

Code-Switching as a Pedagogical Tool in English as a Foreign Language (Efl) Classrooms

Hammad Mushtaq⁺ and Rida Rabbani[⊥]

Abstract:

The study explores and analyzes the pedagogical implications of code switching between Urdu and English languages in undergraduate EFL classrooms. It examines the ways in which code switching can be employed in EFL classrooms as a teaching and learning tool to boost learning speed and understanding of the language students. The objectives of the study were achieved by carrying out a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. A sample of thirty teachers and thirty students (male and female in both cases) was taken from a Rawalpindi based university and college. Questionnaires were designed to collect data, from students and teachers, containing both open and closed-ended questions. The analysis of responses revealed that a limited, deliberate and controlled use of code-switching in EFL classrooms benefits both teachers and learners as it considerably supports the pedagogical process and boosts EFL students' success.

Keywords: Language Pedagogy, Code-switching, EFL Teaching and Learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language teachers in English language class often use code-switching as an academic tool thinking that this helps the students' learning and understanding as well as it is helpful to teachers in explaining. Though several researches, nationally and internationally, have been done at to explain the phenomena yet the impact of Code-switching by the language teachers on students' learning is not fully understood. There is a need to investigate in detail the effect of Code-switching on the pedagogical productivity of English language learners

⁺ Hammad Mushtaq <hammad.mushtaq@s3h.nust.edu.pk> is Assistant Professor at School of Social Sciences and Humanities (S3H), National University of Sciences and Technology, H-12, Islamabad, Pakistan.

[⊥] Rida Rabbani <ridarabbani@yahoo.com> is Student of MPhil English (linguistics) at Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

and tutors. The present research strives to investigate the pedagogical implications of code-switching as tool by English language teachers and the attitude of the ELT students towards this phenomenon.

In EFL classroom, Discourse Code-switching is an arguable issue. Some methodologies favor the interference of mother tongue while others thinking that it may hinder the foreign or second language acquisition considering it as a 'taboo'. In the present day multilingual language classrooms, it is a common phenomenon that English is taught with the help of the native language. In Pakistan too, English is considered as the prevailing language and other languages work as supportive or secondary elements in explanation and understanding. However, in case of monolingual countries, the situation is different in the countries where English is being taught and used as a foreign language in comparison with of the multilingual countries. Pakistan is a multilingual country and Urdu is its national language. In all the government institutions, Urdu is widely used as the official language. However, sometimes mother tongue interference is found as a common fact in English language classroom discourse of universities. Such type of phenomenon creates possibilities for classroom code-switching.

There goes a long discussion on L1 and L2 for an extended time. Relating to the topic of the study, numerous studies started in the 1990s. These researches were focused on native and foreign language usage in classrooms. Previously, many studies suggested that use of second language distinguishes the method of English teaching [Chambers (1991); Halliwell & Jones (1991)]. Researchers are of the view that through this system of teaching, students are helped out to familiarize and learn not only the English language but also the completely English ambiance. The above stated words solidify comprehensible input and natural order hypothesis. Nevertheless, new researches show that, this English-only method of teaching has been doubted, while some research studies show that L1 is also of assistance in English learning classrooms. A researcher, Guthrie (1984) has early asked about the confusion. He asked that if a session is led fully in a second language, then its outcome will result in the form of more learning for its students. Codes switching in a usual communal situation and code-switching in a language wisdom

classroom have separate and distinct functions. However, sometimes some functions are common in both scenarios.

Codes-switching in a usual communal situation and in English language pedagogical scenarios have separate and distinct functions. However, sometimes some functions are common in both scenarios. During the 1970s and 1980s classroom, code-switching was not observed or examined critically. Rather in ESL /EFL classrooms, students were appreciative to use the goal language within the training room for any kind of contact. As a classroom based research started to develop in the 1990s, classroom verbal communication contact happens to add main concern in those explorations, so, classroom code-switching started to gain significance in language learning classes. The language teachers and policy manufacturers in support of classroom code-switching in EFL classes believe that it lends a hand in the permanence of the communication; it provides as a device for conversion of significance and serves unrestrained intention. Grammar Translation Method is thought as one of the oldest techniques in English language education, students' local language is used as the standard of coaching [Richards & Rogers (1986)]. In Direct Method and Oral Approach, there is no use of L1 or the mother tongue. In the Audio-lingual Method, L1 use of language is inadequate.

