

Linguistic Features of Code-Switching: A Study of Urdu/English Bilingual Teachers' Classroom Interactions

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the code-switching phenomenon to have positive impacts upon teaching and learning process. The study investigates the linguistic features of code-switching, that include intra-sentential code-switching, inter-sentential code-switching and code-switching at word, phrase and clause level, which are examined in both male and female university teachers' lectures. Several findings from Urdu/English code-switching corpus, collected from universities of Lahore city, are presented and analyzed. It is investigated that while making use of code-switching, there is a frequent use of different linguistic features of code-switching between Urdu and English by university teachers. It is found that intra-sentential code-switching (37.15%) is the leading code-switched area, and code-switching at word (31.21%), clause (21.54%), and phrase (6.42%) level, being a part of inter-sentential code-switching, are the successive areas. On the other hand, inter-sentential code-switching (3.66%) makes the least of it.

Keywords: Code-switching, classroom interaction, bilingual, intra-sentential code-switching, inter-sentential code-switching

1. Introduction

Usually, we observe bilinguals mixing two languages when speaking. In fact, this situation of bilingualism is present in every country, in all classes of society and at all age levels (Grosjean, 1982). In Pakistan, which is a multilingual society and where many people have the knowledge of two or more languages, the linguistic phenomenon of mixing languages is quite common. For example, if Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, is taken then one can find that the insertion of English items in Urdu sentence is a frequent feature in the speech of educated bilingual Pakistani speakers. Even if they do not possess the ability to speak in English, they employ English words and phrases to give their discourse a touch of English that has social meaning (kaleem Raza khan, 2004). When fluent bilingual speakers of various languages make conversation, they often include words, phrases, clauses and sentences from different languages in a single discourse. This alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation is called code-switching (Milroy and Muysken, 1995). Code-switching is a subject, which has existed in the literature on bilingualism since the early nineteen hundreds when Espinosa (1917) wrote of a 'speech mixture' in the speech of New Mexicans (cited by Ana Huerta- Macias and Elizabeth Quintero, 2001). Code-Switching is from the combination of two words 'Code and switching'.

Ronald Wardhaugh (1986) says, 'that the term code can be used to refer to any kind of system that two or more people employ for communication', whether it is language or dialect or pidgins and creoles, all are codes. Nevertheless, when this spoken form of language or dialect etc. turns into writing, then it is called codification. On the other hand, if we look at 'switching', it appears just a 'movement'; movement from one object to another. This means that you shift, switch or move from one code to another while speaking. This shift, switch, and movement of bilingual speakers from one code (language) to another code, is called code switching. Coming to classroom context, 'the pedagogical and communicative functions of classroom code-switching justify its use in teaching and learning contexts' (Romylyn A. Metila, 2009, P. 44). In Pakistani classroom, code-switching across a range of curricular subjects is a widespread phenomenon. Apart from language classes, universities use English as a medium of instruction. Whether it is mathematics class, EFL, ESL class or any other language class, English language is supplemented with other languages. It means that code-switching exists in some proportion. While keeping aside regional languages, this code-switching involves Urdu, our national language and English, the symbol of economic power, social realities, political force and in fact the Lingua Franca. It means that learning and teaching in classrooms is supported by this blend of Urdu and English. Commenting on this aspect of code switching, Mamokgethi Setati and Jill Adler (2001, pp. 243-244) say:

Code-switching in a school classroom usually refers to bilingual or multilingual setting, and at its most general, entails switching by the teacher and/or learners between the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) and the learners' main language. Code-switching is a practice that enables learners to harness their main language as a learning resource.

In classrooms, code-switching as a learning resource occurs at different levels. If on one hand there is a switch of grammatical items i.e. verbs, adjectives and linkers etc., then on the other hand this switch involves registers and technical language. While keeping in view this aspect of code-switching, Lalita Malik (1994, p. 10) says:

Code-switching is context-governed phenomenon. If interlocutors have a degree in English and use English as the medium of lecturing or in their office work, they are likely to use information carrying items of English and linkers of Hindi. In case the topic of discourse is of a technical, their registral items are likely to be from English and grammatical items from Hindi.

