

Analyzing the Reasons Behind Code Switching in English Language Classroom: A Case Study from Peshawar, Pakistan

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Abstract

In multilingual classrooms such as in Pakistan it is commonly observed that the teachers of English language keep using first language or native language in the classroom. As it is quite important to know the reasons behind switching the codes while instructing in English language and it affects the process of learning, still the research on this topic is quite scarce in Pakistan. Therefore, the main objective of the study is not only to identify how this phenomenon takes place but also to find out the reasons behind code-switching. Quantitative study was conducted to find out the underlying causes and the level of awareness of the teachers about this concept. The teachers of higher secondary level were selected for this study. The study finds that most of the teachers practice code-switching during classroom instructions. Moreover, teachers think that switching to another language makes language teaching easier. Although, the findings of the present study may not be claimed to be final or exclusive, this study provides the much-needed evidence for the need to design a clear language policy regarding the medium of instruction and also the extent of using other languages in our ESL classrooms.

Keywords: Code Switching, Multilingualism, Bilingualism, ESL classroom, Peshawar.

Introduction

Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon where the people use two or more than two languages depending on the context. Gumperz (1982) says that “code-switching” is the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems” (p.59). Yet another researcher Zentella (1981) defines code-switching as “the ability of bilinguals to alternate between the languages in their linguistic repertoires is generally referred to as code-switching” (p.109). One of the simplest definitions given by Numan and Carter (2001) is “a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse” (p.275).

The importance of the study of code-switching has a significant value when it comes to learning English as a foreign or a second language. Further exploration in the field proposes that teacher’s code-switching serves some pedagogical functions related with the discourse among the teachers inside and outside the classroom. But it has also been observed that the use of code-switching is usually not a conscious act. It indicates the fact that the teachers are not mindful of the purposes and results of this phenomenon. As a result, it could be referred to as a spontaneous and automatic behavior.

Pakistan is a multilingual country where more than one language is spoken. The study is based on the data collected from only one province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where Urdu, Pashto and other languages are spoken. There are multilingual classrooms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where majority of the people speak two or more than two languages. The linguistic phenomenon of switching the languages is quite common where native language Pashto, second language Urdu and foreign language English are mixed. Teachers of English language in Pakistan usually use their native or first languages while teaching English language. Although, it happens frequently, still the reasons behind this phenomenon are still unknown and the research regarding the reasons behind this behavior is quite rare.

The objective of this study is to find out the reasons due to which the teachers switch the codes in the English language classroom. Keeping in view the objective, the study aims to answer the following question:

1. What are the reasons due to which the teachers of switch the codes instead of using only English language in the classrooms?

Literature Review

Wardhaugh (1998) asserts that code refers to all systems that people employ for communication, whether it is language or dialect, while codification is the written form given to the spoken form of a language. In addition, 'switching' is apparently a shift from one to another object or in speaking from one code to another. Thus, this shift by bilinguals in language is called code-switching. To begin with, a restriction to employ first language in foreign language classrooms at the end of 19th Century brought a change and led to the use of the direct method in foreign language teaching (Cook, 2001). Hamers and Blanc (2000, p.2) claim it as a complex phenomenon which must be approached as such. They suggested that code-switching can be analyzed at a variety of levels such as interpersonal, individual, intergroup and inter-societal levels.

The pedagogical issues in bilingualism become very important to be studied when the children speak different languages at home but the medium of instruction at the schools is different (Lotherington, 2000). In each country across the world there are lots of academic institutes which often try to find the simplest way with regards to children to get experienced in the actual dominant language (Cummins & Swain, 1986). Code-switching, whether it is because of conscious or unconscious behaviour undoubtedly performs certain fundamental functions that could be supportive in the learning of a language. Following this pattern and using a qualitative approach Mattsson and Burenhult (1999) conducted a research on code switching in French as a foreign language classroom. Their study defined different roles of code-switching based on how teachers and students interact with each other. According to their study, the various functions that code-switching served included switching the topics, affective function and repetitive functions. In topic switch scenario, the teacher employs a language in accordance with his topic.

