Code switching as a robust catalyst; a useful way to become a more strategic language user

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Abstract: Code switching, or as sometimes is spelled code-mixing (Muysken, 2000), is a widely observed phenomenon especially seen in multilingual and multicultural communities. In ELT classrooms, code switching comes into use either in the teachers' or the students' discourse. Although it is not favored by many educators, one should have at least an understanding of the functions of switching between the native language and the foreign language and its underlying reasons. In this paper, it will be tried to clearly provide some basic definitions, elements, functions and classifications of code switching in different fields and disciplines and finally to come up with a general understanding as well as practical applications and uses of this pragmatic tool. This understanding will provide language teachers with a heightened awareness of its use in classroom discourse and will obviously lead to better of instruction by either eliminating it or dominating its use during the foreign language instruction.

Keywords: Code Switching, Language, SLA, Function

1. Introduction

Alternation between languages in the form of code switching is a widely observed phenomenon in foreign language classrooms. The issue of linguistic switch in foreign language teaching was not a major subject of scientific study in past. But, recently, code switching has attracted a considerable amount of attention. Fundamentally, traditions of language alternation became known with the ban on the use of the learners' first language (L1) in foreign language teaching (L2) and it was introduced with the Direct Method at the end of the nineteenth century (Cook, 2001).

Simply defined by Nunan and Carter (2001) as "a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse" (p. 275), it has also received great attention from SLA researchers. Myers-Scotton (1993), for instance, argues that code switching helps bilingual students enhance the flexibility of expression, exceeding the style switching of monolinguals. In other words, by having access to more than one language, the bilingual student is capable of removing obstacles at sentential planning level. Code switching is also considered by Jacobson (1983) as a tool for the acquisition of subject-appropriate vocabulary in first and second language. It is an important instrument in enhancing teaching and learning processes in that it helps students at lower proficiency levels better comprehend ideas and convey their thoughts (Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002; Greggio & Gil, 2007). The term *code switching* is broadly discussed and used in linguistics and a variety of related fields. A search of the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts database in 2005 shows more than 1,800 articles on the subject published in virtually every branch of linguistics (Nilep, 2006).

In a bilingual community, people often switch from one language to another in their daily conversations. Contrary to the assumption that code-switching is evidence of deficient language knowledge in bilingual speakers, a number of code-switching researchers (Auer 1998; Gumperz, 1982; Heller, 1988; Li & Milroy, 1995; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Shin & Milroy, 2000) suggest that code-switching is used as an additional resource to achieve particular interactional goals with other speakers. Additionally, the use of code-switching often reflects the social or cultural identities of the speakers (Foley, 1997; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Siegel, 1995). The switch to a particular language in bilingual discourse can also be used to signal ethnic identity (Kroskrity, 1993;

Nishimura, 1995; Woolard, 1989). This indexical link between language choice and ethnicity is especially prevalent among language-minority children in the U.S. (Pease-Alvarez & Vasquez, 1994). Minority children sometimes identify themselves by their ethnic background in the community, even when they adopt the lifestyle and values of the target language group (Schumann, 1986).

According to Skiba (1997) "language development takes place through samples of language which are appropriate and code switching may be signaling the need for provision of appropriate samples" (p. 3).

Along the same vein, Ife (2007) argues that code-switching provides further evidence of the value of enhancing target language input with other linguistic resources in the early stages of adult language learning. Nonetheless, Ife notifies that this is not an argument against maximizing L2 input in SLA, but an argument in favor of utilization of L1 as a resource in SLA learning. The systematic studies of learners' code-switching by Arnfast and Jørgensen (2003) indicate code switching may lead to a bilingual competence in learners within the first year of intensive training.

Much of the work labeled "code switching" is interested in syntactic or morphosyntactic constraints on language alternation (e.g. Poplack, 1980; Sankoff & Poplackm 1981; Joshi, 1985; Di Sciullo & Williams, 1987; Belazi et al. 1994; Halmari, 1997 inter alia).

