

HOW SHOULD TEACHERS VIEW LEARNER CODE SWITCHING IN SECOND/ FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS?

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss functions of code switching in second and foreign language classrooms. The discussion focuses on learner (as opposed to teacher) code switching in classrooms in which the learners share the same language background. It explores the extent to which code switching plays the roles in enabling students to achieve the pedagogical goals. Also, it attempts to find the place of the functions in the notion of language learning strategy. For second language teaching and learning, the discussion is expected raise teachers' awareness of the patterns and functions the code switching may have in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, the paper is specifically addressed to teachers of second or foreign language as it will expectedly widen the teachers' horizon on the fact of code switching existing in language classrooms and help the teachers cope with the phenomenon.

Keywords: code switching, language learning strategy, second/ foreign language

Code switching is considered as the inevitable consequence of bilingualism (or, more generally, multilingualism) (Hudson, 1996; Auer, 1998). Anyone who speaks more than one language chooses between the languages according to circumstances. Recent studies in the area of language learning, nevertheless, have looked at code switching as the use of the first language (L1) in second/ foreign language classrooms either in the teacher discourse or the student discourse.

The notion of whether or not the first language should be exclusively (or near exclusively) used in the teacher-student interaction or the student-student interaction

in language classrooms has long been a debate and receiving growing attention in the study of language learning. With regard to code switching in teacher discourse, those in favor of the exclusivity (or near exclusivity) of the L2 argue that it is not essential for students to understand everything said to them by the teachers and that switching to their first language (L1) will potentially hinder the learning process (Chambers, 1991; Halliwell & Jones, 1991; Macdonald, 1993). The use of the native language by the students in second or foreign language classrooms will probably be seen (by teachers) as obstructing learning as it does not show the students' exposure to

the target language. Although the phenomenon of code switching in classrooms cannot be avoided, Cook (1991) still argued that the use of the L1 in teaching and learning process inevitably results in less exposure to the target language. Furthermore, the switching may be seen as an indication of a failure to learn the target language or an unwillingness (by students) to speak in the target language. Regarding this, Willis (1981) assumed that if the students start to speak in their native language without the teacher's permission, it generally means that something is wrong with the lesson.

Opposing these views, Guthrie (1984) doubted the fact whether a lesson conducted entirely in the target language actually provides the students with greater intake. In fact, the exclusive use of the target language was seen as detrimental to language learning, as Skinner (1985) pointed out, considering that the exclusive use of the L2 can hinder the process of concept development by obstructing students to connecting with thoughts and ideas already developed in the L1.

In the middle of the debate came the argument which saw the need to switch from the target language to the first language as an inevitable fact in classrooms, however, uncontrolled use of the first language might undermine the learning process (Harbord, 1992). The view suggests that while

excluding the use of the first language the classrooms is considered impractical, controlled code switching, either in teacher discourse or in student discourse, may be seen as an important tool for language learning. If this argument can be perceived as a quick solution for the debate, further inquiries are encouraged to seek for the explanation as to in which circumstances the code switching is considered beneficial for learning (as well as teaching), and what functions the code switching or the use of the native language plays in language teaching and learning.

Some studies in fact show that the use of the L1 can be highly purposeful and related to pedagogical goals. Cohen (1998) demonstrated the benefit of the L1 used (by students) as "the language of thought" during the performance of particular tasks. Similarly, the benefit of code switching as a pedagogical tool in mastering language skills was investigated by Kobayashi and Rinnet (1992) who demonstrated some benefits of thinking in the L1 for writing activities. As for studies of the use of the L1 in reading tasks, Kern (1994) revealed a number of advantages of using the L1 in order to reduce memory constraints, convert text into more familiar terms, and avoid losing track of meaning.

Referring to the fact that the code switching is seen as an important tool in language learning, this study also attempts

to discuss the code switching in relation to language learning strategy, by tracing the position of code switching within the framework of language learning strategy (Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). The article particularly discusses learner code switching (as opposed to teacher code switching), however, the paper is specifically addressed to teachers of second or foreign language as it will expectedly widen the teachers' horizon on the fact of code switching existing in language classrooms and help the teachers cope with the phenomenon.

THE PATTERNS AND THE FUNCTIONS OF THE CODE SWITCHING

The first study to review was conducted by Eldridge (1996). Analyzing the code switching of young learners at elementary and lower intermediate level of language proficiency in a Turkish secondary school, he combined transcription of conversation and interviews for the data collection. The study demonstrated that learners used their first language for several functions such as equivalence, floor-holding, metalanguage, and reiteration.