This can be largely seen in classrooms where grammar instructions are given and the teacher resorts to the mother tongue of the students to make his instructions more effective. It may be proposed here that the gap between identified and unfamiliar ought to be filled and thus making meaning and new content clearer. Another function, according to this study, is the affective function of code-switching which is related with the display of emotions. the teacher resorts to code-switching as a means to develop a better understanding with the learners. Repetitive function is another aspect of code-switching. In this case, it is used for imparting important knowledge to the students. Code-switching is also used for the purpose of making the students understand the meaning of certain words. However, the tendency to repeat the instructions in native language may result in some undesired behavior. A learner who knows the fact that the instructions will be translated in native language after these are stated in the target language might lose his interest leading to negative implications.

Merritt et.al (1999) also conducted a study on three Kenyan primary schools and analyzed the factors behind code-switching by teachers using English, Swahili and their own native language. His explored factors are teachers' linguistic competence, socializing role and the role of repetition.

According to a study carried out by Gulzar (2010) where the researcher interviewed several language experts, the researcher was informed that the percentage use of code-switching cannot be decided because there is no set pattern. On that basis many of the experts would not accept the haphazard use of code-switching as well as the use of the first language in English language classrooms even to minimum extent. But Jacobson (1988, p.19) put forward his own claim when he says that for code-switching to be educationally effective, some conditions are to be met that are (a) vocabulary has to be dispersed on a close percentage 50/50, (b) there must be no interruption while teaching of content, (c) the teacher should be careful about switching the codes between two languages, and (d) the use of two or more different languages must be purposeful and help attaining particular learning objectives. Here, the researcher considers that the percentage of 50% is usually too high specifically on the quality of balanced bilinguals. Bourne (2001, p.24) elaborated that the students often switch the codes consciously to achieve learning targets that have already been established in classrooms. The students combine and share the terms coming from each other's vocabulary. It indicates that students are not merely unaggressive pawns in the classroom environment along with their own strength that could be portrayed by using a hidden intercultural discourse. Educational institutes surely need to accept what is without a doubt taking place by natural means.

Methodology

This study was presumed to target the English language teachers. The higher secondary school level across the Peshawar city including the public, private and semi government institutes were selected. A random sample of one hundred and fifty teachers was selected for the current study.

The questionnaire was designed considering the main objectives of the study. Ten Likert Scale questions are included in the questionnaire in order to get sufficient information regarding the thinking of the selected teachers in the sample and their views about the importance and use of code switching during classroom interactions. These questions are based on the following options: 1-Strongly Agree, 2-Agree, 3-Uncertain, 4-Disagree and 5-Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire consists of ten questions with one open-ended question at the end. The open-ended question has been included in order to get some suggestions from the respondents regarding the use of code switching in an effective manner or stopping its use. In order to calculate the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha test was applied. The result is 0.417 which indicates that the questionnaire is reliable (i.e. the standard reliability value is 0.7). The overall data was analyzed, tabulated and interpreted with the help of Microsoft Excel and SPSS computer software.

Results

Two kinds of questions were asked to know about the teachers' opinions about code switching in the classrooms. The teachers responded not only to the closed ended questions but also to the open-ended questions. The responses to both kinds of questions have been mentioned in the separate sections given below.

Results of the survey questions given on Likert Scale

Usefulness of Code Switching

The survey question contained the presumption that Code-Switching helps in language learning. It is one of the important reasons for this practice. The responses from the sampled respondents are given in the following lines.

Table 1: Results for Question 1

Serial No	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Strongly Disagree	00	00
2	Disagree	19	22
3	Uncertain	01	01
4	Agree	43	51
5	Strongly Agree	22	26
Grand Total		85	100

The data show that 77% of the respondents believe code-switching is helpful. Out of which 26% Strongly Agree while 51% Agree to the use of code switching as useful while teaching English language in Pakistan. Still a reasonable minority of 22% of the sampled teachers Disagree to this notion while none of the sampled respondents showed a strong disagreement to it. Only 1% teachers were Uncertain about this question.

The results indicate that the considerable number of teachers take this phenomenon as quite helpful while teaching a second language.

Role of code switching in instructions

The presumption put in Question 2 of survey is that code switching makes the teaching process quite easier. This is a general notion as revealed by several respondents during informal interaction. The pattern was stronger in the female respondents especially in the public institutions who were of the view that it is impossible to teach grammar and abstract terms without the help of native language. The results from the data are shown and discussed in the following lines.