Alternately, studies of language acquisition, second language acquisition, and language learning use the term code switching to describe either bilingual speakers' or language learners' cognitive linguistic abilities, or to describe classroom or learner practices involving the use of more than one language (e.g. Romaine, 1989; Cenoz & Genesee, 2001; Fotos, 2001, inter alia).

As was stated above, code switching (CS) is a common phenomenon of language contact, which is broadly discussed in every subfield of linguistic disciplines (Nilep, 2006). However, researchers often do not agree on a clear definition of it. It has generally come to be understood as "the alternative use by bilinguals (or multilinguals) of two or more languages in the same conversation" (Muysken, 1995, p.7) or "in the unchanged setting, often within the same utterance" (Bullock & Toribio, 2009, p.2).

Due to this, the following section delivers a comprehensive look at the basic components which constitutes the very nature of a good definition for code switching.

2. Basic Definitions

Boztepe (2005) critically reviews over thirty years of research in the area of code switching and addresses the terminology utilized within this research. In his review, he recognizes that various terms, including the term code switching itself, are not consistently defined.

One of the earliest perceptions and understanding of the concept of code switching have come a long way since

Weinreich (1953) made the case that "the ideal bilingual switches from one language to another according to appropriate changes in the speech situation (interlocutors, topics, etc.), but not in an unchanged speech situation and certainly not within a single sentence" (p.73).

Another old definition suggested for code switching came from Dearholt & Valdes-Fallis (1978) who asserted that, code switching entails a complex rule-governed use of language that "offers a unique opportunity for studying some of the more complicated aspects of bilingual speech" (p. 411).

Furthermore, Gumperz (1982, p.59) defines code switching as "juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems".

Grosjean (1982) defines code switching as "the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation".

"Code-switching … is the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded variety (or varieties) in utterances of a matrix variety during the same conversation" (Myers-Scotton 1993, p. 3).

Other researchers believe that code switching is the alternation of two or more languages among bilingual speakers in the midst of a particular discourse (e.g., Milroy & Muysken, 1995; Nguyen, 2008; Bautista, 2004).

More recently, Nunan and Carter briefly define the term as "a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse" (2001:275).

2.1. Perspectives on Code Switching

Auer defines two perspectives on code-switching as *sociolinguistic* and *grammatical*. The first one deals with the "relationship between social and linguistic structure" and the second one deals with "syntactic constraints on intra-sentential code-switching" (1998, p.3). Sociolinguistic perspectives on code-switching are divided into two categories: an "organizational approach" and an "identity-oriented approach" (Musk, 2006, p.56). As he notes an "organizational approach focuses on the management and sequential organization of conversation, i.e. viewing code-switching as a contextualization cue" (ibid). An identity-oriented approach, on the other hand, "emphasizes the metaphorical link between language and the social identity of speakers" (ibid).

Over the years, several approaches to the study of code switching have been developed. Naseh (2002, p.36) categorizes all of the existing syntactic approaches to code switching into the following six groups:
1. Linear order approach
2. Sub-categorization model
3. Theory-based models
4. Matrix Language approaches
5. No specific approach
6. Minimalist approach

2.2. Types and Functions of Code Switching

Many scholars have identified diverse functions for code switching under different situations (Gumperz, 1982; Wei, 1998; Halmari & Smith, 1994).

One noticeable type of code switching is *discourse-related switching*, as described by Auer (1984), Halmari and Smith (1994), Wei (1998) and other. It is a change itself that does the marking, just like in monolingual speech lexical and prosodic discourse markers do their work by signaling change. Examples of this kind of code switching are marking of quotations, interjections, reiteration, clarifications and emphasis on a request.

The second type of code switching is named *Crutching* by Zentella (1990). It is producing the most immediately accessible lexical item in a semantic field. Borrowing or lexical insertion are of this type and are often related to topic specialization (Lowie, 1945).