Though code-switching is very common in classroom interactions, still it is considered unfavorable by teachers in general. It is believed that students who code-switch are poor speakers of both English and Urdu. Many people consider code-switching as biased one, and even give it pejorative names such as Urduish and Spanglish. Some people say that code-switching is because of incompetency in language, while other considers it as a sign of laziness. It is believed that they speak neither Urdu nor English. If this is teachers' belief about the use of code switching, then how its use will be supported. How will bilingual students be able to seek help from the use of code-switching? The negative beliefs of teachers towards code-switching are needed to be changed as they strongly impact upon students' success or failure in schools. Beliefs guide teachers' thoughts and behaviors (Borg, 2001). Teachers' stated beliefs play an important role in classroom interactions, the material to be selected, the activities to be performed and the language to be used during instruction and accepted from students during teacher-student and student-student interactions. Teachers' beliefs determine classroom interactions, which are done through language use. In other word teachers need to revise their negative attitudes and beliefs towards code-switching and should recognize the role of both L1 (see Glenn S. Levine, 2003 and Tikunoff & Vazquez-Faria, 1982) and L2 in the learners' learning process, which is compartmentalized by them due to which they try to avoid code-switching. So, there is a need for better understanding of code-switching phenomenon among classroom teachers and this study is conducted to help in this regard.

Code-switching, the use of two languages in a single discourse is not a random phenomenon, but a highly effective one. Code-switching serves many functions e.g. identity marker (Shin, 2010; Carmen Fought, 2003; Sridher, 1996; Nishimura, 1995; Kroskrity, 1993; Woolard, 1989; Gumperz, 1982), solidarity marker (Hannah Bradby, 2002), dominance and prestige (Karen Wong, 2000; Waseem, 2000), preciseness (Hussein, 1999; Bonvillain, 1993), strategy of neutrality (Myers Scotton, 1993), style shifting (Hannah Bradby, 2002), reiteration, personalization, address specification, interjection and quotation (Gumperz, 1982). Functions related to classroom context are translation of unknown vocabulary items, explaining grammar, managing class (Mingfa Yao, 2011), clarification (Ajmal Gulzar, 2010), emphasizing some points, expressing empathy and solidarity with students, and facilitating understanding by quoting other's words (Liu Jingxia, 2010; Eda Üstünel & Paul Seedhouse, 2005). 'Teachers' code-switching is an effective teaching strategy when dealing with low English proficient learners' (Badrul Hisham Ahmad, 2009, p. 49). According to Alex Brice (1997) and Reyes (1995) code-switching is an indication of a sophisticated user who exhibits a sound cognitive linguistic functioning. Similarly, Li (2000) elaborates that code-switching is a typical feature of the speech of bilingual speakers rather than deficiency. Code-switching is not an indicator of deficient language skills in the bilingual speakers.

There are numerous investigations (Shin & Milroy, 2000; Li & Milroy, 1995; Myers-Scotton, 1993), which have demonstrated just the opposite and consider code-switching as an additional resource for interaction purpose. It is obvious that there is well-documented sophisticated literature, which rejects the negative claim that code-switching is a sign of laziness and deficiency in language. Rather, it claims that bilingual speakers have the prestige of exploiting their treasure of linguistic knowledge to express meaningful thoughts and ideas (Karen Wong, 2000). Its use can also help in effective instruction. The use of code-switching' while making use of native language, when students are not clear about a point or when participation is needed, not only makes instruction effective, but also develops students' rapport with teacher and develops confidence to interact. In this regard Ernesto Macaro (2001), quoting Atkinson (1993), says that excluding L1 from classroom is not only impractical but also means depriving learners from one of the learning tools.

Learners can make use of code-switching in both participant-related functions, which involve the role of students and teacher in classrooms and also in discourse-related functions, which include bilingual practices outside classrooms (Grit Liebscher and Jennifer Dailey-O’Cain, 2005). One can find its feasibility as a means of developing bilingualism, which is ‘the ability to use two languages in varying degrees of proficiency and in different contexts such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking’ (Alex Brice, 1997). According to Krashen (1981), comprehensible input is necessary for language acquisition. It means that there is a need of scaffolding process and the best way of scaffolding, which fits well here in this context, is code-switching. This means that language development takes place through samples of language, which are appropriate, and code-switching may be signaling the need for provision of appropriate samples. Cook (1991) says that lesson can be made more communicative when code-switching is integrated into the activities which are formulated for second language teaching. This allows the balance use of both languages according to the situation and hence facilitates both teacher and students. Therefore, this study is conducted to make teachers aware that code-switching is a quite common occurrence in Pakistani EFL and many other subjects’ classroom and it may be helpful in changing teachers’ negative beliefs about code-switching practice as incompetence in both languages.

