

The Effect of Teacher's Code-Switching on Students' Achievement in Speaking in the EFL Context

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Abstract

This study mainly aims to identify if the teacher's code-switching to Arabic language affects students' performance in the speaking skill in the EFL classroom. The study also investigates the functions of teachers' CS in the EFL classroom as well as students' attitudes towards teachers' CS. The sample of the study is comprised of 20 teachers from the ELI-Jeddah to be observed through a checklist followed by dividing the teachers into two groups; teachers who CS and teachers who don't CS. After that, the speaking grades of students are accumulated, then is divided into two groups as well. Moreover, the students' sample was a total of 200 students from each of the 20 classes observed (10 students in each class). The findings of the study are grouped into three categories: first, it was found out that the grades of students' who attend to teachers who don't CS are higher than those students who attend to teachers who CS. Second, the most used CS functions in all the 20 observed sessions were for the purposes of "assessing understanding" and then "translation". Third, it was shown from students' questionnaire that students obtain a positive attitude towards teachers' CS in the classroom as it facilitate their learning.

Keywords: EFL; ELT; Code-Switching; English Language Institute; KSA

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Introduction

Code switching (CS) is a phenomenon that occurs frequently in a variety of language use contexts. The act of using student's first language while speaking in the target language is referred to as the phenomenon of Code-Switching. Interest in CS has greatly increased due to the development of modern society, increasing globalization, the increasing interconnections among different ethnic populations, as well as the process of migration (Akynove, Zharkynbekova, & Aimoldina, 2012). Isfahani & Kiyoumars (2010) state that CS occurs in the speech of bilingual speakers who are able to speak both languages with some degree of competence. They also claim that it represents speakers' ethnic identities. Johansson (2013) finds CS in bilingual communities who speak more than one language to communicate. She has also indicated that CS is used by bilinguals when trying to communicate better to convey meanings. Then & Ting (2009) have commented on the use of CS in multilingual communities. They consider the phenomenon to be widespread, "from daily life and workplaces to classrooms" (pg. 1). Additionally, many authors stress that the term CS is appropriate to studies of bilingualism or multilingualism in which the focus is the use of two or more languages in discourse" (Huerta-Macías, Quintero, 1992).

Statement of Problem

In the context of the English Language Institute (ELI)/ Jeddah/ King AbdulAziz University- which is where the researcher works-, students are taught by both native and non-native speakers of English. Teachers from different language backgrounds endeavor to communicate with students primarily in the target language. However, some teachers switch to the Arabic language since it is the students' first language. In the ELI context, it is important to consider that not all teachers have the same perspectives on CS. Some teachers perceive CS as hindering students' maximum potential in learning the target language (Olmo-Castillo, 2014). Other teachers do not, believing that CS may, in fact, support students' second language acquisition in multiple ways. These conflicting conceptions about CS use may affect students' second language (L2) achievement positively or negatively which will be reflected in the speaking achievement of students. The speaking assessment for students in the ELI is perceived as being worrying and challenging. This is due to students' low fluency in the English language which is slowly developing especially in beginners levels. To date, there is little research on the impact of CS on student achievement in speaking L2. What studies there are limited in scope and range, in terms of qualitative study of this issue (Amorim, 2012). Specifically, in the local scope of Saudi Arabia there isn't much focus on this topic applied on Saudi students to investigate whether CS is a recommended linguistic feature in the language classroom or not. More studies are needed to allow researchers in this field to draw conclusions concerning whether CS should be implemented as a useful strategy that supports students' learning and achievement or if it should be banned from EFL classrooms. Moreover, aside from the issue of the value of CS in the classroom, it is important to measure students' speaking achievement since, "learners must be able to speak fluently if they are to communicate effectively in international English" (Amorim, 2012).

Purpose of the study

This thesis project is an explanatory study which will investigate the effect of teachers' code switching on learners' achievement in the speaking skill in the EFL context. Moreover, it will explore the purposes of CS in the EFL classroom, as well as students' attitudes towards CS in class. Through observing 20 sessions of non-native teachers, the researcher will examine instances of CS and for what purposes it was present in these sessions. This study will join others (e.g., Then & Ting, 2009) offering linguistic evidence based on naturally occurring classroom data, as a means to provide better insight into the functions and forms of CS. In the analysis of this thesis, the planned data analysis will support conclusions about the efficacy of classroom CS in promoting student achievement in the target language. Moreover, the functions of CS in the classes observed are also going to be investigated as well as students' attitudes towards teachers' CS behavior in class.