Gumperz (1982) identified socially predictable language choices based on addressee, location, event frame or genre and topic. He then coined the third type of code switching called *situational code switching*. In established societal bilingualism, situational code switching can be so predictable that deviations become marked (Myers-Scotton, 1993) and available for tactical use (Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, 2001).

A fourth function of code switching is what Grumperz (1982) has called *metaphorical* or *conversational* switching, in which the switch is a contextualization cue.

Furthermore, Blom and Gumperz (1972) distinguish two types of code switching: *situational code switching* and *metaphorical code switching*. Situational code switching is related to a change in situation, for instance, when a new participant joins the activity, or a change in the conversation topic or setting. On the other hand, metaphorical code switching is often used as a conversational strategy to enhance or mitigate conversational acts such as requests, denials, topic shifts, elaborations or clarifications.

In the same vein, Gumperz (1982) considers code switching as a special discourse strategy which bilinguals usually use for different purposes during their communications and then identifies six functions of code switching including *quotation, addressee specification, interjection, repetition, message qualification, personification* or *objectification*.

In another study, Sankoff and Poplack (1981) identified three types of code switching: *Tag switching, inter-sentential switching* and *intra-sentential switching*. Tag-switching, also known as extra-sentential code switching (Muysken, 1995), involves the insertion of a tag or a short fixed phrase in one language into an utterance which is otherwise entirely in the other language. Inter-sentential code switching constitutes a switch occurring at a clause or sentence boundary, where each clause or sentence is either in one language or the other. Finally, intra-sentential code switching involves switching within the clause or sentence boundary.

3. Code Switching Research Areas

3.1. Early Studies: The Emergence of Code Switching

The history of code switching research in sociocultural linguistics often dates from Blom and Gumperz's (1972) work named "Social meaning in linguistic structures" (e.g. Myers-Scotton, 1993; Rampton, 1995; Benson, 2001).

One of the other earliest American studies in linguistic anthropology to deal with issues of language choice and code switching was George Barker's (1947) description of language use among Mexican Americans in Tucson, Arizona. Barker proposed that younger people were more apt to use multiple languages in a single interaction than were their elders, and that the use of multiple varieties was constitutive of a local Tucson identity.

3.2. Negative Views toward Code Switching and a New Era of Positive Views

Code switching has been frequently studied from different perspectives. It has been studied since the 1950s. However, most early studies reported upon it rather negatively. The term *semilingualism* was once used, and code switching was believed to occur because of a lack of sufficient proficiency in either language (Martin-Jones & Romaine, 1986).

Boeschoten & Verhoeven (1987) studied children's code switching, illustrating that immigrant children's switches could be explained by a lack of appropriate terminology in the first language.

Skiba (1997) asserted that the other language is used to compensate for the difficulties students have in communicating with the first language. Ellis (1984) considered the negative effect of teachers′ use of code switching in second language classrooms as depriving students of their rights of second language achievements. Besides, referring to the interference role of code switching and its error-proneness nature, Cook (2001) stresses that code switching should be strongly avoided in the classroom.

However, other studies have led most researchers to agree that code switching plays an important role in bilingualism rather than being just a random, stigmatized phenomenon. For instance, MacSwan (2000) mentioned that code switching may be regarded as a prestigious display of linguistic talent in many cultures.

The practice of code-switching itself does not indicate a deficiency of language knowledge (Heller, 1988; Reyes, 2004; Schieffelin, 1994); rather, it seems to serve a communicative function in conversation. Code-switching as a conversational resource has been studied by several sociolinguists (Gumperz, 1982; Li & Milroy, 1995).

From a sociolinguistic point of view, code switching has been studied as an important strategy for establishing social relationships. It has been shown to be a personal communication device for enriching discourse (Koike, 1987; Scotton & Ury, 1977).

