Learners Use of Code Switching in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom

Azam Jamshidi, Mahdieh Navehebrahim

M.A Student in Educational Administration, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch.
M.A. in Linguistic and English Language Studies, School of Humanities, Univeristi Sains Malaysia.

Abstract: This paper discusses the application of L1 in EFL classrooms, where English is taught as a foreign language. The main objective of this study is to determine the effects of using L1 in an EFL classroom. The subjects level of proficiency in English were among the beginning, advanced and intermediate and levels. The students and the teacher in this study were speakers of Persian as L1 and of English as L2. Based on the data collected from the students’ responses to the questionnaire, this study contributes to the effectiveness of using mother tongue. A switch to L1, whether initiated by the teacher or the student, aims to increase the efficiency of information conveyed. The findings of the study reveal that students who use Persian during the class feel more comfortable and enjoy greater competence.

Key words: Code Switching, EFL classroom, Persian, mother tongue.

INTRODUCTION

In most learning styles especially in a foreign context code switching is used for maintaining communication. Code-switching is known to be a widespread phenomena among bilinguals where speakers use their native tongue L1 and their second language L2 in different domains. By analyzing the bilingual pedagogical practice in an academic institute, this paper shows how code switching can be used in the classroom to assist students overcome communication problems in three EFL classrooms among subjects coming from beginning, intermediate and advanced levels.

1.1 Diverse Definitions Of Code Switching:

According to David Crystal (2003), the term code is defined as “a set of conventions for converting one signaling system into another”. Code-switching is defined as the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent. The term has come to the fore in sociolinguistics, where it is mainly used as a neutral label for any system of communication involving language. It avoids sociolinguistics to commit themselves to such terms having as dialect, language or variety. David Crystal (2003) states that the linguistic behavior referred to code switching ,code-shifting or within a language, style-shifting, and code mixing “involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another: a sentence begins in one language, then makes use of words or grammatical features belonging to another” (pp. 78-79).

The linguistic behavior referred to code switching, code mixing, code-switching or within a language, style-switching, according to David Crystal (2003), “involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another: a sentence begins in one language, then makes use of words or grammatical features belonging to another” (pp. 78-79). Jacks C.Richard and Rhichard Schmidt (2002) describe code switching when a speaker makes a change from one language to another language. This change can occur when one speaker uses a language during a conversation, and the other speaker replies in a different language; or when a speaker starts his-conversation in a language, then changes it to another language in the middle of his speech. Code switching can be a sign of cultural solidarity or distance and code selection as the selection of a particular language situation. People use a code for certain purposes for instance, in certain situations and for certain individuals code selection depends on factors such as, age, gender, proficiency levels and educational background of the subject. They defined code mixing as “The process of mixing two codes or languages without making a change in the topic. This process is common among bilingual and multilingual people. For instancewhen it takes place among bilingual friends in an informal context. Grosjean (1982) defines a code switch whether it is just a word, phrase or sentence ; as a complete shift to the other language whereas a borrowing is a word or a short expression that is adapted phonologically and morphologically to the language being spoken’ (Grosjean 1982: 308). Code is defined as “any systems of signals which can be used for sending a massage, a term which is used instead of language, speech variety, or dialect. People use “code” to stress the uses of a language or language variety in a certain community” (p.p 79-81).
1.2 Code Switching In Second Or Foreign Language Acquisition:

Code switching in second or foreign language acquisition is a linguistic behavior for developing bilinguals in bilingual learning or multilingual contexts. Early studies about such subject were done in bilingual contexts in the United States, with the objective of investigating first the functions of code switching in the speaking of bilingual teachers and with which some languages, usually English or Spanish, were employed to perform different functions (Martin-Jones, 1995).

According to Clyne (2000), code-switching is the alternative use of two languages either within a sentence or between sentences. Also, this contrasts with transference, where a single item is transferred from languages A to B (or vice versa), whether integrated into the grammatical or phonological system of the recipient language or not.

In the mid 1990s, researchers focused on the way code-switching related to the interaction between teachers and learners in a bilingual classroom. Later, researchers examined the topics which were related to teachers’ and learners’ use of code switching in an educational context.