They would realize that code-switching is a complex process, which involves different levels of switching according to the proficiency in both the languages. This study provides quantitative analysis of the linguistic features of code-switching which serve a variety of pedagogical functions, whether in teacher-led classroom discourse or in teacher-student interaction or in students-students interaction. In this study, teachers’ classroom interaction is used to refer to teachers’ lectures and teachers discourse with students. It is believed that the conducted study can change teachers’ stigmatized beliefs about code-switching use in EFL and other subject classrooms and would contribute to the field of language education and educational research.

The second important aspect, which this study focuses on, is the ratio by which the two languages are to be used while switching from one language to another. For instance let teachers attitudes are changed about code-switching and they are willing to code switch, then what should be the ratio between the two languages during instruction because language management is a very important concern of bilingual education. In this regard Macswan (1997, p. 303), citing Jacobson (1983), says:

By code-switching in the classroom students will acquire subject-appropriate vocabulary in L1 and L2, and none of the practical problems of other approaches will be present. However, this switching may not be done haphazardly or randomly. In order for it to be educationally effective, four criteria must be met; (1) the language must be distributed at an appropriate ratio of 50/50; (2) the teaching of content must not be conscious of his/her alternation between the two languages; and (3) the alternation must accomplish a specific learning goal. Code-switching instruction, which does not meet these criteria Jacobson calls the “Unstructured approach”.

Here Jacobson’s third point that teacher should be conscious of the learning goal and the ways how to achieve that goal, is very important. It means that teacher should be aware of the fact whether switch should be made at word, phrase, clause or sentence level. This study provides information about the proportion at which words, phrases, clauses and sentences can be switched during instruction. In short, the main purpose of this study is to have an idea of the code-switching practice and its different linguistic features.

2. Methodology

The main reason behind this study was to investigate the linguistic and structural features of code-switching while using classroom interactions. Here, all sixteen HEC recognized universities of Lahore city were included in the population. However, lectures delivered at postgraduate level were taken into account and were observed. Purposive sampling was used and six out of sixteen universities were selected. Two or three classes from each university were taken and hence a total number of fourteen lectures were observed and recorded. The data, based for this study, was a corpus of approximately ten hours of classroom lectures. Observation, a basic and important tool of data collection, which is the most appropriate for this type of research, was used. Observation of classroom interactions involved teachers’ lectures. The researcher himself as a non-participant observer made observations, which were recorded through an audio recorder. However, in some classes, due to practical difficulty and ethical consideration when the researcher’s presence could have disturbed classroom interactions, the researcher has not been able to sit in the classrooms and teachers themselves made recordings of the lectures. The data collected were mostly teachers’ words, which require appropriate method to capture the exact language (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

Teachers may find it difficult to articulate the practice of using code-switching in classroom interactions, therefore, for this purpose to collect data on how teachers make use of code-switching and use language in classroom interactions, the researcher used digital recorder to record teachers' lectures, which provided access to the verbal output of the teachers. This study focused on different linguistic features of code-switching among bilingual teachers and instances of teachers' code-switching are identified and transcribed from audio recordings of university teachers' lectures. In this way, while strictly focusing on audio-recorded lectures, data were collected, transcribed and analyzed, which helped in the completion of the process in the form of a descriptive report.

3. Results and Findings

Before moving to data analysis, it is to be clarified that as this study just focuses on the instances of different linguistic features of code-switching and not their motivations, functions and purpose where long discussion and description is needed. So, long description is avoided. Efforts were made to just bring into account the actual frequencies and percentage values of these instances. In order to find out the frequency of intra-sentential and inter-sentential code-switching by teachers in classroom interactions, the data indicated that there are 2646 instances where code-switching occurred. Out of 2646, 983 examples show intra-sentential code-switching and only 97 instances belong to the category of inter-sentential code-switching. This shows the significant difference between these two types of code-switching. Furthermore, if we look at the percentage values of these two types of code-switching, it is obvious that intra-sentential code-switching, which is 37.15% is much higher than 3.66% of inter-sentential code-switching. Examples from intra-sentential and inter-sentential code-switching are given as the following:

- *Yeh jo influence ki hum baat kerte hein na, tu* some bad influences change us.
- *This the influence of we talk do are so* some bad influences change us.
- As we are talking about influence so some bad influences change us.
- I am not taking any assignment afterwards. *Yeh yaad rakh lein keh akheri paanch mere paas aye hein.*
- I am not taking any assignment afterwards. *This remember keep that last five I with received are.*
- I am not taking any assignment afterwards. Remember that I have received the last five.