There are many research studies saying that the policy of code switching is a helpful instrument in supplementary English language pedagogical scenarios. Code-switching helps the dispatchers relocate the data to the beneficiaries successfully [Skiba (1997)]. Alternatively, Cook (2001), Ellis (1994), and Rodgers and Richards (2001) focus on second language possessions and declare that even though the introduction to L2 can support language students to attain triumph. A variety of encouraging purposes of code-switching, such as clearing up new terminology, syntax, new concepts and tranquil learners would improve the learners' graspable participation throughout the learning session [Ahmad & Jusoff (2009)]. Topolska (2010:11), while discussing the pros and cons of using translation or L1 in English language pedagogy, asserts that L1 is not considered acceptable in the EFL classrooms due to a dominant use of the communicative method in English language teaching and because "teachers are generally not familiar with relatively new methodological

indications of how to use L1 in a manner which would not hinder their students' learning processes". The use of L1, after the introduction of the Communicative Approach, has been considered by many as counter-productive for learning L2 as it is assumed that the students would not express themselves freely in L2 when they are allowed to use L1 [Carreres (2006: 1)].

Before bearing in mind the various uses of code-switching from the viewpoints of teachers and the students, we can say that dealing with the use of code-switching in its logically happening background would be more suitable. In other words, utility of code-switching in the English language conversations of bilingual individuals is highly significant. Trudgill rightly believes that speakers tend to switch languages in order to persuade, define or control the situation when they are trying to clarify the meanings or individual intentions (2000: 105). Trudgill's idea suggests that code-switching can be used as an effective instrument to bring better understanding in ELT classrooms which may also fulfill individual and group objectives of English language pedagogy.

Trainers do not always use code-switching deliberately; which suggests that the ELT teachers are not constantly observant of the methodology and the ensuing results the code-switching processes. Consequently, in certain scenarios, it can be looked upon as conduct that is unconscious and unacknowledged. The utilities of code-switching are itemized as affective functions, topic change and repetitive functions by researchers Burenhult and Mattson (1999: 61) in a study they carried out. In cases of code-switching, the ELT teachers change their verbal communication according to the topic under consideration. Generally, it is observed that in grammar teaching, the tutors shift their language to the L1 of their students to elucidate the topic under discussion. In such cases, students' attentiveness tends to aim to the new facts by practicing code-switching. In this context, it is recommended that a connection from L1 language to the foreign language of the speaker is constructed for transferring the new information. Cole in a study of 1998 also stressed it by saying that an instructor can successfully exploit its students' past learning experiences of L1 to enhance the knowledge and understanding of their L2.

Hoff (2013) asserts that a deliberate and critical use of L1 in EFL classrooms plays a significant role in learning outcomes regardless of the level of teaching and the teachers' attitude. He also considers translation to be an appropriate use of L1. In a recent study, Bozorgian and Fallahpour (2015) conclude that EFL teachers use a limited amount of L1 to facilitate their students and the use of L1 should not be banned in the EFL classrooms. Mahmutoglu and Kicir (2013) believe that the use of L1 is helpful in explaining difficult grammatical concepts and complex vocabulary items and assert that it can save instruction time.

The review of literature shows that a lot of research on this topic has been done at the international level. In Pakistan research has been done on code-switching in text messages, songs, social media etc. but the research on classroom code-switching is very limited. It is hoped that this research will pave the way for teachers and students of English language for future research.

1.1. Research Questions

1. How does code-switching function in ELT classrooms when it is used by teachers as a pedagogical tool?
2. What do students think about the use of code-switching?
3. How do students react to the use of code-switching in the classroom?
4. What is the teachers' feedback and attitude towards the use of code-switching in class?
5. How frequently are English and Urdu used in English language classrooms?

1.2. Significance

The results of the current research will be supportive in providing beneficial information in the field of linguistics research. The results will also assist in realizing the important relationship between the English language learners' affective learning condition and the code-switching phenomenon. It will also help discover the significant connection between the English language learners' learning success and code-switch-

ing frequency. Moreover, it will help linguists understand the code-switching phenomena in the field of teachers and students' perspective.

1.3. Delimitation

A sample of 30 male and female teachers and 30 male and female students of Foundation University, Rawalpindi Campus and Army Public School and College Ordnance Road, Rawalpindi are the subjects of this study.

1.4. Methodology

A questionnaire was used to investigate teachers' and students' feedback and attitude to the code-switching use (L1 use) in the English classroom. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis was used for this research. A questionnaire was constructed with a set of closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire focused on the various themes such as the setting up of affective support in students' learning, the extent of learning success due to the use of code-switching in English language classroom, and the future use of code-switching. Sets of questionnaires were distributed among teachers and students of Foundation University, Rawalpindi Campus and Army Public School and College Ordnance Road, Rawalpindi. In total 60 questionnaires were used for the purpose of this investigation; 30 filled by students and 30 by teachers. Students needed to give their views in order to see if they think L1 is necessary and useful during the teaching process. On the other hand, teachers needed to answer the questions related to their teaching methodology and their views towards the use of code-switching in the English pedagogy. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The percentages were used to show how frequently English and Urdu elements were used in the English language classroom. Data analysis shows the facts about code-switching and its effects on the learning efficiency of students.