Recent studies carried out in monolingual foreign language classroom, have also shown that teachers and students use code switching when interacting with each other in educational context ( Anton and Dicamilla, 1999; Flyman-Matsson and Barenhutt, 1999; Braga, 2000; Cipriani, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Moreira, 2001; Bergsleithner, 2002). While it was investigated such aspects as humor, participation strategies and grammar in EFL context, the researchers observed that beginners use code switching as well as intermediate and advanced learners of English.

1.3 Literature Review:

The main reasons why learners’ code switching had not been studied in the 1970s-1980s was the fact that learners were never allowed to code switch freely (Legonhausen, 1991). During these years, the traditional and stereotyped view of code switching was defined as a completely haphazard mixture of two languages (Legenhause 1991). Traditionally, SLA has been considered as L2 acquisition in a more or less formal setting: the pronunciation of an L2, the grammar of L2 etc (Ellis, 2000; Gass & Selinker, 2001; de Bot, et al, 2005).

Simon (2001) raises the question whether the methodology used for analyzing social code-switching is adequate in the classroom context. Code-switching can be used as part of an actual teaching methodology. When the teacher is aware of the language of the students, the classroom is a setting that potentially uses code-switching. Code-switching is necessary in the classroom if the teacher and students share the same language and should be regarded as a natural part of bilingual’s behavior. Systematic investigation of learners’ code-switching are undertaken by Arnfast and Jorgensen (2003), which show how code-switching may develop into a bilingual competence among learners within the first year of intensive training.

Bilingual teachers use two languages to teach the academic content. Within the context of lessons, they switch between the languages in at least three ways: (a) spontaneously, (b) directly, (c) intentionally. Teachers may decide immediately when L1 should be used and when a switch to L2 is appropriate in order to enable comprehension and meaningful involvement of the students (Cook, 2001). However, teachers are unaware of the fact that they are switching; switches are made unconsciously (Tikunoff, 1985; Ovando & Collier, 1985; Mattson & Burenhult, 1999).

Radolphi Jacobson (1981) proposed a model which incorporates the use of code-switching in the teaching of content courses in bilingual courses. There are agreements and disagreements to the application of two or more languages in the same context. The NCA resulted from a desire to bring together the languages the child acquires in a way that would further the child’s language development and, at the same time, lead to satisfactory school performance. In Jacobson’s research, the following issue addressed:” (1) the extent to which the child’s native language must be developed for success in learning a second language; (2) the extent to which the home language should be used in school; (3) the extent to which first language maintenance in the primary grades would not interfere with the transition to English in postprimary education; (4) the extent to which the use of both languages would lead to an understanding of the bilingual functioning of some sectors of our society; and (5) the extent to which school subject could be learned through two languages.” These issues are discussed in terms of the curriculum, the social situation of the classroom, the content lesson, and various aspects of staff development and teacher training.

Code-switching is “a natural and purposeful phenomenon, which facilitates both communication and learning.”(Eldridg, 1996). In recent years many studies have been carried out in educational contexts around the world in the field of code-switching, indicate that both teachers and learners use code-switching to communicate and interact in the foreign language classroom. (Anton and Dicamilla; Brage, 2000; cipriani, 2001; Macaro,2001; Martinez, 2001; Mariera, 2001; Bergsleithner, 2002; Turnbull, 2002; Arnfast and argensen, 2003 ; Melo. 2005).
Braga (2002), conducted a study on humor in a beginner EFL classroom. In the study he indicated that participants use of code-switching was used as a strategy which signals humorous situations through correcting activities.

In other words, code switching makes a comfortable atmosphere in the EFL classroom under investigation. A study of Turkish high school English classes found that code-switching is seen as a highly purposeful way that is related to educational aims (Eldridge 1996:303).

Bergsleithner (2000), investigated a study on grammar and interaction in a pre-intermediate EFL classroom. The researcher stated that learners use code-switching to express themselves better during interaction and negotiation of the meaning and form. Burden (2000) conducted a study on 290 university students. He found that 73 students thought native teachers and students should speak code-switching in the classroom.

