

EFL Teachers' Attitude toward Code Switching: A Turkish Setting

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Received: July 23, 2013 Accepted: August 19, 2013 Published: October 23, 2013

doi:10.5296/ijl.v5i5.4043 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v5i5.4043>

Abstract

Code switching, that is, the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same discourse, has been the focus of attention in regard with foreign language learning and teaching. The fact, however, is that the reasons foreign language teachers utilize this strategy is not the same, and various kinds and manners of code switching have been noticed. What's more, it can be employed for a whole range of different instructional cognitive, affective, and behavioral purposes. Different skills and components of language can be fostered through the application of code switching in case the proper meticulous care and attention is given to the tasks. In terms of affective variables, it can remove students' emotional barriers such as anxiety, lack of self confidence and weak self esteem in the act of language learning. In this study, an effort was made to see functions, manner, reasons, and contributions of Code-switching to the process of English language teaching from teachers' point of view. To this end, 20 teachers from the two Turkish universities responded to interviews questions on Code Switching. The analysis of the answers showed some commonalties and differences in their attitudes towards the inclusion of this concept in language teaching classes.

Keywords: Code switching, Bilingualism, Culture, Facilitative effect, Debilitative effect

1. Introduction

In this study, the different cognitive and affective functions of codeswitching have been analyzed. The manner, frequency, functions, reasons, etc of this concept have been extensively expounded.

2. Review of Literature

Code-switching is defined as a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse (Numan & Carter, 2001). It stands for a transition between the native language of the students and the foreign language which is aimed to be acquired. As Trudgil (2000) argues, speakers' code-switching is a means for modifying language for personal intentions. This modifying accordingly may facilitate the second language acquisition by means of a transfer from L1 to L2. Haliday (1975) emphasizes the communicative function of code-switching as it fulfills the interpersonal function of communication. In the same vein, Gumperz (1982) holds that Code-switching can facilitate some aspects of communication, such as conveying precise meaning, appealing to the literate and illiterate, facilitating communication, stressing a point, capturing attention and communicating more effectively.

In ELT classrooms, students apply code-switching for various functions encompassing equivalence, floor-holding and reiteration. Equivalence stands for using equivalents of some lexical items in the target language and code-switching to the native language. Thus, equivalence function provides students an opportunity to fill in the gaps resulting from the linguistic incompetence in the target language. Floor-holding function is filling the stopgap with the native language use during a conversation in target language. Another function is reiteration which means messages in target language are repeated by the students' native language so that the student will convey the message aimed to be given in the target language by the help of native language. As Skiba (1997) suggests, code-switching serves for continuity in speech by the help of transference of meaning between L1 and L2.

Teachers also apply code-switching usually automatically and unconsciously in most ELT classrooms. However, it may be helpful in terms of providing a smooth transition between two languages. According to Mattsoon and Mattson (1999), this code-switching of teachers function differently in ELT classrooms. One of the functions it serves is topic switching which implies using the native language while giving instructions of grammar rules of the target language. Here, code switching facilitates students' comprehending the rules of L2 by the help of L1. Another function is the affective one which enhances building solidarity and achieving a relaxing learning atmosphere. This may help weaker students since they may need L1 to comprehend the rules of L2.

A substantial amount of research carried out in different contexts demonstrated that code-switching can be categorized into different kinds and further it can be used for a panoply of purposes in the context of class. Investigating the use of code-switching in a Turkish high school where English was taught as a second language, Elridge (1996) found out that students at elementary and lower intermediate classes applied code-switching in their educational conversations. Further, Relying on their observations at three Kenyan schools where English

was taught as a second language, Merritt et al. (1992) found out that there were four different kinds of code-switching. One of them is reformulation across codes, which means saying the same thing using a different language. The other one is code-switching which is used in the content of the activity which stands for bringing new information to the discourse by using another code. The third one is code-switching which is used in translation or word substitution within one sentence. The last one is code-switching which is used with interactional particles. Borlongan (2009), on the other hand, found out that 7.5% of all the English language teachers in Philippines English language classrooms applied at least one example of code-switching.