3.3. Code Switching and Children Language

A growing body of literature on peer interactions in multilingual settings illustrates that adolescents and school-age children use code-switching for a variety of functions, such as structuring play, games, and other activities, negotiating meanings and rights, and asserting their shifting identities and allegiances (e.g., Auer, 1984, 1998; Cromdal, 2004; Cromdal &Aronsson, 2000; Garrett, 1999; Guldal, 1997; Hewitt, 1986; Howard, 2003; Jørgensen, 1998; Paugh, 2001; Rampton, 1995, 1998; Schieffelin, 1994; Zentella, 1997).

Goodz (1989) and Lanza (1997) asserted that young bilingual children, like older children and adults, may pragmatically switch languages for emphasis, clarification, or addressee specification, or to gain or retain attention. However, children's use of two or more languages to construct imaginary adult roles during spontaneous pretend play, particularly when adults are not present, has received little systematic attention (Guldal, 1997; Halmari & Smith, 1994; Kwan-Terry, 1992).

Functions performed by children's code switching such as quotations, emphasis, and getting attention have also been observed and analyzed (Fantini, 1978; McClure, 1981; Fotos, 1990; Halmari & Smith, 1994).

Furthermore, as a number of researchers have shown (Blum-Kulka, 1997; Halmari & Smith, 1994; Reyes, 2004; Zentella, 1997), bilingual children acquire and develop knowledge of code switching functions in the course of speaking with other interlocutors.

Besides this, Gumperz (1982) listed several code switching functions of adult bilingual speakers in which bilingual children use code switching in similar ways to adults with symbolic, instrumental, or register changing functions (See also Auer 1998).

Shin and Milroy (2000) investigated code switching as a contextual cue in the sequential development of conversational interaction among elementary Korean-English children in classroom activities including story telling. Their research suggests that the students' use of code switching, frequently misperceived as a deficit, appeared to be an additional resource to achieve particular linguistic goals: to accommodate other participants' language competencies and preferences, for example, or to organize conversational tasks such as turn-taking, emphasis marking, and clarification.

Ochs (1996) reported that Children in Dominica also engage in complex code-switching practices between English and Patwa in their role play with peers. Their language choice in role enactment illustrates their emerging sensitivity to the ways in which these contrasting languages index particular social identities, places, and activities. These children' code-switching practices, though restricted when compared to those of adults, illustrate the associations of the languages with particular people, places, and functions; in particular, Patwa is identified with affective stances that complement or intensify those expressed through English (Paugh, 2001).

Similarly, Cromdal and Aronsson (2000) attribute children's code-switching during recess in a bilingual English-Swedish school (40 children ages 6–8 years) to individual language choice, accommodation to monolingual children, or a need to display shifting "footings" (Goffman 1981) or orientations toward different play activities, rather than to playing specific roles.

3.4. Code Switching from Linguistics and Syntactic Perspectives

Studies of children grammatical performance are typically based on the analysis of their monolingual speech (Gutiérrez-Clellen, Restrepo, Bedore, Peña, & Anderson, 2000; Gutierrez-Clellen *et al.*, 2008; Simon-Cereijido & Gutierrez-Clellen, 2007).

Code switching has been also studied from a formal syntactic point of view. Researchers have attempted to establish universal syntactic constraints of code switching such as the *free morpheme constraint* (Poplack, 1980), the *government constraint* (Di Sciullo, Muysken & Singh 1986), and the *Minimalist approach* (MacSwan, 2000).

Azuma (2000) discussed syntactic constraints of Japanese/English code switching. He mentioned that the lexical category is interchangeable between two languages in code switching, yet the functional category in one language cannot be replaced by another language.

Linguistically, according to Myers-Scotton (1993), code alternation is grammatical by nature and highly depends on the bilingual's fluency in the two languages. Sociolinguistically, it is concerned with the way people use it as a discourse-enhancer in their daily speech. Crystal (1987), for example, refers to the possible sociolinguistic reasons for using code switching such as the speaker's inability to express himself or herself in one language as a result of fatigue or emotional state, his or her desire to show unity with a special group, and the tendency to communicate his or her attitudes toward a listener.