Literature Review

Code-Switching in the Language Classroom

The phenomena of CS has been a significant topic of theoretical and practical investigations in second language acquisition. The first investigations in this field (Jones, 2000, cited by Akynove, Zharkynbekova & Aimoldina, 2012) were in the 1980s when classroom interaction was first being examined with audio-recording devices. These researchers' analyses had a linguistic orientation as well as investigating classroom discourse functions. It was as a result of these investigation, CS became a topic of debate with particular focus on the use of target language versus L1 in foreign language classrooms (Akynove, Zharkynbekova & Aimoldina, 2012).

CS has important implications for theories of second language acquisition, thus has been receiving increased attention in the field of second language acquisition. Nilep (2007) states that the term code-switching is used in studies of language acquisition, second language acquisition, and language learning to describe "bilingual speakers' or language learners' cognitive linguistic abilities, or to describe classroom or learner practices involving the use of more than one language" (p. 1). It is also "an indicator of the degree of bilingualism that exists within a certain community and by extension, the degree of access speakers have to the source language" (Sayahi, 2011, p. 114).

Sert (2006) confirms that a language classroom is considered to be a social group; for this reason he relates CS as a natural phenomenon among any social group to be "valid" and ascribed to a language class.

Reflecting on that, the fact that using the native language in foreign language learning is considered by many theorists unfavorable for learning itself which may hinder the process of acquiring the language. Akynove, Zharkynbekova & Aimoldina, (2012) state that CS is a "haphazard mixture of two languages; therefore, students were not allowed to switch forth and back between the target language and the native language" (p. 224). Many linguists have recognized it as contributing to a lowering of standards (Bailey & Nunan, 1996, cited in Amorim, 2012). It has even been considered a "sign of laziness or mental sloppiness and

inadequate command of the language” (Sridhar, 1996, Apud, McKay & Hornberger, 1996, p. 59, cited in Amorim, 2012).

On the other hand, Tarone (1977) (cited in McDonough 1995, p. 23, cited in Amorim, 2012), considered a language switch as a communicative strategy such as “translation, appeal for assistance, mime, paraphrase, or avoidance” (p. 179). Amorim (2012) elaborates on the use of L1 and L2 in the English classroom, pointing out that, “exclusive use of L2 in class is unrealistic, as the two languages are active inside the learners’ heads and will influence each other”. (p. 179). McDonough (1995, p. 25, cited in Amorim, 2012) asserts that it is an ‘achievement strategy’ in which learners can rely on when “compensating for their language incompetence. Sert (2006) “suggested that a bridge from known (native language) to unknown (new foreign language content) is constructed in order to transfer the new content and meaning is made clear in this way”. In this respect, Cole (1998, cited, in Sert, 2005) emphasized on this point when he states “a teacher can exploit students’ previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2” (p. 3).

Research Methodology

Research Approach

Quantitative design is used in collecting and analyzing “the final speaking grades of students”, as well as it is used in students’ questionnaires.

Quantitative research bases its research on numbers to represent its data while qualitative research identifies its data through verbal description (Perry, 2005). Quantitative research originated mainly from psychological research where the focus was abundant on statistical analysis for the purpose of making generalizations to the large population (Perry, 2005). Perry (2005) described quantitative research as it is "characterized by the use of numbers to represent its data...which frequently uses sample strategies for generalizing findings to larger populations" (p. 75). Litosseliti (2010) states that quantitative approach in research is “deductive” by its nature. It bases its research on a theory which is “already known”, for the purpose of constructing a hypotheses in which the researcher during the course of the study attempt to “approve or disapprove based on empirical investigation” (p. 52).

Population and Research Sample

Female students of the preparatory year (modules 3 and 4) as well as the 20 non-native teachers, at King AbdulAziz- city of Jeddah, represented the population for this study. The preparatory year students were specifically identified for the following important reasons. First, as a researcher and an instructor of the preparatory year students, the researcher’s very important cause for conducting this study on this sample is for it to contribute to more understanding and facilitating the difficulties learners face in this year. Second, as being an instructor in the preparatory year, the sample collected were easily accessible and less costly. The students were from the same institute the researcher work in, as well as the 20 non-native teachers were the researcher’s colleagues. Third, learners in this year share the same native language which is “Arabic” which is the area of the researcher’s investigation; the CS between Arabic and English.

In all the 20 classes observed, the researcher distributed 10 questionnaires in each class to students. The total number of questionnaires distributed were 200 questionnaires. Students who were given the questionnaires were Saudi students at levels 102/103 and 104 who are aged between 18-21. The choice of giving this number of questionnaires (10) was because of attempting to have a convenience sample.

Although students differed in their academic orientation (Science and Arts students), they were placed together in classes according to their level of proficiency in English. The study was conducted in modules 3 and 4 of the academic year, so the study sought students who were graded from levels 1 and 2 and reached to levels 3 and 4.

