



The Effects of Code Switching on Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

Code switching is defined as the practice of selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction (Nilep,2006). The main purpose of this study is to investigate and closely examine the role and the effects of code-switching on material learning in a classroom context and also students' attitudes towards this linguistic phenomenon. For this purpose, the students' notes, which were taken from the teachers' speech, were studied and then their written notes were analyzed qualitatively with a focus on code switching. Then, the questionnaire was distributed among participants to investigate their attitudes. According to the quantitative and qualitative data analysis obtained from the questionnaire –distributed among 60 participants – and the interview, code switching during delivering materials was completely helpful to the students' learning and also it helped them to remember better for their exams.

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Introduction

In linguistics, *code-switching* is "switching between two or more languages, or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation". Thus, code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a manner consistent with the syntax and phonology of each variety. Code-switching is distinct from other language contact phenomena, such as borrowing, and code mixing. Borrowing affects the lexicon, the words that make up a language, while code-switching takes place in individual utterances (Gumperz ,1982-Poplack ,1984- Muysken, 1995). Code mixing is thematically a related term, but their usage varies. Some scholars use either term to denote the same practice, while others apply *code-mixing* to denote the formal linguistic properties of said language-contact phenomena, and *code-switching* to denote the actual, spoken usages by multilingual persons(Bokamba, 1989- Clyne, 2000- Genessee, 2000).As EFL students of English literature, the effects of code switching on material learning is very tangible for us since literature professors frequently use code switching in courses like novel and poetry at the university level. MahzadMardiha(2014) explained the process of translating poetry in this way:

Poetry possessing all the above components aroused doubts and queries on the possibility of its translatability. Whereas some people look at it as a sacred entity, others dared to conquer its impregnable fortifications. Translating literary works is, perhaps, always more difficult than translating other types of text because literary works have specific values called the aesthetic and expressive values. The aesthetic function of the work shall emphasize the beauty of the words (diction), figurative language, metaphors. The translator should try, at his best, to transfer these specific values into the target language (p.1).

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effects of code-switching on learning and students' attitudes toward this linguistic phenomenon. For this purpose, one of the EFL literature classes was chosen, the classroom context in which the audio recordings were taken and the students took notes from the teacher's speech. Then whether code switching has a positive

or negative effect on student's material learning was taken into account based on the students' notes as well as their scores.

Review of literature

Susan Pollard (2002) explained the history of code switching in this way:

An interest in the study of code-switching has existed since the early twentieth century when Espinosa (1917) first wrote of a "speech mixture" in the dialogues of New Mexicans (Huerta-Macias 1). In the past two decades, this interest has grown considerably as code switching becomes a more frequent occurrence in classrooms in the U.S. Most recently, code switching has been defined as the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence, or constituent (Poplack 224).

During its development researchers came to different definition of code switching, for example Gumperz's (1982, p. 59), defined code switching as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems". Myers-Scotton (2006, p. 239) also defined code switching as "the use of two languages varieties in the same conversation".

In the 1940s and 1950s, many scholars considered code-switching to be a sub-standard use of language. (Weinreich, Uriel, 1953).Since the 1980s, however, most scholars have recognized it is a normal, natural product of bilingual and multilingual language use.(Goldstein, B.; Kohnert, K., 2005-- Brice, A. & Brice, R. 2009). The term 'code mixing' is another linguistic phenomenon which is closely related to code switching. Some linguists differentiate between these two linguistic phenomena. Bokamba (1989) defines both concepts as:

Code-switching is the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event... code-mixing is the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from a co-operative activity where the participants, in order to infer what is intended, must reconcile what they hear with what they understand.

One of the major characteristics of both phenomena is their imposition as the norm of language use in the most bilingual communities (Kamwangamalu, 1989). Also, some language experts have investigated this linguistic phenomenon from different perspectives like; its causes, functions, and effects. Such investigations on the causes of the phenomena have revealed "sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors" (Ayeomoni, M.O, 2006).

Besides, some researchers have performed experiments which deal with the relationship between mental processes and the use of code-switching. For example Claudia Maria Riehl (2005) explained the reason of code switching as "Jointly active language material is especially likely to be strongly connected and will be activated simultaneously". On the other hand code switching is sometimes viewed negatively. Some language experts believe code switching to be harmful because by using it students will not be able to communicate efficiently in either language. "It is often considered a low prestige form, incorrect, poor language, or a result of incomplete mastery of the two languages." (Hammink, 2000).