Schweers (1999) conducted a research into the field of code-switching, and found that a high percentage (about 88.7) of the participants felt that the use of mother tongue in their English classes is effective. Also, if the learners try to ignore the use of mother tongue in English classes, may cause that their identities are threatened. Cipriani (2001) worked on real participation strategies in a beginner, found that use of code-switching was a good way to foster oral participation among the learners and teacher. Her study also showed that the teacher use of code-switching to clarify words communicative tasks make a good atmosphere among learners to speak English.

Kavaliauskiene (2009) investigated a study on students in social sciences at a university studying English for specific purposes (ESP). To fulfill the purpose of the study, 55 pre-intermediate and intermediate learners were chosen consisting of both male and female subjects. It should be highlighted that all the subjects are between the ages 18-22, consisting of both male and female subjects. The subjects did not represent an equal ratio of male and female. The results showed that participants use of mother tongue in written activities, while reading professional texts, in ESP vocabulary tests, In listening activities, While speaking caused to facilitate the ratio of male and female. The results showed that participants use of mother tongue in written activities, while reading professional texts, in ESP vocabulary tests, In listening activities, While speaking causes to facilitate the linguistic development of learners.

Cook (2000) believed that to permit students use their mother tongue can be factor to help students improve the way they learn a second language and it provides students with opportunities to say what they tend to say in English classes. (Levine, 2003) also argues that if the use of L1 is in the right way it will serve effective functions in L2 classrooms, such as, vocabulary, grammar, and writing assignments.

Duff and Polio (1990) conducted a study at the university of California, Los Angeles, and through their observations among thirteen different L2 classrooms which included many typologically unrelated languages, found that there was a range from 100 present L2 use by teachers, and most students were satisfied with the status with regard to English/L2 use. Researchers stated that teachers using their mother tongue deprive their students many chances to engage and deal with the target language.

Rodolph Jacobson (1981) has suggested a-model to use code-switching in bilingual courses. There are pros and cons to apply the concurrent approach. Jacobson (1981) highlights some issues: 1) the extent to which first language should be used in EFL classrooms.

2) the extent to which the first language maintenance in the first grades would not interfere with the transition to English in post primary levels of education. 3) the extent to which learners can learn by using of two languages. These issues are explained in terms of social situation of the classroom, the context of lesson, and curriculum.

In a study conducted by Macaro (1997), except a small group of females, most of the students preferred the use of L1 by the teachers in order to better understanding. Even some students mentioned that they could not understand items without using the mother tongue. Macaro adds in his study to use strategies namely; interviews, class observations and surveys to come across the L1 and L2 use in the classrooms. He discovered that teachers may use code-switching to clear and clarify instructions in class tasks to give feedback to students and to ensure the students’ understanding.

Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) conducted a study on 5 French classes and 4 teachers. They adapted quantity and qualitative analyses, and came to the conclusion that code-switching included 3 functions: 1) transition.

2) metalinguistic uses, and 3) communicative uses. Storch and Wiggleworth (2003) conducted a study to examine the use of L1 in writing assignments and problem-solving among adult L2 language learners. Furthermore, the results identifies the following uses of mother tongue in the classroom: classroom management, language analysis and presenting rules that govern grammar, giving instructions or prompts, explaining errors, and checking comprehension.

As this brief literature review shows, code-switching carries out important functions in the communicative activities in L2 classrooms. The present study would illustrate the use of code-switching in interactive exchanges among learners and teachers in EFL classrooms.

2. Methodology:

2.1 Context, Participants, And Data Collection:

The participants were the students who were studying English as a foreign language in Oxford institute in Ahvaz. There were totally 27 respondents aged 16 to 32 who were predominantly males at the beginners,
intermediate and advanced levels. A questionnaire was administered to three groups of learners of different degrees. All the statements were rated according to the scale of five possible answers: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- not sure, 4- agree, 5- strongly agree. The obtained data were statistically processed by statistical package for the social science (SPSS) software and then interpreted at the end of the study.