The terms equivalence refers to the use of or elicitation of an equivalent word or expression in the native language for the purpose of searching for the similar word or expression in the target language. It was

noted that 24 per cent of examples on the data employed this strategy. When the students were asked to explain why they code switched, the most common reply was that the required word or expression in the target language was simply unknown.

As a floor holding, the code switching appeared to function when the speed of retrieving the learned information was slower in the target language than in the native language, in this case, the use of the first language might be seen to function as a kind of stopgap, while the 'learned' target language was being retrieved. It was observed that the use of the native language in this situation could also function to avoid breakdown in communication.

The next function of the code switching is that it was used as a metalanguage to comment, evaluate or discuss about the tasks in student-student interaction. The researcher argued that there seemed to be a natural agreement among students that while tasks themselves should be performed in the target language, comment, evaluation and talk about the tasks may take place in the native language. Consequently, in the task itself may be found natural switches from the target language performed for the task to the first language used as a metalanguage of the task.

The strategy of reiteration refers to the use of the first language to reinforce, emphasize or clarify the message which has

already been transmitted in the target language, but still not clearly understood by the learners.

Focusing on learners aged 11-13 at an elementary and lower intermediate level, the analysis of the data also revealed that there appeared to be no relationship between level of language proficiency in the target language and the use of code switching strategy, that is, higher level students code switched as regularly as other students. Consequently, as the research suggested, “to assume that the greater the competence in the target code, the less the learner will switch to the native code may not be correct” (p. 304).

Another important point obtained from the data, with regard to quantitative analysis, is that 77 per cent of all examples of code switching were oriented to classroom tasks. Of the rest, 16 per cent were comments directed by the learner towards the teacher concerning procedural matters, or questions about English which were not actually related to the task in hand. The researcher thus pointed out that the majority of code switching activities in the classroom were related to learning objectives. He further argued that “the presence of code switching in the language classroom does not in itself indicate any kind of breakdown in pedagogical purpose” (p.305).

In its summary, the study showed that “there is no empirical evidence to support the idea that restricting the use of native language would necessarily improve learning efficiency, and that the majority of code switching activities in the classroom is highly purposeful and related to pedagogical goals” (p. 303). Finally the researcher asserted that “code-switching appears to be a natural and purposeful phenomenon which facilitates both communication and learning” (p.310).

In similar context to that of the previous study, Hancock (1997) analyzed the code switching that went on during group work at pre-intermediate classes, in which the learners shared the first language, at a private English language school in Madrid. Following Goffman’s (1974) concept on literal and nonliteral frame, Hancock (1997) layered the discourse produced in the situation into off-record and on-record discourse. The term off-record refers to discourse concerned with negotiation between learners while on-record discourse is performed to be overheard by a potential second language audience. The finding suggested that the learners performed the code switching in both discourses, each of which presented different functions of the use of the first language. In the analysis, the researcher did not seem to relate the use of the first language to level of language proficiency.

The analysis of off-record discourse showed that the students used their first language for the purpose of metatask for discussion about the task, metalanguage for the discussion about the language or linguistic form in the second language and self-address in which the learner appeared to be talking to him/herself. Metatask discourse includes strategies what the researcher called as turn dispute, prompt and boundary exchange (pp. 224-227). Metalinguistic discourse includes modelling and translation appeal (p. 228). The final subcategory of off-record discourse, self address, appeared to function for checking (to the learner him/herself) the meaning of certain words in the second language (p. 228).

The strategy of turn dispute is an utterance made to establish who should say what and when. Included in prompt strategy are prompt appeal and prompting. Prompt appeal was produced when one learner asked another learner for help orienting to the task. On the other hand, one student was prompting when he or she provided the other student with help (regardless it has been explicitly requested or not). As seen in the data excerpt (p. 226), student J reminded student G of one word (in the first language) on the role card that G should perform in the task by providing a prompt although G did not request that. Boundary exchange includes opening and closing boundary exchanges. Opening boundary exchange was

performed, in one example, when learners were managing the task, including planning the task and determining the roles, while closing boundary exchange was used for the evaluation of the task indicated by a comment such as “We’ve finished” (p. 227).

The next off-record discourse, metalinguistic discourse, includes modelling and translation appeal. The term modeling refers to a strategy by which one learner tells the other how to say something in the second language. When seeking a model or translation back to the L1, a learner produces a translation appeal. There seems to be similarities between modelling and prompting, in that learners similarly provide assistance one another, as well as between translation appeal and prompt appeal, in that a learner similarly asks for help. However, it is argued that modelling and translation appeal are performed for the purpose of searching for equivalent words or expression in the L2, which seems similar to the strategy of equivalence found in the previous study.