The second example reveals that the code-switching data not only have the insertion of lexical items, phrases and clauses but also long stretch like sentence and because of this alteration inter-sentential code-switching occurs.

Secondly, the researcher was interested to know the frequency of words switched. So, for the purpose to answer this question, it was found from the data collected that after intra-sentential code-switching, code-switching at word level has the highest frequency. There are almost 826 (31.21%) instances of code-switching at word level. One of such examples is given below.

- I just told you that *keh* Nicholas Bacon was the father, till then we were talking about Sir Francis.
- I just told you that *that* Nicholas Bacon was the father, till then we were talking about Sir Francis.
- I just told you that Nicholas Bacon was the father, till then we were talking about Sir Francis.

Thirdly, the proportion, by which teachers switch phrases, were searched, and it was discovered that code-switching at phrase level is not the growing preference of the teachers. It was observed that there are only 170 (6.42%) places in the present study where code-switching at phrase level occurred. The example below shows code-switching at phrase level.

- *Hartal kay dawran* President Musharaf is being interviewed by the prosecutor.
- *Strike during* President Musharaf is being interviewed by the prosecutor.
- During a strike President Musharaf is being interviewed by the prosecutor.

The fourth main objective of this study was the knowledge about the use of code-switching at clause level. To find this, it was discovered that quite unexpectedly clauses were switched at a higher rate than phrases. Here 570 (21.54%) instances were found where code-switching at clause level occurred. To have an idea of code-switching at clause level, example is given below.

- *Yahan tak hum puhunch gaye hein, at least mein, aur agar aap nahein puhunchein, tu* question me.
- *Here up to we reached are, at least I and if you not reached then* question me.

- We have reached till this point; at least I, if you haven't, then question me.
See table 1 at the end for the values of linguistic features of code-switching.

4. Discussion

The code-switching data, which has a variety of code switched items, revealed that in some cases as is shown in the example below, where there is intra-sentential code-switching, the matrix language is English i.e. the predominant language is English.

- I just told you that *keh* Nicholas Bacon was the father, till then we were talking about Sir Francis.
- I just told you that that Nicholas Bacon was the father, till then we were talking about Sir Francis.
- I just told you that Nicholas Bacon was the father, till then we were talking about Sir Francis.

Conversely, if we have a look at the other example below, then it is obvious that there is a shift from English to Urdu as the matrix language of code-switching.

- *Yeh jo* influence *ki hum baat kerte hein na, tu* some bad influences change us.
- This the influence of we talk do are so some bad influences change us.
- As we are talking about influence so some bad influences change us.

But still if we take the below mentioned third example, it is open to eyes that the matrix frame is shared by both English and Urdu and hence it is a bit difficult to decide whether it is English or Urdu that makes the matrix language. It reveals that teachers have produced sentences which contain English and Urdu stretches of varying lengths that perform various functions.

- He never bothered to think about *keh unhein kya kerna chahiye?*
- He never bothered to think about that they what do should ?
- He never bothered to think about that what they should do?

In order to remove confusion and for the sake of simplicity, the researcher has taken English as the matrix language as majority of the lectures contain more English than Urdu. As English is the medium of instruction in the recorded lectures, so it can also be said that the matrix language designation is solely based on the criterion of having the highest number of morphemes from that language.

Secondly, it is clear from the data and its analysis that intra-sentential code-switching is much higher than inter-sentential code-switching. As intra-sentential code-switching involves switching of short stretches of discourse, so one possible reason for this could be that it is easier to switch shorter stretches than longer ones. Another reason can be that as longer stretches of language were produced only when instructions were given or when questions were asked, both of which occurred rarely and that is why intra-sentential code-switching leads inter-sentential code-switching.