Gumperz (1982) considers it as a special discourse strategy which bilinguals usually use for different purposes during their communications.

3.5. Development of Classroom Code Switching Research

Classroom code switching research, as opposed to social or general code switching in no specific context, has focused on both teacher-learner interaction and the influence it may exert on students' learning. Early studies on code switching centered around bilingual education programs for minority pupils in the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s (Martin-Jones, 1995). These studies were quantitative in nature and aimed at illustrating the influence of code switching in bilingual classroom communication on children's linguistic development. However, Milk (1981, 1982) and Guthrie (1984) started a breakthrough line of research in the realm of code switching by departing from a purely quantitative study of classroom communication.

They started using audio-recordings and descriptive frameworks to focus on the ways in which teachers and students fulfill tasks with two languages.

More recent studies have focused on describing language teachers' code switching patterns in foreign language classrooms (see Greggio & Gill, 2007). Duff and Polio (1990) reported observations from several foreign language classrooms, claiming that the use of target language varied from 92% to 100%. Polio and Duff (1994) investigated the functions for which language teachers employed code switching. They categorized cases of code switching into functions such as classroom administrative vocabulary, grammar instruction, and classroom management. Kraemer (2006) studied the amount and purpose of L1 use by five language teacher assistants, and reported that a "fair amount' of L1 was used, specifically for classroom management and translation.

Hobbs et al. (2010) compared code switching behavior of native and non-native speaker teachers in Japanese language classrooms.

3.6. Code Switching and Language Socialization

Code switching can be related to language socialization practices given that it conveys social meaning and plays a role in shaping notions of ethnicity and cultural identity (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Schieffelin, 1994). Schieffelin (1994, p. 28) examines relationships between code switching and general processes of language socialization among children as follows:

"A consistent finding across these and other studies is that children's alternation between languages is neither random nor the result of a linguistic deficit. As with adult speakers, social, grammatical and functional principles govern these children's code switches. Their ability to code switch identifies them as members of particular communities and represents a skillful use of language for social or stylistic ends".

Since language socialization research is primarily focused on how children are apprenticed into socio-cultural norms and practices through language as a symbolic system (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Ochs, 1993; Ochs, 2002; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), a relationship code switching and language socialization practices in bilingual settings is likely.

Lanza (1997) suggests that bilingual children as part of the language socialization process are able to link social meaning to linguistic form from an early age and learn to differentiate their languages according to the needs of the social situation or preferences.

Finally, Myers-Scotton (2001) notes the effectiveness of code switching in defining social rights and obligations in interactions in East Africa and suggests that linguistic choices can be explained in terms of speaker motivation.

3.7. Code Switching and Narration

De Mejia (1998) investigated two Colombian preschool teachers' use of code switching in storytelling sessions and found that preschool teachers' code switched story telling with student interaction can facilitate comprehension and narrative skill development that are critical to school-related activities associated with literacy development teachers' use of code switching in storytelling sessions.

Zentella (1990) found that bilingual speakers were more likely to code switch when narrating (27 code switches per hour) and telling jokes (14 per hour), as opposed to making purchases (1 per hour) or answering interview questions (2 per hour).

3.8. Code Switching Research Areas in Iran

Iranian researchers have investigated code switching and its related aspects and reached valuable results and implications about the roles and functions of code switching in Iranian context. It is worthy to mention some of these researchers' works here.

Parvanehnezhad and Clarkson (2008) investigated the Iranian bilingual students use of language switching during doing mathematics and found that these students use switching between English and their L1 language (Persian or Farsi) because of the following reasons: the difficulty of the problem, familiarity with particular numbers or words they used habitually in Persian, and being in the Persian school or interview environment. They concluded that these Iranian bilingual students will continue to use some form of language switching to help them understand and complete mathematical tasks in mainstream classrooms.