Ahmad (2009) conducted a research on a Malaysian English language classroom. The results showed that learners supported teachers' code-switching and there was a positive correlation between teachers' code-switching and learners' affective support as well as teachers' code switching and learners' learning success. Rahimi and Jafari's (2011) qualitative research which was conducted on Iranian EFL teachers and students revealed that use of code-switching was considerable in four classrooms. It has also been found out that code-switching was most commonly applied while doing activities in classrooms so as to check the correctness of what they did, to correct misunderstandings and to get confirmation of their teachers. Especially in vocabulary and grammar activities, teachers were found out to apply code-switching like using equivalent words or expressions in Persian as well as replying in Persian when students code-switch to check whether they had learned the grammatical point correctly.

As code-switching is accepted as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, its usage and function may vary from culture to culture. Such being the case, EFL teachers' view of code-switching from different cultures may worth examining. In the light of these considerations, this qualitative study was an attempt to explore functions, manner, reasons, and contributions of Code-switching from the point of view of the teachers teaching at Turkish Universities. In effect, the study addressed the following questions.

- 1) Do you code-switch in your classes? Why or why not? (e.g. to facilitate the learning process, to check if the subject has been comprehended, to reduce anxiety and make a relaxing learning atmosphere)
- 2) How do you code-switch? (for e.g. filling the stopgaps, for word substitution)
- 3) How does code-switching contribute to learning process?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Twenty teachers (male = 5 and female = 15) from the two Turkish universities, Halic University and Bahcesehir University, took part in the study. The teachers were of different nationalities including American, Belarus, British, Canadian, Iranian, and Turkish. Eleven teachers had approximately ten years teaching experience. Three teachers had more than ten years and six teachers had less than six years teaching experiences.

3.2 Data Collection

The main source of data for the present study was individual semi-structured interviews took place between the researcher and each teacher. The interviews were structured around

functions, manner, reasons, and contributions of Code-switching that allowed the teachers to reveal their perceptions about the given aspects of code-switching.

4. Findings

Instructor 1

Gender: Female

Age: 50

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching Experience: 25 years

- 1) I practice code switching in my classes to reduce anxiety and make a relaxing learning atmosphere.
- 2) I use stopgaps and word substitutions as well as switching to the native language completely especially to tell a joke or give examples from a local context
- 3) I think it relieves students momentarily and help them reconcentrate after the brief pause the native language provides.

Instructor 2

Gender: Female

Age: 30

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching Experience: 5 years

- 1) Yes I do, in order to facilitate the learning process to check if the subject has been comprehended to reduce anxiety and make a relaxing learning atmosphere.
- 2) Sometimes I feel the need to codeswitch when I see empty faces in the class, most of the time they do not understand the sentence if there are too many words, the meaning of which they do not know. Then first I paraphrase the sentence in the target language if I believe that it still does not make any sense to them, then I explain it in the native language. Sometimes I add some examples from their daily life for example from TV shows, advertisements or popular books in the native language.
- 3) I really helps them to understand the thing they are learning or what they are reading when they hear the explanation in their native language.

Instructor 3

Gender: Female

Age: 34

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching Experience: 10 years

- 1) Yes sometimes, mostly to make the students relaxed or to initiate some laughter.
- 2) For filling the stopgaps or for word substitution
- 3) It does not, but making a comfortable learning atmosphere is possible. It may make students feel comfortable while speaking as well. So they won't be afraid of making mistakes.

Instructor 4

Gender: Female

Nationality: Turkish

Age: 28

Teaching Experience: 5 years

- 1) I do prefer codeswitching in some classes while using abstract terms, students may not be always following the lecture. So in order to prevent this, code switching may be applied during the class. But rather than talking in the native language, I prefer them to tell the word first, if they already know then I continue with the target language.
- 2) When students answer the questions wrong, or when they know the answer but cannot find the words to describe it, I code-switch. First I make sure that they know the answer in native language and then we try to choose the right words to describe it in target language.
- 3) I think it contributes to a certain extent, if it is applied more than enough, students may get the impression to bilingual class (which is not the case), however if it is applied rarely then students will see that this is only a helping process to learn and they take it as a little help to them.