Table 2: The results related with the statement 2

Serial No	Response	Frequency	%
1	Agree	58	68
2	Strongly Agree	11	13
3	Uncertain	3	4
4	Disagree	10	12
5	Strongly Disagree	3	4
Total		85	100

The data displays a trend similar to the response of Question 1. In response to the question that teachers use this process as it makes teaching easier for the teacher, 68% teachers Agree while another 13% Strongly Agree to the statement. Only 4% teachers Strongly Disagree while 12% teachers Disagree and another 4% teachers are Uncertain about the statement.

The overall data pattern shows that most of our teachers think it essential to resort to code-switching during the classroom interaction. They are of the view that code-switching makes the instructions easier for them and they are able to make their students understand well what they are trying to teach.

Practical advantages in learning the target language

In Question 3 the respondents are asked to give their opinion to the supposition that the employment of code-switching can have practical advantages in learning the Target Language (L2). Learning of English is mandatory to academic success, business and other spheres in Pakistan and people sacrifice L1 to learn English. Question 3 also asks the strategy of code-switching as employed by the teachers to make students

understand the target language which is English. Data obtained for this question is portrayed and discussed in the following lines.

In the following table the results of the responses have been described.

Table 3: The results related with the statement 3

Serial No	Response	Total	Percentage
1	Strongly Disagree	2	3
2	Disagree	14	16
3	Uncertain	8	9
4	Agree	50	59
5	Strongly Agree	11	13
Grand Total		85	100

The results show that only 2% teachers Strongly Disagree while 16% Disagree to the statement. It is interesting to see that 9% teachers were Uncertain about the validity of the statement. But again majority of teachers (59%) Agree with another 13% that Strongly Agree to this assumption. The data shows that most of the teachers think it justified to resort to code-switching because it can lead to practical advantages in learning the target language.

Role of using L1 in learning L2

A more explicit question was asked in that it is assumed about code switching in general that L2 can be quickly learnt if L1 is used. It also means that the proportion of using L1 in the class will diminish chances of practicing L2 in the class. Response to this question is given below.

Table 4: Response to Question 4

Serial No	Response	Total	%
1	Strongly Disagree	5	6
2	Disagree	21	25
3	Uncertain	8	9
4	Agree	43	51
5	Strongly Agree	8	9
Grand Total		85	100

The data shows that 6% teachers Strongly Disagree while 25% Disagree to Question 4. It is interesting to see that 9% respondents are Uncertain about this factor, whereas 51% Agree and 9% Strongly Agree to the statement. Thus, it proves that majority of the respondents Agree or Strongly Agree but still a reasonable minority of them Disagree or Strongly Disagree to the contention in question 4.

Role of code switching in developing learners L2 capability

The assumption contained in Question 5 served as one of the core questions for the present study. The question was that whether the respondents think that the students will learn the concepts easily if the teacher switches to the first language? The results obtained after tabulation of the data are discussed in the following lines.

The response to this question by the sampled teachers in Peshawar has been indicated in the table below.

Table 5: The results related with the statement 5

Serial No	Response	Frequency	%
1	Agree	35	41
2	Strongly Agree	7	8
3	Uncertain	5	6
4	Disagree	29	34
5	Strongly Disagree	9	11
Grand Total		85	100

It was one of the core questions in the questionnaire and its results are important for the present study. The results in the above table show that 41% respondents Agree, 8% Strongly Agree, 34% Disagree, 11% Strongly Disagree while 6% remain Uncertain. The result shows that the respondents are almost equally divided in their approach toward this phenomenon. It reflects the present situation in ESL classrooms where teachers are at liberty to make use of LI and L2 according to their own needs and perceptions.

Effect on teacher's performance

Question 6 is to testify the claim as put forward by several teachers that code switching helps out a bilingual teacher in improving his/her performance in the classroom. It is one of the main arguments put forward for supporting the use of code-switching in ESL classrooms. In informal discussion with some of the respondents it was revealed that students have a good liking for those teachers who can make them understand the important terms and concepts in L1. The results for this question by the respondents is discussed in the following lines.

Table 6: The results related with the statement 6

Serial No	Response	Frequency	%
1	Agree	50	59
2	Strongly Agree	6	7
3	Uncertain	13	15
4	Disagree	15	18
5	Strongly Disagree	1	1
Grand Total		85	100

In response to the statement that 'code-switching can improve the teaching performance of the bilingual teacher; 59% respondents Agree to this statement while 7% Strongly Agree. However 18% Disagree to this claim and only 1% Strongly Disagree but 15% were not sure about this claim. It is a general notion among the teachers in Peshawar and especially in the public sector, as witnessed by the researcher himself while interacting with the respondents that many teachers think it impossible to teach at higher secondary level without the help of code-switching. The data in the above table testifies to this fact.