Thirdly, as is mentioned in the findings, code-switching at word level has the second highest value and it seems that it is because of the simple nature of the lexical items, which fits well in the matrix language structure. This opinion is also owned by Wu (1985) who refers to the high frequency of words and phrases as they are very short and bear a relatively complete unit of meaning and hence should be focused in teaching and learning process. Most inserted words in the present study belong to the category of helping verbs and conjunctions. Helping verbs usually need other words for message delivery. Grammatical structure is incomplete without them but still they cannot tell when they are alone. That is why they are mostly used with main verbs. The data in the present study reveal that most of the switched helping verbs are “*hai*”, “*hein*”, “*tha*”, and “*thee*” which refers to the “be form” of verbs in English e.g. “is”, “are”, “was” and “were” respectively. The mostly switched conjunctions included “*leiken*”, “*aur*” and “*kyunkeh*” whose gloss in English is “but”, “and” and “because”. The third most dominantly switched word is Urdu “*keh*” which in English means “that”. It is important to mention that nouns were switched less. One reason could be that the nouns used in the collected data mostly represent some sort of concepts, which either had no equivalent in Urdu or was difficult to recall at that time. Example includes:

- Ambivalence, *kia matlab he is ka?*
- Ambivalence, what means is it of?
- Ambivalence, what does it mean?

Similarly, Lalita Malik (1994) account of code-switching, which advocates our results, says that when English is the medium of instruction (in our case the matrix language) then information carrying items, registral and technical words are likely to be from English and linkers and other grammatical items from Hindi. So, it can be said that the findings, as is obvious from the above example, are quite in accordance to Lalita Malik.

It was also discovered that the growing concern and preference of the teachers was code-switching at clause level (21.54 %) than at phrase level (6.42%). The high level of code-switching at clause level is opposite to Wu's (1985) view who says that the high frequency of lexical and phrasal code-switching is because of its short form. This study indicated that clauses, which have a relatively longer structure than phrases, have high frequency of code-switching than the short form phrases.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was an attempt to know about the practice of code-switching by the university teachers between Urdu and English in Pakistani context. From this study, we can conclude that code-switching is a natural, creative and innovative way of communication of the bilingual university teachers in Pakistan, which is used as a technique for facilitating students. The study suggests that while making use of the code-switching phenomenon, there is a frequent use of different linguistic features of code-switching between the two languages by university teachers. Most of the university teachers make use of code-switching between Urdu and English but in order to avoid its blind use; it remains on them to search different approaches and procedures to approach the significance, constraints and limitations of code-switching in the life of students. The following section contains some suggestions and recommendations that are worth considering for teachers.

Before taking any action, the most important thing is the need of identifying learners' needs and problems who are studying in different media. Once they are identified, then keeping in view that information, appropriate actions are to be taken. Secondly, there is a need of reassessing the role of English and other languages in the lives and education of students that what benefits they can have from these languages during different stages of life, whether educational carrier or private life. Then based on this assessment, important decision should be taken. Nevertheless, during this assessment, one thing should be kept in mind that in spite of the importance and role played by English, it still makes only one part of the complete whole of the learners' repertoire of languages. Therefore, other languages existence should neither be challenged nor ignored. Thirdly, it is also very important to note that teachers must have familiarity and knowledge of learners' other languages; otherwise, they will spoil the grammars of the concerned languages during code-switching. Fourthly, it is necessary to point out that teachers must be aware of the fact whether switch should be made at word, phrase, and clause or sentence level.

Lastly, as is obvious from the data analyzed that the ratio of intra-sentential code-switching was far high than inter-sentential code switching, reflects the unawareness of the teachers. As severe use of intra-sentential code-switching makes teachers' language broken and gives students wrong impression of the teacher and have difficulty in learning language. Jacobson (1983) quoted by Aichun, (2003) also addresses this fact and says that if teacher uses intra-sentential code switching, then 'the child is not exposed long enough to any one language to drive from the teacher's talk the grammatical, semantic and lexical rules of English nor Spanish'. This does not mean that teachers should say goodbye to the use of intra-sentential code-switching, rather they should take care of the place and proportion regarding its use.

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Table1: Values of teachers' linguistics features of code-switching

S. No	Linguistic features of code-switching	Number of occurrence	Percentage values
1	Intra-sentential code-switching	983	37.15%
2	Inter-sentential code-switching	97	3.67%
3	Code-switching at word level	826	31.22%
4	Code-switching at phrase level	170	6.42%
5	Code-switching at clause level	570	21.54%