On the other hand, the non-native teachers who were randomly selected have varied backgrounds. 9 Saudi's, Egyptian, 4 North Africans, Pakistani, Malaysian, 3 Jordanian and 1 Lebanese.

Sampling Technique

Simple random technique was utilized in distributing the questionnaires to the 10 students in each class. This as well corresponds with selecting the 20 teachers to be observed. The researcher interest was to select only non-native teachers in the ELI in random choice of classes.

Research Tools

Three kinds of tools were administered throughout this study. Two of them are considered main research tools, and the third one is a secondary source tool. The main tools are observation and questionnaire; and the supporting tool is "the final speaking grades of students". Two significant research tools were utilized for their significance in the study. Wray and Bloomer (2006) states that questionnaires can best be utilized along with other methods of data collection (interview, test, observation) to gain the complete picture. For this reason, Wray and Bloomer (2006) comment "questionnaires often do not operate as a substitute for transcription and analysis, but rather complement them" (p. 158).

Observation

In this study, "event sampling" was adopted to be used since this method of entering data to a checklist is useful in counting the frequencies and occurrences of the observed behavior for the purpose of making comparisons (Cohen, Manion, Morrison, 2007).

In the checklist used in observing the 20 classes, the researcher divided the instances of CS in each class into a list of the eight functions of CS. So that when the researcher is in class, she just check the reason of the teacher to switch to L1 and how frequent are they. These functions are:

- 1-Teacher code-switch for translation
- 2-Teacher code-switch for explanation of grammar
- 3-Teacher code-switch for assessing the understanding

- 4-Teacher code-switch for managing class
- 5-Teacher code-switch for indicating sympathy and friendship to students
- 6-Teacher code-switch for putting stress on important notions
- 7-Teacher code-switch for shifting topics
- 8-Teacher code-switch for getting students' attention

Questionnaires

A number of 200 questionnaires were focused on students' opinions and were distributed among these students of levels 102/103/ 104 through modules 3 and 4. The questionnaire is comprised of a total of 16 statements that determine students' preferences about teacher's CS in the English classroom.

Speaking Results

The speaking results of the students in levels 102, 103 and 104 are used as a second source or supporting source tool. In each of the 20 classes observed, the final speaking grades sheets were collected from teachers of those 20 classes. The speaking results are used as one of the tools for the purpose of collecting all the 20 sheets and comparing between them. During each module, there are two speaking exams; one at the beginning and another one in the middle of the module. So the average between the two exams are used as the final grade of the student.

Setting

In the context of the ELI, there are four modules during one academic year in which students study four levels; 101, 102, 103, 104. The researcher conducted the study in modules 3 and 4. In a single module, students take the speaking sessions as a practice before the speaking assessment which are two speaking assessments per module.

Procedure

The study was carried out during the academic year of 2015/ at the English Language Institute at King AbduAziz University in Jeddah. In the study two main tools with different procedures were implemented. First: observation will be discussed and then conclude of how the process of giving questionnaires was administered.

Observation

After the researcher created the checklist for the functions of teacher's CS, a permission was obtained to enter classes for the purpose of observation. The researcher attended a total of 20 classes of nonnative teachers which was recorded using a recording device. It is important to capture the elements of observed behavior using a recording device, reflect upon how true was, and describe it the way it was.

The researcher attended one hour in each class which makes the total number of observed hours twenty hours. Teachers were not informed that their code switching behavior was the subject of observation by the researcher in the class to ensure naturalness.

After observing all the twenty classes in modules 3 and 4, the researcher divided the teachers into two groups. Teachers who CS to L1 and teachers who don't CS to L1. After dividing the teachers into two groups, the final speaking grades were obtained from teachers of each class in module 3 first and then 4.

Then, from these students' grades, comparisons were made to analyze if CS behavior affected both groups' performances.

Data analysis Procedures

Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires and final grades of students were quantified using a computer program (SPSS) through a T-test. Moreover, percentages are used in determining students' perception on teachers' CS in class. A detailed description of the analysis of results and discussion is thoroughly described in chapter 4.

Findings

Findings of Observation Using a Checklist

In analyzing the data, the results of observing 20 classes showed that teachers have distinctive behaviors in these classes which will be divided into two main groups. The first group are the teachers who code-switched to first language which are counted as a total of 13 classes, whereas the rest of the 20 classes which are a total of 7 classes constituted the second group of teachers who do not code-switch. Five sections were observed in module 3, and 15 sections in module 4. The total number of observed speaking sessions were thirteen sessions, but the rest of the observed sessions were a variety of different skills (5 grammar sessions, and 2 reading sessions). The reason for not being able to only attend speaking sessions for the whole 20 sessions, is because of the difficulty to find speaking sessions in the period of observing since many teachers gave the speaking sessions in the same timings. A second reason is because having a variety of different skills would broad the scope of the study which will contribute to having better results.

