

CODE SWITCHING: LOOKING AT THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE ON STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE 4.0 DIGITAL ERA

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ABSTRACT:

Research about code switching (CS) is very important in the domain of linguistics and language education, especially in the 4.0 digital era. This article enumerates the outcome of many researchers on how learners switch code from the target language to their mother tongue during group work, so that we can suggest policies about teachers' adequate attitude towards their learners' using first language (L1) in the classroom in this age.

Keywords: Code switching, language education, linguistics.

1. Introduction

Research about code switching (CS) is very important in the domain of linguistics and language education. Code switching ability plays an essential role for a person to carry out his/her learning process within the bilingual, multilingual and multicultural community. While with some theorists, CS has been believed to be a result of poor proficiency with one language (Skiba, 1997), Duran (1994) affirms that it can be a communicative strategy. 'code-switching seems to serve important communicative and cognitive functions'. In fact, if a speaker applies CS flexibly, he/she can communicate effectively. On the other hand, if he/she abuses code switching, he/she may not acquire the communicative purpose.

As educators, we should be conscious of the need to thoroughly explain and understand this bilingual phenomenon, in order to deal with it in our

instructional context. This article enumerates the outcome of many researchers on how learners switch code from the target language to their mother tongue during group work, so that we can suggest teachers' adequate attitude towards their learners' using first language (L1) in the classroom.

2. Studies on code switching in group work and why speakers code switch

Many researchers have studied on the effectiveness and limitation of group work in English classes (Long & Porter, 1985, Chen & Hird, 2006, Le, 2009 among others). They agree that group work creates chances to use the target language, enhance learners' courage and dynamic activities. However, Le (2009) finds that her 1st and 2nd year English major students overuse their mother tongue with awareness when working in groups and they rely on Vietnamese to keep their discussion going on. In my opinion, in an EFL

classroom where the learners share the same L1, it is impossible to eliminate using their mother tongue or code switching. Instead, we should find out effective solutions to limit using L1. Jacobson (1976) argues that there are negative attitudes towards the phenomenon of CS as this issue may cause the feeling of 'inferiority and alienation' for speakers due to the state of not being as good as other people, and making listeners less friendly or sympathetic towards the speakers.

On the other hand, several researchers have found the benefits of maintaining L1 in developing social, cognitive and metalinguistic abilities (Zelasko, 1998, Portes, 2002). Tarone and Swain (1995) suppose that students have the tendency to use L1 in classrooms more often in higher grade levels, when they encounter many new words and more difficult academic tasks. In some aspect, we should sympathize with these learners, who feel easier when they speak their native language to achieve their communicative purpose and comprehend the knowledge they need. C. William Schweers (1999) convinces us that L1 has an important and 'facilitating' role in SL and FL classrooms. His research on how frequently and for what purposes the teachers use Spanish in their classes persuades that L2 can be learned through being aware of the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. He also believes that using L1 leads to positive attitudes toward the EFL process since they can express their own culture.

3. Studies on why speakers code switch

Holmes (1992) observes and transcribes the dialogue using CS from English to Maori among three speakers to clarify the function of CS, that is to build intimate interpersonal relationship among speakers in a bilingual community. He says that CS is a tool to create linguistic solidarity for them, especially among the speakers sharing the same ethno-cultural identity. Gysels (as cited in Duran, 1994) reveals two purposes when speakers switch codes: for filling a linguistic/conceptual gap, or for other multiple communicative purposes. Duran (1994) supposes that one of the reasons for us to use interlanguage and code switching is not to debate, erase, or cause cognitive confusion to each language. This idea may be surprising, but he has his strong argument for one language may help the other, or both languages together may create new

idea, image, thought, etc. As a result, this seems to have a function of facilitating and supporting thinking and communication.