The last form of code switching indicated by metalinguistic discourse is self-address. This was stated (although not showed in the excerpt) to be adopted commonly when learners engaged in the restaurant role play were calculating the bill, an activity which was not addressed to the other learner and therefore obviously not

intended to be heard or overheard by the other learner.

The analysis of on-record discourse showed that the learners used their first language to produce insertion and joke integrated in the utterance. Insertion refers to the use of a word or short phrase in L1 which is inserted in the sentence produced in the target language. It may unintentionally occur in the interaction, however, it is argued to play strategic function to fill a lexical gap occurring in the communication. This function is similar to the use of the first language termed in the previous study (Eldridge, 1996) as floor holding. The second category of on-record discourse, the use of jokes, seemed to emerge to function as building “intimacy” (Jefferson, Sachs & Schegloff, 1987) with the other learner.

Reflecting on his analysis, the researcher suggested that teachers should not be worried about the presence of the first language in their classrooms. Instead, they are encouraged to carefully treat the code switching so that it may potentially give benefit for learning. He also argued that students had showed to have different motivations in using the first language for the second language learning and therefore it should not be treated similarly. When the students select the first language by default, teachers should raise their awareness by persuading them to use the target language. On the other hand, if the students select the

first language for a particular communicative purpose, efforts to cut down on the use of the native language will unlikely achieve the desired result. Finally, the researcher recommends teachers “not to assume that all L1 use is “bad” and all L2 use is “good” (p. 233).

Having slight differences in the context with the previous studies which investigated the student code switching in learning English as a second and foreign language, a study by Anton and DiCamilla (1999) investigated the use of English as the first language in the collaborative interaction of adult learners of Spanish. In spite of the difference in the context of the study with the previously reviewed research, this study was considered relevant to the review in that it focused on the students with the same native language and the research similarly focused on learner code switching as opposed to teacher code switching.

The study examined “the social and cognitive functions of L1 use in the collaborative speech of L2 learners engaged in a writing task in the L2 classroom” (p.233). This study specifically featured Vygotskian psycholinguistics as the theoretical framework for the analysis of code switching. Looking at the use of the first language within the framework, the study demonstrated that the use of the first language by students played a strategic cognitive role in scaffolding (Wood, Bruner

& Ross, 1976) and establishing intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1985) at the interpsychological level and in externalizing the students' inner speech or private speech (Vygotsky, 1986) as is necessary to perform the task and achieve the pedagogical goals at the intrapsychological level. The finding appeared to be a response to inquiry in sociocultural theory which had concerned the question of "how language serves to mediate human activity both on the interpsychological plane, in the form of social speech (and/ or writing), and on the intrapsychological plane, in the form of private speech (and/ or writing)" (p.235). In brief, this study showed that the use of the first language in a language classroom served to provide students with scaffolded help, construct intersubjectivity in the collaborative learning process, and perform private speech as a cognitive tool for problem resolution.

This study made use of transcribed data which made it possible to look closely at the nature of the collaborative process and the strategies used by the students in the collaboration. In the analysis of the collaborative speech of learners who are all native speakers of English with a low level of proficiency in Spanish as a second language in a writing task, it was showed in the excerpts how the use of the first language, at the interpsychological level, provided the students with scaffolded help

for the purpose of accessing the second language linguistic forms, making sense of the form or meaning of a text and evaluating a text in the second language.

Accessing the second language forms appeared in the form of searching for a translation of words and expression (which is similar to equivalence strategy in Eldridge's (1996) term), and a metalinguistic strategy which was used when students were trying to produce complex linguistic forms. The act of making sense of the form or meaning of the text and evaluating a text in the target language were seen in the collaborative dialogue between the two learners particularly in circumstances such as when learner S started to break down the text for D, when D translated the portions of the text read by S and when D requested S to reread the sentence for a global evaluation of the learning task. The excerpts also showed how the two learners were engaged in rendering certain Spanish form and how they collaboratively constructed the scaffolding that eventually enabled them to produce the form they were seeking. It can clearly be seen from the collaborative act showed in the data that without the use of the first language as a cognitive tool it seemed difficult for the students to produce the linguistic form.