Informed Consent was taken from the administration of the institutions as well as teachers and students undergoing the study.

2. DATA ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The present study was designed to investigate the use of code-switching as a pedagogical tool in undergraduate students and teachers of Foundation University Rawalpindi campus and Army Public School and College for Boys, Ordnance road, Rawalpindi. The sample involved 30 students and 30 teachers. The important thing to note here is that all the students are native speakers of Urdu and because of their educational background; all of the subjects have learned English and are using the language as a medium of instruction in their institutions. A set of questionnaires was used to investigate students' feedback and their attitude towards the use of code-switching (L1 use) in the English learning classroom.

2.1. Reasons for Classroom Code-switching By Teachers (Closed Ended Questions)

2.1.1. Understanding Difficult and Complicated Topics Easily

Code-switching also helps in the understanding of difficult and complicated topics easily. In response to question-3 'Does code-switching help the students understand the difficult and complicated topics easily?', 25 respondents (83.3%) responded that code-switching helps the students to understand the complicated topics easily, whereas only 5 teachers (16.7%) are of the opinion that it does not help the students to understand difficult and complicated topics easily. There is a significant difference in opinion (Chi Square Test $p < 0.001$). This result shows that for the explanation of difficult and complicated topics teachers frequently switch codes. This not only helps the students to understand the difficult topic easily, but also saves the time of both the teachers and the students.

2.1.2. Code-switching as a Useful Tool for Clarification

Code-switching is a very useful tool for the clarification of different concepts in ELT classrooms. In response to question 4 'Is code-switching a useful tool for clarification?' Figure 4 shows that 24

respondents (80%) agree that code-switching is a useful tool for clarification, while only 4 teachers (13.3%) disagree; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$). The result shows that 80% teachers agreed that code-switching is a very useful tool which helps them to clarify concepts easily in class. Every time when students are introduced to a new word, topic, lesson, concept or term, it is the job of the teacher to describe and clarify it in detail. Every time when teachers go for the new strategies, they might intentionally or unintentionally switch codes from English to Urdu. So, for the clarification of any kind of confusion or misunderstanding about any topic code-switching is an effective tool which helps both teacher and student in making the pedagogical process successful.

2.1.3. Explaining Unfamiliar Terms, Words or Expressions

In response to question-5 'Do you switch codes in order to explain unfamiliar terms, words or expressions?' 23 teachers (76.7 %) said that they switch codes to explain unfamiliar terms, words or expressions while only 7 teachers (23.3%) disagreed; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$). At times new words, terms or expressions are needed to be explained in front of students because there are some students who are not aware of the basic meaning of these words or expressions. In such cases, teachers help them in understanding all the unfamiliar words or expressions and for this purpose they take help from the L1.

2.1.4. Building Solidarity with the Students

In response to question-6, 'Can code-switching build solidarity and intimate relations with students?', 22 teachers (73.3%) agreed and only four (13.3%) disagreed. 4 respondents (13.3%) were indecisive; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$) and implies code-switching is a very useful tool to build solidarity with the speaker. In Pakistan as most of the students come from Urdu medium background, they feel uncomfortable and shy in English language classroom. This happens when the lecture is completely taken in English, particularly this situation can be seen when students are at the very beginning of the undergraduate courses. Teachers can avoid these situations by switching

codes from English to Urdu by telling jokes, sharing their personal experiences and ideas with the students in Urdu. As a result, students feel relax and comfortable and in a way a friendly, supportive and pleasant environment is generated for learning.

2.1.5. Code-switching Consciously

In response to question seven, ‘While taking class do you switch codes consciously?’, 20 teachers (66.6%) agreed that they switch codes consciously in class, whereas only four teachers (13.3%) disagreed; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$) and shows that code-switching results out of a subconscious process in which the speaker might shift from one language to another unintentionally and unpredictably. Here the important thing to investigate is to see whether the similar thing takes place in case of classroom discourse or not. Therefore, it means that code-switching is often an unintentional and unplanned process, which can occur any time in the ELT class.