Instructor 5

Gender: Female

Age: 31

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching Experience: 9 years

- 1) I sometimes code switch in my classes in order to attract students' attention and involve students in the discussions. It also helps to facilitate the learning process, to check if the subject has been comprehended and to make a relaxing learning atmosphere.
- 2) I sometimes code-switch unintentionally especially if some stopgaps don't have any equivalent in the target language.
- 3) Students' comprehension of the subject may be facilitated specially when they encounter

new words and they can be more actively involved when they hear a word they are familiar with.

Instructor 6

Gender: Female

Age: 40

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching Experience: 10 years

- 1) Yes I do. I don't code switch deliberately. Sometimes it happens.
- 2) I generally code switch for word substitution and clarify the meaning.
- 3) Introducing the subject in two different languages may foster the learning process.

Instructor 7

Gender: Female

Age: 40

Teaching Experience: 15 years

- 1) I code switch for all the given reasons above.
- 2) I code switch by re-explaining in complete Turkish, not word substitution but in forms of paragraphs.
- 3) If teaching is literature and content-based, this method helps. Students understand the information in the text much better.

Instructor 8

Gender: male

Age: 38

Nationality: Canadian

Teaching experience: 8 years in prep school

- 1) Yes, it's a tactful acknowledgement of my respect for the students' culture and a means of establishing and maintaining rapport. It also gets big laughs when used comically.
- 2) The best reactions are usually the non language sounds people make oh = ha or tsk tsk tsk or eeeeeeeeh that are specific to the culture, also its useful to respond in the students; L1 when you overhear them talking to each other which lets them know you are listening. Occasionally to clarify instructions.
- 3) When done sparingly, and when using language students already know, it improves atmosphere in the class.

In response to the first question asking whether or not he embarks on codeswitching the instructor A at Bahcesehir University states that code switching is a sign of respect and reverence towards students' cultural background. He believes in the positive role code switching can play in acknowledgement and appreciation of students' ethnic diversity. As idiomatically expressed 'one man's meat is the other man's poison or one man's trash is the other man's treasure'. To him, this is an indication of individual differences among students and codeswitching is considered an effective way to cater to the whole gamut of students' ethnic and individual differences.

He also mentions the application of codeswitching for creation of a jovial lively and hilarious environment in the class. Codeswitching can remove the negative affective factors like anxiety and lack of self confidence. What's more, he refers to the role of code switching in establishing relations with students, He discusses the possibility of the function of codeswitching as a means of connecting emotionally to the students.

With respect to the second question asking about the manner of codeswitching and its different manifestations, the instructor at Bahcesehir University points out that non language sounds people make oh = ha or tsk tsk tsk or eeeeeeeeh that are specific to the culture. These sounds are not available in English so he has to resort to codeswitching to remove the gap between Turkish and English phonetic systems.

In response to the third question asking about the contribution of CS to language teaching procedure, he reiterates and emphasizes its positive influence on the classroom atmosphere or learning environment. Students' satisfaction with classroom environment can be boosted through CS.

Instructor 9

Gender: female

Age

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching experience: 9 to ten years

- 1) Yes I do, i switch to Turkish when I feel it might be easier to explain a point through translation.
- 2) Sometimes it makes things easier instead of giving long complicated explanations, the teacher can resort to translation ,on the other hand, if often resort to students' native language , they expect you to do so all the time.

Instructor 10"

Gender: female

Age: 29

Nationality: Belarus

Teaching experience: 8 years

- 1) Yes I do, I hate to do that in classes sometimes students cannot understand some grammatical structures in English also I do that so as to check the students' right understanding of students' academic vocabulary that we study, They need to know the right word in their own language. Our students are not the kids at the age of three four who can learn the language only by being exposed to L2, they already have the images of their own language, that's why I believe that they should know the equivalents in their L1.
- 2) I do that while explaining grammar and translating academic vocabulary to make sure they understand it in their own language. There is another issue here, our students do not know some grammatical structures in their own language, they don't know the rules, the ways of formation so it will be impossible to teach something with knowing that students understand it in their own L1.
- 3) It contributes to the learning process, students become more conscious of the things they learn. When there is consciousness in things you learn, the learning is faster, easier and more effective and long lasting.