In addition to playing a cognitive function, as illustrated previously, the use of

the first language served a social function as well. In the collaborative activity of learners with low second language proficiency, the use of the native language was seen as necessary to construct the collaboration that would facilitate the completion of the task by enabling learners to achieve intersubjectivity, that is, a shared perspective of the task through dialogue in the native language. The first language was used to assist the students to create and maintain intersubjectivity by, in one case, providing them with the tools to control the task, thereby making the task manageable. In another case, the use of L1 enabled the learners to continually check with each other in defining and limiting the task as it was being broken down. One example presented in the excerpt showed that L1 was used to check with each other considering limiting the topic of the writing task, to make suggestions about the sub-goals of the task and to consult with each other in such a way that they eventually reached agreement on the sub-goals. At this particular writing task, the use of L1 to create and maintain intersubjectivity was achieved as the students finally arrived at a shared understanding of the objects, events, goals, and sub-goals of the task as the students considered which sports to write about, what to say about them, and the order in which to discuss them. Indeed, throughout the interaction the students used the L1 to

establish mutual agreement on the objects, events, goals, and sub-goals that defined their task; that is, they used their L1 to establish and maintain intersubjectivity.

At the intrapsychological level, the first language appeared in the form of private speech which served as a tool to express the learners' own thought and a self-evaluation of what have been produced or learned so far. Unfortunately the study did not show whether the practices of the private speech eventually arrived in the accomplishment of the learning goals, e.g. final production of a sentence in the target language.

The study showed no sign of the relationship between the use of L1 and the level of learner language proficiency. However, in the analysis of learners with low proficiency in L2, the use of L1 was seen as very much needed in order to construct collaborative act in learning. The research claimed to have proved the use of L1 "as a means to create a social and cognitive space in which learners are able to provide each other and themselves with help throughout the task" (p. 245). Indeed, the study has shown the use of L1 was beneficial for language learning in that it served as a cognitive tool that made it possible for students to construct collaborative dialogue in the completion of language tasks by performing three important functions: construction of

scaffolded help, establishment and maintenance of intersubjectivity and use of private speech.

The last article in the review analyzed advanced learners of Spanish who are native speakers of English. In the study, Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain (2005) based their analysis on the interactional model of code-switching suggested by Auer (1984, 1995, 1998). In interactional contexts, code switching has been shown to serve both discourse-related functions and participant-related function. Discourse-related functions organize conversation by contributing to the interactional meaning of a particular utterance while participant-related functions are switches corresponding to the preferences of the individual who performs the switching or those of coparticipants in the conversation (see Auer, 1984, 1998 for detail). Further, in the analysis the researchers looked at the classroom, in which the interaction took place, as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), in which “people are mutually engaged in a joint enterprise with a shared repertoire of styles” (p. 236).

Analyzing the code switching within the theoretical frameworks stated above, the study was conducted to identify the patterns of the code switching used in the classroom and the factors underlying such phenomenon. The analysis found that the presence of the code switching throughout

the interaction (presented in the data excerpts) reflected both discourse functions. In addition, several code switching were analyzed to have participant-related and discourse-related functions at the same time, following what Auer (1998) believed as occur in non-classroom discourse. Although the study did not explicitly relate the use of the first language to level of language proficiency, it showed that the code switching served to give benefit not only for learners with low level proficiency but also for those with high level proficiency. It demonstrated that, for advanced learners, code switching did not only provide students with help dealing with language difficulties but also enable such students to construct bilingual community in the classroom environment. In the study, the learners were observed to use the first language for the purpose of reformulation or repetition, word searching, a stopgap, metalinguistic comments and request for help.

Reformulation refers to a repetition of a chunk of language (a word or phrase) in the course of performing a language task. Showed in the data, a student reformulated the same utterance in a different code (German to English) in order to add emphasis to her answer as well as to ask for clarification whether the first utterance in the target language is correct.

The use of the first language for strategy of word searching, preceded by a

number of pauses, provided students with a backup language situations where (as similarly analyzed by Eldridge (1996)) they cannot easily retrieve a word in the target language. It was seen that after the code switching, the student finally could provide reformulation in the target language.

When a learner is struggling with the target language, the first language is used to overcome a breakdown in the communication. In one example presented in the data, when a student was having difficulty expressing what she wanted to say, indicated by perturbation markers, false starts and multiple pauses, the student went on to express the ideas in the first language.

The use of the first language for metalinguistic comments was seen to explain the reason of the difficulty in the learning task. In this particular example, the problem did not come from her lack of knowledge or vocabulary in the target language, but she found difficulty in developing the ideas and expressed her argument in the learning task. The comment in the first language thus gave her the chance to release her from stress at her inability to put her ideas into words.