In his study, Eldridge (1996) concludes the four functions of CS. 'Equivalence' is first function, giving the learners the chance to continue expressing their ideas by using the native equivalent of a certain lexical item when they do not have the competence for explaining that item in the target language. The second function is 'floor-holding', helping the learners to avoid gaps in communication when they cannot remember the suitable target language at the moment of speaking. However, Eldridge finds that the overuse of L1 in this way may have its drawback, for the dependence on L1 may result in the learners' loss of fluency. The next is 'reiteration', which uses L1 to reinforce, emphasize, or clarify the message that has already been transmitted in the target language. With this function, the message is transferred exactly or the learners can indicate that they have understood the content. The last function is called 'conflict control', switching codes to transfer or vary the utterance meaning for the sake of the speakers' needs, intention or purposes. CS, therefore, may help avoid misunderstanding in communication.

Besides, David Atkinson (as cited in C. William Schweers, 1999) shows us the cases when speakers switch code such as eliciting language, checking comprehension and cooperating in groups, etc. He reasons that learners can sometimes compare and correct their answers, or explain a part of the lesson to their peers better than teachers by CS to their L1. Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft (2000) show the strong influence of the communication setting on the frequency of learners' code switching. They find that learners switch codes to establish their solidarity and identity in the community. They give examples to conclude that a speaker can switch codes to quote directly what another person says in a language different from the language he/she is using. They also explore that a person switches codes to identify the proper language with his/her listeners and to be sure that the listeners understand what he/she is talking. Heredia & Altarriba (2001) show the evidence that learners code switch when they know that the people they are talking to understand what they are saying. This implies that

the language they are using at that time is meaningful in a specified situation. They also find that learners switch codes frequently when they learn new words, when they do not know a word in the target language or cannot remember the word they have already learnt before.

Having some similar observation on the learners' use of L1 during their group work, Bassano (2003) recognizes that when working independently in groups, ESL (also EFL) learners sharing the same L1 tend to use that language among themselves. They also have the same tendency when they are asked to perform a task that is beyond their ability such as using too complex English language, too difficult process or topic, and when they are afraid of making mistakes.

We can draw a sound conclusion from the studies that teachers should observe to find out the reason why their learners switch codes or use mother tongue. When code switching is used, it may cause negative attitudes or bad impressions for participants in the conversation. However, the feeling does not seem to exert any refraining force on the code switching practice as long as it is performed in an informal, relaxed atmosphere and especially among members of a group. It has been presented that the use of code switching is dispensable to every utterance in the speech contexts. It is considered in any conversation as a

strategy to negotiate identities. It also signals the speakers' intention in the social relationship with other people in conversations.

4. Conclusion

In fact, code switching is a universal phenomenon, yet its functions vary among communities. It can be both facilitating and obstructing factor to the process of learning English. In classroom situations, code switching may assist weak EFL learners but its overuse may take away the learners' necessary target language input. Additionally, whatever purposes code switching serves and whether it is used consciously or not, the 'new' language created in these situations keeps linguistic consistence and validity to those communicating with it.

In summary, it is useful for educators to recognize the aspects of code switching that can help develop positive relationships and efficient communication among the learners. As a result, they are able to adjust their EFL learners choosing suitable language and improve their target language, since the learners may deal with discouragement in learning English or danger of wasting time without mastering English due to using code switching so much in their study years. Consequently, they have appropriate attitude towards code switching as well as give suggestions to their learners for effective code switching. ■

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CHUYỂN ĐỔI MÃ: TÌM HIỂU SỰ ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA NGÔN NGỮ MẸ ĐỂ ĐỐI VỚI NGƯỜI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ TRONG KỶ NGUYÊN SỐ 4.0

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TÓM TẮT:

Nghiên cứu về chuyển đổi mã (CS) rất quan trọng trong lĩnh vực ngôn ngữ học và giáo dục ngôn ngữ, đặc biệt trong kỷ nguyên số 4.0. Bài viết này liệt kê kết quả của các nhà nghiên cứu về cách người học chuyển mã từ ngôn ngữ đích sang tiếng mẹ đẻ khi họ làm việc nhóm, từ đó có thể gợi ý các chính sách về thái độ phù hợp của người dạy đối với người học sử dụng tiếng mẹ đẻ (L1) trong lớp học ngôn ngữ trong thời đại này.

Từ khóa: Chuyển đổi mã, giáo dục ngôn ngữ, ngôn ngữ học.