use of this function in bilingual classroom. 1.6250 was the mean of the sample and .80662 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Krashen (1985) has view about translation:

The teacher does not speak much in a language and translates what he said in the target language. When translation occurs, students do not pay attention to the English language (target language). Moreover, the teacher does not use different techniques like gestures, realia or paraphrase to make the meaning understandable in English language, as the translation offers itself. (p. 81)

Creating friendly environment

The result of the analysis shows that 18 subjects (45%) agreed and 9 subjects (22.5%) strongly agreed to the use of this function. 6 subjects (15%) disagreed and 1 subject (2.5%) strongly disagreed. No subject agreed nor disagreed to the use of this function. 2.8000 was the mean of the sample and 1.43581 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Sometimes, teacher does code-switching to be friendly with students. He tries to socialize with students to get the positive results. Sometimes, he does code-switching to motivate them by quoting the maxims of the native language. Sometimes, he uses it to show his feelings of pleasure and wrath. Crystal (1987 in Gulzar 2010) explains that when a person wants to show unity to a socially recognized group of people, he usually takes help from switching. When the receiver reacts with the same switch, a relationship is developed between encoder and decoder. (p. 14).

Accessing the understanding

This analysis shows 22 subjects (55 %) agreed and 11 subjects (27.5%) strongly agreed. 5 subjects (12.5%) disagreed and no subject strongly disagreed to the use of this function. 2 subjects (5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 1.7250 was the mean of the sample and 1.03744 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Teachers want their students to understand their speech therefore, they do not take the risk of convey their speech just in L2. To access the understanding to the students they switch from L2 to L1. In friendly environment they access the understanding to the students. If they feel need to say the speech again they do it in native language. Flyman -Mattson and Burenhult (1999) give major reason of teachers' code-switching from L2 to L1 is that they want students to comprehend their communication. Gumperz (1982) and Kamwangamalu and Lee (1991 in Brice 2000: 102) noticed the repetitive function for assessing the understanding.

Repetitive Function

The result of this analysis shows that 21 subjects (52.5%) agreed and 5 subjects (12.5%) strongly agreed. 12 subjects (30%) disagreed and no subject strongly disagreed to the use of this function. 2 subjects (5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 1.9250 was the mean of the sample and 1.14102 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Flyman-Mattson and Burenhult (1999) describe that "the repetition in the first language can be either partial or full and is often expanded with further information, but more frequently code-switching is used as a repetition of the previously uttered sentences" (p. 11).

Explaining Grammar

The analysis shows 21 subjects (52%) agreed and 15 subjects (35%) strongly agreed. 4 subjects (10%) disagreed and no subject strongly disagreed. 1 subject (2.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed to the use of this function in bilingual classroom. 1.6500 was the mean of the sample and .86380 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Liu Jingxia (2010) gives the view of Polio and Duff: teachers do not show their willingness for teaching grammar in foreign language. They give some reasons as, "time saving, grammar oriented exams and worries about too much pressure on the studies". According to her Martin Jones stated teachers' teaching grammar sequence as L2-L1-L2.

Managing Class

The analysis shows 17 subjects (42.5%) agreed and 12 subjects (30%) strongly agreed to the use of this function. 6 subjects (15%) disagreed and 3 subjects (7.5%) strongly disagreed. 2 subjects (5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. 2.0250 was the mean of the sample and 1.16548 was the standard deviation of this variable.

Class organization also involves the selection of language. Some teachers switch to the mother language after having tried vain attempts to manage the class in the target language. Frustration comes out through native language. Instructions are given in native language to perform different activities. Franklin observed 68% of the teachers favoured 8% L1 for activity instruction.

4. Remarks on the findings

The result of this analysis showed that a large number of teachers gave their consent to the use of the functions of code-switching in bilingual classrooms. The opinions of teachers were different from one another about the functions of code-switching in bilingual classrooms but no one rejected any function. The statistical data explained that teachers used the above mentioned functions for the purpose of code-switching according to the need of situation. Teachers used code-switching to accommodate their own and students' needs.

5. Conclusion

Findings and analysis of this study highlight that the functions of code-switching in bilingual classrooms occur especially with reference to Pakistani classrooms. Teachers prefer the functions of code-switching in different conditions to fill the communication gap. As a result, this study suggests that the use of code-switching as a strategy should be encouraged to teach the foreign language in bilingual classrooms. Students' level should also be kept in mind while using code-switching. Aguirre (1988) describes that in classrooms where students and teachers are culturally and linguistically varied, the code-switching is inevitable as teachers use it as a strategy to learn students the target language. Code-switching offers a chance both for students and teachers to communicate without any restriction in the classroom. The outcome of this investigation shows that the use of CS is not a sin. Though, the use of CS receives much criticism but still in the light of the result of this study, we can say that the use of CS is significant in bilingual classrooms.

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