2.2 Results:
The data were obtained among groups of students with level of proficiency in English namely; beginning, advanced and intermediate and levels. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire. They are as followed: 1) I occasionally prefer to use my mother tongue; 2) I often mentally translate ideas from my mother tongue into English during written activities; 3) I use a bilingual dictionary to translate unknown words while reading academic texts; 4) In vocabulary tests, it is easier for me to translate terms from English to my mother tongue than from my mother tongue to English ; 5) In listening activities, I often mentally translate what I hear; 6) During individual talk, I prefer to look at my notes – I worry about my English; 7) while speaking spontaneously, I find it hard to recall some terms; 8) I use Persian for a continue to my arguments; 9) I use Persian for solving my linguistic problems; 10) I use Persian in order to find synonyms in Persian language; 11) I use Persian for finding synonyms in English; 12) I use Persian for asking questions about structures and grammatical rules for the goal of better understanding 13) I use Persian for finding synonyms in Persian to translate the words.

After collecting the responses to the questions the researcher computed the mean scores and the Standard Deviation and other related statistics of those students who answered positively to each question for their agreement of the use of the first language in a second language teaching setting. The results were calculated and illustrated in Table 1. The results revealed that almost all students in each level of the study agreed on the use of the first language.

Table 1: statistical results of the positive answers for each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for Mean Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.7033</td>
<td>6.41436</td>
<td>-12.2308</td>
<td>19.6375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32.0600</td>
<td>11.74782</td>
<td>32.0600</td>
<td>62.7572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>44.5467</td>
<td>14.38360</td>
<td>44.5467</td>
<td>83.5619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55.6900</td>
<td>15.71028</td>
<td>55.6900</td>
<td>105.4220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.8967</td>
<td>9.47022</td>
<td>50.8967</td>
<td>74.4220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.9672</td>
<td>12.32742</td>
<td>23.9672</td>
<td>46.7214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.9672</td>
<td>12.32742</td>
<td>23.9672</td>
<td>46.7214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23.9672</td>
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<td>23.9672</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52.3233</td>
<td>20.89767</td>
<td>52.3233</td>
<td>104.236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52.6933</td>
<td>28.41311</td>
<td>52.6933</td>
<td>106.4343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55.0767</td>
<td>28.84979</td>
<td>55.0767</td>
<td>110.6397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>59.3600</td>
<td>16.93433</td>
<td>59.3600</td>
<td>112.1472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35.0767</td>
<td>28.84979</td>
<td>35.0767</td>
<td>66.6666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39.7854</td>
<td>21.39682</td>
<td>39.7854</td>
<td>71.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the results calculated in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation were analyzed for each group of the study using inferential statistics. Such statistical computations allow drawing conclusions about the significance of the research questions. The results show how the difference between the Mean and Standard Deviation for each question among three groups is significant or not. The results in Table 2 were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. The compared ratios p show how significant the differences in the value of the Means are. It can be seen that p values are different for various statements. The interpretation of p value is as follows: value p < 0.05 indicates that there is no significant difference between the answers. The closer the p value is to the unity, the less is the difference between the responses. These results show that p = 0. O33. Therefore, the data are statistically significant and it could be concluded that using the first language in an English speaking context has a positive effect on improving the students’ learning English as a foreign language.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation for each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sum of Squares df Mean Square F Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups 9061.402 12 755.117 2.355 .033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups 8335.900 26 320.612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 17397.302 38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Conclusion:
Using Code-switching in English institutes is inevitable and necessary. It is not only a part of communicative resources of bilingual classes but also an active part in the learning experience. Scholars in second language acquisition have become increasingly aware of the role the mother tongue plays in the EFL
classroom. One word, one phrase or even one sentence code-switching is very common among English speakers in English institutes. Code-switching can be applied to teaching in EFL/ESL classes and this study has shown that careful and judicious use of code-switching can lead to appropriate successful teaching and learning of new vocabulary in speaking classes. As the studies shows, bilingual education may lead to more effective and meaningful language learning. Such code-switching can be used by the EFL learners as a compensatory strategy; meaning that using L1 in an L2 context plays a crucial role for learners to organize, enhance and enrich their speech.

The results show that EFL students using their mother tongue inside the classroom feel more comfortable since their competence of L1 is greater than L2.

REFERENCES