Bahcesehir University Instructor discusses the positive role of Turkish as students; first language and the idea that the words and structures of first language can be effectively employed by teachers through the process of CS to teach grammatical structures and vocabulary items in a more efficient and meaningful manner, The experience of learning a first language can be successfully systematically utilized by teachers and students through codeswitching. She also discusses the idea of students; consciousness and awareness of the learning process and mentions the consciousness raising potential of CS in this regard. CS could be a parameter involved in fostering students' critical language awareness.

Instructor 11

Gender: female

Age: 35

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching experience: 10 years

- 1) Yes because Turkish student wants Turkish explanations but in all classes.
- 2) They try to find out the meaning in Turkish after a time they ask me to make a proper explanation in Turkish.
- 3) They feel relaxed and more comfortable, but this is not always true, students should be encouraged to use the target language specially in writing classes it is needed.

This Bahcesehir University Turkish instructor states that students need Turkish explanations so that they can enjoyably learn English and understand the meanings.

Instructor 12

Gender: female

Age: 32

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching experience: about 10 years

- 1) Yes, I codeswitch in my classes because i prefer myself differently in classes to engage my students.
- 2) I adjust my actions and words to fit the acceptable standards of the classes and I am interacting with or to meet my students expectations. I submit specific grammatical rules and specific syntactic boundaries for where code switching might occur.
- 3) Sometimes students switch when they don't know a word in one language, most mulitlinguals have a better language but all depends on the topic and speech partners.

Instructor 13

Gender: male

Age: 26

Nationality: British

Teaching experience: 4 years

- 1) Yes, 1) to expect students to be interested in languages, the teacher must show interest in languages, 2) some direct translations are erroneous false friends, different usage and nuanced. Knowing these differences is important in teaching correct usage.
- 2) Checking understanding of grammar points, ie, ‘‘how do i say. shundan alabilir miyim? in English? ‘’ this is used sparingly but it is engaging and useful to students as reflects the process by which they communicate in a foreign language context, ie, Turkish thoughts and English speech.
- 3) If it becomes a standard part of the lesson, students can get very quickly used to simple translation and slack off from putting language two into practice, used sparingly it has a great impact in consolidating newly learned structures word and phrases

This Bahcesehir University instructor talks of false friends and cognates which can be used for improvements in teaching vocabularies. Furthermore, he argues that in case the teacher shows his interest in other languages, specially students; mother tongue, the same interest and respect to English is evoked in students and the teacher can emotionally share and connect to students. Moreover, students' engagements in tasks and assignments can, in his opinion, be increased by application of Turkish sentences like ‘‘shundan alabilir miyim’’ showing the process of CS. He also gives a note of caution bewaring teachers of the fact that excessive use of Cs could be counterproductive rather than productive leading to students' withdrawal from authentic

English production and their sluggishness and spoonfeeding.

Instructor 14

Gender: male

Age: 32

Nationality: Iranian

Teaching experience: 9 years

- 1) Yes I do, in order to facilitate the learning and comprehensibility.
- 2) I prefer to use only one or two Turkish words while switching.
- 3) It can enhance comprehensibility and intimacy in the classroom, being able to show that you can understand the 1st language of the learners can help them to feel relaxed.

This Iranian Bahcesehir University instructor focuses on the idea of the appropriacy of the given input which must be commensurate with students' background information and schemata. To his opinion, CS can provide the students with the comprehensible input which is conducive to effective learning and removal of affective barriers such as feeling of stress and insecurity.

Instructor 15

Gender: female

Age: 48

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching experience: 27 years

1. I do from time to time, actually it sometimes happens naturally, I think it helps me.....
 - a. When i want to express my feelings about what is going on in the class
 - b. When i feel that if i uttered a few sentences in Turkish I could convey nuances in meaning better and quicker,
 - c. To increase students understanding of L2, using L1 learning experience,
 - d. To clarify meaning or to avoid any misunderstandings
 - e. To save time
 - f. To reinforce & and back up what i have taught in L2
 - g. To attract students attention
2. During my classes, I call students by using their names, however, when i call them ‘‘arkadashlar’’, my students can easily comprehend that there is something wrong or that i am about to make an announcement, similarly, while doing exercise on relative and noun clauses, i may code switch if i feel that it will help students understand it better.