The last function of the code switching demonstrated in the study was the use of the first language for making request for help. In similar case to those of prompt appeal and translation appeal analyzed by Hancock (1997), the switch served to mark

the need of students for the required information needed in the learning task.

Through the study, the researchers stressed that, especially for advanced learners, the first language was not only used when they faced difficulties in the target language, but also served to conceptualize the classroom as a bilingual setting. The researchers further argued that by allowing students to code switch in ways that resemble uses in non-classroom bilingual interaction, therefore, not only gives them the opportunity to become more comfortable with the target language but also gives the chance to experiment with using two languages, like bilinguals they hope (and are expected) to be in the future.

Overall, based on the review of the four articles above, it can be concluded so far that each study has demonstrated that code switching plays important roles in achieving language learning task. Some studies show similarities of the functions one among the others. There are five general functions of code switching that can be found in more than one study. Those are equivalence (word searching), floor holding (a stopgap), metalanguage (metalinguistic comments), reformulation (repetition or reiteration) and private speech (self-address).

CODE SWITCHING AS LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY

None of studies previously reviewed claims that learner code switching in classroom may potentially obstruct learning. It can be assumed, therefore, that the use of L1 may be perceived as strategy in language learning process. This part of the paper is to trace the code switching strategy, showed in the reviewed studies above, in the concept of language learning strategy particularly outlined by O'Malley and Chamot (1990).

A language learning strategy is used by the learners “to facilitate the learning” (Chamot, 1987, p. 71), “to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information” (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, p.1), and “to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situation” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). It is consciously selected by the learner (Cohen, 1998) and varies among individuals (Brown, 1994).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) listed the strategies into three categories: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process which is broken down into planning (before the learning task takes place), monitoring (when the learning task is being undertaken) and evaluating (after the learning task takes place).

Cognitive strategies involve interacting with the learning materials and applying a specific technique to the learning task. Social affective strategies involve interacting with other persons (other learners, teachers or native speakers) to assist learning. Oxford (1990) categorized the strategies into direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memorizing, cognitive processing and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies include metacognitive, social and affective strategies. Direct strategies require mental processing of the language and therefore they directly involve the target language, while indirect strategies help learners in language learning without the use of the target language.

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), the use of the first language by students in performing the learning task is categorized as cognitive strategy. Furthermore, if the five general functions of code switching identified in the review are placed within the categories of language learning strategy, four out of five functions can be categorized either in metacognitive, cognitive or social and affective strategies. Equivalence, depending on to whom it is addressed, can be categorized as questioning for clarification (if addressed to teachers) and cooperation (if addressed to other learners), both under the social affective strategy. Metalanguage, depending on the

aims and the learning situations, can be categorized as strategies of selective attention, advance organization, and organization planning, which are all under category of metacognitive strategy. Reformulation (of a word or phrase) is categorized as the strategy of auditory representation, which is under cognitive strategy. Finally, private speech or self-address, is categorized as self-talk strategy, under social and affective strategy. Of the five general functions, only floor holding or a stopgap function can not be recognized under either categories of strategy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The article has reported the review of articles in searching for the functions of code switching by learners who share the same language background. The review has showed that each study encourages the use of the first language in the classroom as it has been demonstrated to serve several functions that enable the students to achieve the objectives in the language learning.

It also shows that some studies presented similar functions of the code switching one among the others. There are five general functions of code switching that can be found in more than one study, which are: equivalence (word searching), floor holding (a stopgap), metalanguage (metalinguistic comments), reformulation

(repetition or reiteration) and private speech (self-address). With regard to the framework of language learning strategy, four out of five functions stated above can be recognized as strategies under either metacognitive, cognitive or social affective strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Referring to the fact, it can be concluded that the use of the first language by students in the classroom has significant and, in some cases, crucial functions which can potentially benefit learning. For teachers of second or foreign language, to whom the paper is particularly addressed, there are two things which may be perceived as reflections on the learner use of the first language in the classroom. First, it is suggested that the code switching should not be seen as an obstacle, deficiency or even failure in learning. Instead, it may be seen as an important tool or beneficial learning strategy that enables learners to achieve the learning goal. Finally, it is worth contemplating that by banning the use of the first language in the classroom, it will remove the opportunity for the students to experiment bilingual language practice, which can be the goal of learning. Also, in the classroom situation with low proficiency level of students, it will potentially obstruct the establishment as well as maintenance of intersubjectivity needed in the interaction.

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