In the first group, the number of teachers who code-switched were thirteen non-native teachers. Seven sections were from level 104, five sections from level 103, and 1 section from level 102. Teachers in this group code-switched for many reasons as mentioned earlier by Sert (2005). They code-switched for translation, explanation of grammar, assessing understanding, managing class, indicating sympathy and friendship to students, putting stress on important notions, shifting topics, and for getting students' attention (Sert, 2005).

In analyzing "the teachers' functions for code-switching" checklist card, it was found that the highest code-switched function was that teachers' code-switched for assessing understanding which reached 135 times in all sessions. Some sessions had high frequencies of "assessing understanding" code-switching than other sessions. Some sessions did not include this category of code-switched occurrences. The second most code-switched function was when

teachers' code-switched for translation with 126 times of switches in all code-switched sessions. On the other hand, the lowest category of code-switched frequencies was when teachers' code-switched for getting students' attention with only ten times in all the 13 classes. Moreover, two functions had exactly the same number of code-switched frequencies which are when teachers' code-switched for explanation of grammar, and for managing class with 66 times in each function. The remaining categories which are: "indicating sympathy and friendship to students", and "shifting topics" functions had similar results with 40 times of code-switching for the former, and 41 for the later function. The last function to discuss is when teachers' code-switched for putting stress on important notions which occurred 26 times in all the 13 observed code-switched sessions.

Findings from Comparing between Two Groups

As a reminder of what was stated previously in the introduction, the following hypothesis was examined: a) The null hypothesis (H_0) which states that there is no significant difference between the two groups; grades of students who attend to teachers' who CS which are a total of 13 sections, and the grades of students who attend to teachers' who don't CS which are a total of 7 sections, b) The alternative hypothesis which states that there is statistically significant difference between the grades of those students who attend the classes of teachers who code switch, and the other students who attend classes of teachers who do not code switch.

Thus, the final speaking grades of students in the sections of teachers who CS and teachers who do not CS were collected and entered in an SPSS program. Then, an independent sample t-test was performed on the grades of both groups at the α level = 0.05 and the results revealed that there is statistically significant difference that exists between the groups and therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Findings from Students' Questionnaire

Looking overall at the percentages, we find that most of the highest percentages (7 questions) are within the "strongly agree" category. Firstly, the highest percentage of responses, lies in the first question and the first category specifically. This question states "I understand more when my English teacher uses Arabic while teaching in class", is the most general question of the all the 16 questions in the questionnaire. A score of 59% which represents 104 students have responded "strongly agree" to this question. The scores gradually decrease with 20.5% in the "agree" category, 14% in "sometimes" category, 5% don't agree, and one of the lowest percentages 1.5% who strongly disagreed. Secondly, the second highest percentage is found in the fourth question which states "I prefer my English teacher to use Arabic to explain new vocabulary" with 58% in the "strongly agree" category. It also decreases with 19%, 15%, 5%, and then 2.5% respectively in the categories "agree, sometimes, don't agree, and strongly don't agree".

Conclusion

In this study, the null hypothesis proposed in this study was not retained whereas the alternative hypothesis was accepted which states that there's a significant statistical difference between the grades of students who attend to teachers who CS and the ones who do not which means that CS should not be recommended in the language classroom. In contrast, students' attitudes toward teachers' CS in class were positive. To the researcher surprise, she has not expected these results and thought that both comparing between the grades of the two groups and students' opinions would somehow complement each other to strengthen the research conclusions. However, perhaps somehow these were the research findings because a variety of tools were implemented to test the study hypothesis and to look at it from different angles. Indeed, CS has been the focus of a wide range of studies in linguistics and especially in language learning studies. However, looking closely at this study and its findings had its own uniqueness to it due to the fact that there aren't many studies that have tackled the CS behavior in the local context of language learning in Saudi Arabia. This study would contribute to the larger corpus of research of CS locally for researchers, educators and teachers who are interested in this phenomenon in the language classroom. In this regard, teachers should be aware of their CS and for what purposes they are doing it. The researcher believes that teachers should realize the fundamental aspects of using CS in class and implement it wisely. If this rule was applied, it could be suggested from the contrasting findings of using students' grades and students' questionnaire, that CS should be banned generally, nevertheless, when there is an urgent need for it, CS could be the final resort if it were from students' side to reach compromising ends if –as mentioned earlier- it was based on teacher's awareness of the CS functions and if the lesson was based on a student-centered approach. This said, should not be the excuse to use CS whenever it's needed. As a matter of fact, the study supports its second hypothesis and finding that the speaking achievement was significantly better when there wasn't CS around. As mentioned earlier, teachers' use of CS would have a limited effect on students' process of learning.

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