In the same vein, Rezaeian (2009) investigated the code switching behavior in Persian/ Canadian English conversations and finally asserted that after analyzing of instances of intra-sentential code switching of these subjects, it was found that age or gender did not have any significant effect on the code switching patterns. Furthermore, she argued that her study provided evidence against the strict separation between borrowing and code switching and argued for a unified treatment of the two phenomena.

In another study, Mirhasani and Mamaghani (2009) examined if code switching conducted as a communicative strategy leads to earlier entrance of the students into communication phase and consequently to the establishment of early oral proficiency. Finally, they concluded that the use of code switching does improve the speaking skill of EFL learners and can be used as a technique to enhance this skill.

Furthermore, Kheirkhah (2010) attempted to adopt a sociolinguistic perspective on code switching in order to investigate the repair patterns in actual conversations between Swedish-Persian bilinguals. After conducting this case study, she reached the following result: "As regards code switching ….the boy does not code switch until line 60, when 1:20 minutes of the conversation have passed. What is clear is that he switches from Swedish to Persian when he is exposed to it a lot by his mother. She argued that, it can be said that his mother's direct questions in Persian affect his choice of language and cause him to code switch" (p.7).

Besides this, Rahimi and Eftekhari (2011) conducted a

study on code switching in EFL classroom contexts at tertiary level in Iran and at the end concluded that code switching was an effective teaching strategy when facing low English proficient learners and it was useful regarding various functions that it served in Iranian EFL classrooms.

In another study, Kim and Rezaeian (2007) examined whether typologically similar languages (Korean and Persian, in this case) follow similar patterns for code switching. At the end of their study, they concluded their data in Persian/English and Korean/English code switching revealed that bilingual speakers of Persian or Korean followed similar patterns when code switching, especially in light verb constructions.

Rezvani and Eslami Rasekh (2011) conducted a small-scale exploratory investigation of code switching between English and Farsi by 4 Iranian English foreign language (EFL) teachers in elementary level EFL classrooms in a language school in Isfahan, Iran. Their findings suggested that code switching was a frequently applied strategy and a valuable resource for bilingual teachers in foreign language classrooms, and its judicious and skillful use could boost the quality of teaching. Moreover, they found that EFL teachers in this study tended to use the learners' L1 (i.e., Farsi) to serve a number of pedagogic and social functions, which contributed to better teacher-student classroom interaction.

Finally, Momenian and Ghafar Samar (2011) explored the advanced and elementary teachers' and students' functions and patterns of code switching in Iranian English classrooms and came to the conclusions that the elementary teachers and students, for most of the functions, ranked higher than their advanced counterparts, which is still quite indicative of the practice of the traditional methods in the classroom.

4. Conclusion

According to Skiba (1997), code switching means that the two languages are kept separate and distinct creating a barrier to interference. This is on the basis of the assumption that when individuals code switch, they do not try to make up their own variation of the words they are unable to say correctly. Thus code switching can prevent interference at a phonological level. Moreover, the lexical units of the language would not be used out of their grammatical context, and hence the language would not be subject to interference at a lexical level. As Butzkamm (1998) puts it, attempts to reduce code switching would hinder the acquisition of the second language.

Code switching is a strategy that has several paybacks for second-language learners, since it provides a natural short-cut to content and knowledge acquisition. On the other hand, as Eldridge (1996) points out, there is no empirical evidence to support the notion that restricting mother tongue use would necessarily improve learning efficiency.

Myers-Scotten (1993), for instance, argues that code switching helps bilingual students enhance the flexibility of expression, exceeding the style switching of monolinguals.

In other words, by having access to more than one language, the bilingual student is capable of removing obstacles at sentential planning level.

Speakers may code switch to facilitate expression and/or comprehension, avoid miscommunication, establish themselves as members of a particular group, change discourse to convey a certain effect or attitude, or alert listeners to a shift of emphasis, among other functions (Hughes, Shaunessy, Brice, Ratliff, & McHatton, 2006; Skiba, 1997).

So it seems rational and a necessity to consider this important and valuable phenomenon into account and try to implement and use it in actual real EFL as well as ESL classrooms.

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