The term code-switching is also used outside the field of linguistics. Some scholars of literature use the term to describe literary styles which include elements from more than one language, as in novels by Chinese-American, Anglo-Indian, or Latino/a writer (Lourdes, 2007).

Methodology

Participants

The study participants for this study were 60 in number ranging from 20-30 years of age – all students of 'A survey of English literary history II' Course from University of Isfahan. They voluntarily participated in the study with an advanced level of proficiency. For the research purpose, 60% of the students, who took notes during teacher's speech, were provided with questionnaires. And a group of 15 out of the participants were randomly chosen to be interviewed.

Data Collection Procedures

Audio files of the class, students' notes, and the participants' scores in the exam form the sources of our collected data. The audio files contained the teacher's speech of the secessions in which she explained about English poems of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelly, Blake, Byron, Keats (prominent poets in the Romantic era) and the two secessions were also specifically recorded from her speech about the novel 'Frankenstein'. Then we choose randomly 15 participants to examine their notes. The midterm exam -which was out of 14-, included some essay questions from the materials which were discussed above. Then the scores were compared according to their level of inserting code switching parts in their notes. The third procedure was to distribute questionnaires among 60 participants to see their attitudes towards the teacher's use of code switching. As was mentioned earlier, 15 participants were also interviewed.

Results

The results obtained from the collected data are shown in the tables 1 and 2. As it is shown in the table 1, 85.7% of the participants have inserted the code switching parts without any change in their notes. Besides, table 2 indicates that 35.7% of the participants, who did not insert the switched speech exactly, translated the Persian parts into English, and 32.1% translated the English parts to Persian. The specific percentage of those who were neutral did not take any notes at all, and some of them preferred to write their own understanding of the materials.

Table 1. Inserting code switching parts in students' notes

| Item Description | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---|-------|---------|----------|
| I insert the code switching parts in my notes | 85.7% | 7.1% | 7.1% |

Figure 1, Graphic representation of participants' inserting of code switching



Table 2. The preference for inserting teacher's speech in English or Persian

| Item Description | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|--|-------|---------|----------|
| I translate the Persian parts to English in my notes | 35.7% | 21.4% | 42.8% |
| I translate the English parts to Persian in my notes | 32.1% | 25% | 42.8% |

In order to measure the students' language attitudes towards the teachers' use of code switching, a student questionnaire was administered. On each question, students indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with the given statements related to their attitudes. The final data were analyzed using percentages to measure the differences in the performance and attitudes of the participants, and the results were then reported in table 3 elicited that inserting code switching parts offered a better understanding of the material to the students.

Table 2. The result s gained from students' ideas expressed in questionnaire

| Item Description | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---|-------|---------|----------|
| Code switching is necessary for our courses | 60.6% | 28.5% | 10.7% |
| I understand the materials much better when code switching is used | 78.4% | 14.2% | 7.1% |
| Since we study English the materials should be taught only in English | 35.6% | 21.4% | 42.8% |

In addition, 60.6% of the participants agreed upon the fact that using code switching is necessary in such courses. At the same time 78.4% of the participants strongly agreed the fact that the material was much better understood while code switching was applied. However, a lower percentage of the participants (35.6%) disagreed with the fact that applying code switching could help them better understand the material(s), and stated since the subject is an English course it needs to be delivered in English as well.

The participants' attitude toward these phenomena was also assessed through an interview. Those of the participants, who preferred inserting the materials delivered by the teacher using code switching without any changes claimed that it's less time consuming. Since, the students would save the time needed to translate the material back into English and use the time to follow the lecture being delivered. Also to make sure about the positive effects of code switching we compared the students' scores. The data collected from this comparison showed that those who inserted the code switching parts in their notes, performed better for the exam.

Conclusion

In this study, the functions of code switching in English literature classrooms were presented with a focus on the student's way of inserting code switching. Also it aimed at exploring the students' attitude towards the usage of code switching. The data lead us to this conclusion that the usages of code switching have had a positive influence on Iranian EFL students, since it suggested them a better understanding of the materials. And as for the statistics; about 85.7% of the

participants were for the usage of code switching, thus the usage of code switching appealed to a significant number of the participants. As it was mentioned earlier around 35.6% of our participants believed since the subject is an English course it needs to be delivered in English as well. This is while, those 85.7% of the participants who were appealed by the usage of code switching, found it effective and useful because it made the materials more comprehensive. As we had some limitations in performing this experiment like limited scope of research, it would be suggested for further research to perform this study with a larger scale of participants in various EFL courses.

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