Making the students aware of code switching

The idea contained in question 7 is to know views of the respondents about the opinion of the students regarding code-switching. The question is whether the English language teachers consider it important that the students should be allowed to understand the reasons behind code-switching in the ESL classroom. More explicitly, it was to know that whether the respondents think it essential to explain to their students why code-switching is practiced in the ESL classroom?

The results from the data are shown and discussed in the following lines.

Table 7: The results related with the statement 7

Serial No	Response	Frequency	%
1	Agree	49	58
2	Strongly Agree	10	12
3	Uncertain	13	15
4	Disagree	12	14
5	Strongly Disagree	1	1
Grand Total		85	100

Data for the above question shows that 58% respondents Agree, 12% Strongly Agree, 14% Disagree, only 1% Strongly Disagree while 15% remained Uncertain. The overall pattern shows that majority of the respondents consider it essential to make their students understand the reasons for code-switching in the classroom.

Minimizing code switching

Question 8 contained an important proposition that whether the respondents agree that code –switching in bilingual classroom ought to be reduced to make students proficient in the target language. It is the second core question of the present study along with Question 5 and the response to it is very important for the findings of this research thesis. Language is basically a matter of practice and not of understanding and it was essential to know the opinion of those who are responsible for making it possible. Results obtained after the tabulation of data are discussed in the following lines.

In the following table an the results related with the statement 8 is presented.

Table 8: The results related with the statement 8

Serial No	Response	Frequency	%
1	Agree	35	41
2	Strongly Agree	18	21
3	Uncertain	3	4
4	Disagree	19	22
5	Strongly Disagree	10	12
Grand Total		85	100

In response to the proposition presented above that code switching should be reduced in the ESL classroom to make students proficient in the target language, 41% Agree, 21% Strongly Agree, 22% Disagree and 12% Strongly Disagree while 4% remained Uncertain.

Overall, 62% respondents Agree that code-switching should be reduced to make students proficient in the target language. But results to the earlier questions show that they favour code-switching in classrooms and this is not the practice to reduce it when they are in classroom situation. Nevertheless, majority of them agree to it in theory.

Code switching during the classroom interaction

Question 9 contained a statement to know whether the students agree with the conversational pattern of code-switching during the classroom interaction by the respondents. This pattern may differ from respondent to respondent. Results of this question are discussed in the following lines with the help of three tables.

Table 9: The results related with the statement 9

Serial No	Response	Frequency	%
1	Agree	59	69
2	Strongly Agree	6	7
3	Uncertain	15	18
4	Disagree	3	4
5	Strongly Disagree	2	2
Grand Total		85	100

This table presents data about question 9. It reveals that 69% respondents Agree, 7% Strongly Agree, 4% Disagree, 2% Strongly Disagree while 18% remain Uncertain. A total of 76% has shown agreement that their students favour their code-switching pattern in classroom. It reveals the fact that students have also grown accustomed to the practice of code-switching by their teachers in ESL classrooms.

Approval or disapproval of code switching

Question 10 asks the opinion of the respondents that whether they approve or disapprove code-switching by students during the classroom interaction. The results are displayed and discussed with the help of succeeding tables in the following lines. The results related with the statement 10 is presented in the table below.

Table 10: The results related with the statement 10

Serial No	Response	Frequency	%
1	Agree	52	61
2	Strongly Agree	1	1
3	Uncertain	10	12
4	Disagree	16	19
5	Strongly Disagree	6	7
Grand Total		85	100

The data reveals that 61% respondents Agree to this practice, only 1% Strongly Agree, 19% Disagree, 7% Strongly Disagree while 12% remain Uncertain. It shows that it is quite encouraging for the students most of the time when they code-switch during classroom interaction with their teachers.

Discussion

Above mentioned data is based on the responses of the teachers to the closed ended questions. Majority of the teachers switch the codes while teaching English language. They switch to the local languages or the national language because of multiple reasons. It strengthens the statement given by Mattsson and Burenhult (1999) that code switching plays multiple roles in a classroom. In the French classroom code switching included switching the topics, affective and repetitive functions. Here in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa it not only plays a significant role in interaction with the students but also plays a key role in teacher performance in the classroom. It makes teaching easier for the teachers as the students find the target language easy to understand when a teacher switches the codes. In this way, the findings of this study are also related with the affective role of code switching.