3. I think it does not undermine the learning process at all and can be used to build the rapport between teacher and students. Of course, it all depends on how much, how often you code switch

Instructor 16

Gender: female

Age: 24

Nationality: USA

Teaching experience: 3 years

- 1) No because I am not Turkish and have international students in my classes, I occasionally use 1 or 2 words.
- 2) If there is a vocabulary word that i know but it is really difficult for the students to understand.
- 3) Contribute: it can make time more efficient by saving time to explain something also students are obviously going to translate nearly everything so we aren't stopping them by code switching.

Undermine: it can become a crutch and may not force students to develop their sociolinguistic and strategic competences, students need to develop the ability to use circumlocution and translating by steps this skills.

This American instructor at Bahcesehir University tends not to use codeswitching due to the simple reason that she has a low command of Turkish language. She uses CS very sparingly. She also appeals to CS when trying to teach very difficult words. She also finds CS effective in saving time in classes since explanations in English can be very complicated and time consuming at times.

Instructor 17

Gender: female

Age: 35

Nationality: Turkish

Teaching experience: 10 years

- 1) Yes because Turkish student want Turkish explanations but in all classes.
- 2) They try to find out the meaning in Turkish after a time they ask me to make a proper explanation in Turkish.

They feel relaxed and more comfortable, but this is not always true, students should be encouraged to use the target language specially in writing classes it is needed.

5. Concluding Remarks

Nearly all the instructors at Haliç University resort to code-switching to facilitate language learning, to provide students with a more relaxing learning atmosphere since students seem to feel more comfortable when they encounter familiar words in native language within the target language context. Inclusion of native language in the teaching process provides students with a more comfortable learning atmosphere and reduces affective filter by removing anxiety which hinders interaction in language learning. Students are more actively involved in learning since the feeling of familiarity provided by code-switching increases their motivation. Some instructors stated that they sometimes code-switch to make a joke more understandable, thus they can create a funny, hilarious environment in the classroom. This also shows that it contributes to learning process as a warm up tool as well as a facilitator to overcome ambiguity.

Some ELT instructors state that codeswitching should not be employed by the teachers for all their instructional activities, it may be used as a helping tool nonetheless. Other teachers stated that when students encounter difficult words, they may need word substitutes so that vocabulary learning may be facilitated by the help of code-switching.

Furthermore, In teaching literature, code-switching functions in terms of the objectives of teaching literature. So, most of the literature instructors claimed that codeswitching help them to make the content more comprehensible. They even resort to translation to make figures of speech understandable and clarify themes. Teaching content is more essential in literature classes since all the students are assumed to have the necessary knowledge of foreign language as they all have completed the prep classes successfully and they are considered as students at the advanced level of English. Since foreign language learning requires a fluent practise of target language, some ELT teachers do not approve of the frequent use of code-switching whereas they sometimes use it sparingly to clarify the instructions. These examples show how extensively code- switching functions depends on the course objectives.

To sum up, it may be concluded that all the instructors at Haliç University resort to code-switching in a sense. However its function and frequency depend on their course objectives. The common view of all the instructors is that it serves as a facilitator since it helps students comprehend the instructions and meanings of new words as well as foster students' involvement in the learning process within a relaxing environment since it provides them with a feeling of relief by the help of familiarity offered by the native language.

Similarly, Bahcesehir University instructors referred to the facilitative role of code-switching in clarification of complex grammatical points and vocabulary items as well as removal of students' negative feelings of anxiety, stress, demotivation, insecurity, and boredom. Moreover, they reiterated the fact that code-switching can establish a jovial relaxing pacifying classroom environment which could be otherwise stifling repressing and depressing. Added to that, they talked of the role of CS in provision of the appropriate comprehensible input germane to students' current level of knowledge and information. Cultural diversities, individual idiosyncrasies and ethnic discrepancies were not ignored by teacher at BAU. They clearly specified the importance of code-switching in catering to these differences. It may be pointed out, however, that an American instructor was categorically against application of Turkish

words and found it debilitating. She believes that using Turkish in a culturally heterogeneous class encompassing different cultural and ethnic backgrounds can be a waste of time and energy or probably unfair to the students of non-Turkish origin.

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