The study also relates with Merritt et.al (1999) where the code switching was found related with teachers' linguistic competence, socializing role and the role of repetition. Majority of the respondents included in this study support the process of code switching and find it significant to increase students' linguistic competence, socializing with students and also making the target language understandable to them.

Responses to the open ended question

The response to this question was very much similar to that of the previous questions. Significant number of the respondents supported the use of code-switching and provided justifications for its use. On the pattern similar to the previous questions, most of the respondents from the public and private institutions openly defended the use of code-switching whereas most of the rejection came from the respondents in autonomous and semi government institutions.

Most of the respondents think that using first language is necessary because the students are weak in English and as the same method of code-switching was applied in the previous classes of English. In this case if code-switching is discarded, the students will be simply confused. In order to eliminate students' confusion, it is deemed essential by the respondents to translate the abstract thoughts and words of English language into native or local language. Hence the argument was that code-switching should be encouraged or at least not discarded at all as it helps in understanding the target language with the help of local or national language. One of the teachers responded that:

The problem is that students when they enter college/university level have not properly acquired proficiency in English language at school level. This poverty of fundamental basic level of proficiency causes comprehension issues when the instructor is teaching English in English. ELT and school level must be reformed first. Latest research suggests minimum use of first language while teaching and learning a second language.

It was very much the opinion of all the teachers especially females who think code switching is necessary and defend its use while teaching in public institutes where students have weak proficiency as one female teacher remarked that code switching is necessary as the students cannot learn a second language without it.

Majority of the respondents in private sector also agreed with using first language carefully. One respondent from the private sector remarked, "Instead of leaving their students in confusion, teacher should use L1 and make their students clear. The respondents from semi government and autonomous institutions majorly opposed the idea of the use of code-switching and expressed a general dislike for this practice. This sub-section of the respondents believes that the use of code switching should be reduced because it slows down the process of acquiring new language. It is also believed that students at the secondary level who are from the schools where code-switching is common, lack sound grammatical and language control which is an indication of the fact that code-switching does not serve the purpose of learning English language and therefore should be controlled if not discarded altogether. One teacher said, "In ESL classroom, the teacher should use minimum switching to first language as it minimizes the process of acquiring new language."

During the analysis of the responses, it was realized that this issue has not been properly addressed at the level of policy makers. This comes as a basic reason that teachers have the liberty to code-switch and use L1 in ESL classrooms without knowing the limitations.

On further enquiry into the data it was also observed that majority of the teachers who defended the use of code switching themselves studied the schools and institutions where code-switching was common, whereas, the respondents in opposition to the use of code switching were groomed up in English medium institutions. So we can also deduct the result that the teachers' own medium of instruction was an important determinant of the use of code- switching.

These findings go in line with Gulzar (2010) who claimed that code switching process if used in a haphazard manner without setting the clear objectives or outcomes. It can be found from the results given above that education policy has certain flaws about medium of instruction which is mainly responsible for unbridled use of switching languages. It was also observed that some of the teachers while serving the same college or university have expressed quite opposite views about this practice. The respondents also expressed partial agreement to the notion that teaching performance can be enhanced by code-switching. Similarly, most of the teachers consented to the prudent and judicious use of code-switching only. They

also provided justification for the use of code-switching that it helped to simplify the difficult concepts to the students. Furthermore, it was considered as a handy tool and extra resource that could be used in difficult situations faced by the teachers.

Conclusions

The present study concludes that code-switching is used frequently in the English language teaching at higher secondary level in Peshawar. Almost 70% teachers practice and experience code-switching during class instructions and moreover, they take it as a helping tool. Many of the teachers believe that English language teaching at Higher Secondary level is not possible without code-switching. Although the teachers agree that code switching may affect L2 proficiency of the students, still they take it as a helpful tool in teaching English language.

Hopefully, the present study will provide significant results to highlight teachers' perceptions about the employment of code-switching in order to fulfil the learning objectives as well as the needs of the students. Findings of the present research will also create awareness about the positive and negative aspects of code switching. It may also help policy makers to frame clear laws about language choices in the classroom. Finally, it may open new avenues and dimensions for research in this area which are essential for a better understanding of code-switching.

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