2.1.6. Initiation of Code-switching

While responding question eight, ‘Do you think most of the time students initiate code-switching?’, majority of teachers 21 (70%) agree that most of the times students initiate code-switching in English language class. 8 respondents (26.7%) disagree and 1 teacher’s data (3.3%) were missing; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$). The reason is that the proficiency level of English of these students, who are coming from Urdu medium background and specifically the ones coming from the rural areas, is very low. Yet, most of them have good reading and writing skills but when it comes to speaking skills, they are not good at it. This is because they do not have any know how about everyday conversational English. Furthermore, they lack confidence and have fear in them. They also feel ashamed thinking that their classmates and teacher will make fun of them if they make mistakes in front of them. This feeling makes them feel shaky and they take help from code-switching which makes their life easy and they at the same time feel comfortable in front of their classmates and teachers.

2.2. Reasons for Classroom Code-switching by Teachers (Open Ended Questions)

2.2.1. Usage of L1 in Class

In response to the question: ‘How much L1 (Urdu) do you use in class?’, Majority of the teachers did not respond to this question. Out of 10 who responded 4 teachers (40%) claimed that they do not use L1 in English Language Class; 2 (20%) use 10% L1, 1 teacher (10%) use 20 % L1, 2 teachers (20%) use 50% L1 and 1 (10%) responded that she uses L1 almost 90%.

2.2.2. Understanding the Content of English language class

In response to the question: ‘Take this class as an example, do you think your students can understand the content of this class?’, 20 teachers (66.7%) think that their students can understand the contents, only 1 teacher (3.3%) said otherwise; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$).

2.2.3. Negative Attitude towards Classroom Code-switching

In response to question five, ‘Do you possess any negative attitude towards classroom code-switching?’, 20 teachers (66.7%) responded that they do not possess any negative attitude towards code-switching; 10 teachers (33.3%) replied otherwise. This shows that majority of teachers are in favor of code-switching; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$). The other part of this question: ‘if yes, why?’, all 10 (100%) teachers were of the opinion that code-switching hampered the students’ perception and learning of English as the main language in English classes. If students are given opportunity to do code-switching frequently, it will lose its value and will give no benefit to them and if they do so, they will make it a habit and use it whenever they speak. They will also not be able to become fluent in English and their proficiency level and skill will never be improved. Teachers’ fluency and proficiency level will suffer a lot. Frequent code-switching may hinder their abilities and skills. Therefore, whenever they

need to switch codes, they should do it skillfully, carefully, and in a goal oriented manner.

2.2.4. Encouragement of Classroom Code-switching by both Teachers and Students

In response to question six, ‘Do you encourage classroom code-switching initiated both by teachers and students?’, 18 teachers (60%) responded that they do not encourage classroom code-switching, while 10 teachers (33.3%) responded otherwise; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$). The other part of this question ‘If yes why?’, 10 teachers who encourage classroom code-switching said they do this due to students’ weak knowledge of English. 6 teachers (60%) switch codes for students’ understanding of lesson contents and 2 teachers (20%) for better teacher student communication; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p < 0.001$).

2.2.5. Initiation of Code-switching by teachers or students

In response to the question: ‘Who initiates the code-switching teachers or students? Why?’, 13 teachers (43.3%) were of the opinion that students initiate code-switching, while 9 teachers (30%) said that teachers do so; this difference is not significant. The reason behind it is that most of the students come from Urdu medium background and they do not know how to communicate in English.

2.2.6. Encouragement of Classroom Code-switching by both Teachers and Students

In response to question ten, ‘When students come for consulting/ problem solving/ counseling, how do you interact with them? 8 teachers (26.7%) replied that they interact entirely in English during students consultation, 2 teachers (6.7%) answered that they speak Urdu, 10 teachers (33.3%) answered that they speak both languages i.e. they switch codes. This difference is not significant (Chi Square Test; $p = 0.392$). The result shows that most of the teachers while counseling or solving the problems of their students switch codes; this helps not only teachers but students as well.

2.3. REASONS FOR CLASSROOM CODE-SWITCHING BY STUDENTS (CLOSED ENDED QUESTIONS)

2.3.1. Frequent Code-switching for the Beginner Students

In response to question one, ‘Do you think teachers frequently switch codes in English language classes for the beginner students?’, 25 students (83.4%) responded that the teachers use frequent code-switching in English language classes for beginner students. Five students (16.6%) disagree with the statement. This shows that many learners think that switching of codes is a very useful tool for the beginner students. This is because most of the students come from Urdu medium background and for these students code-switching plays a very important role for them. As these students are new to English medium system so for them switching of codes is a very useful tool for understanding the content of English language classroom.

2.3.2. Reduction of Code-switching in Higher Classes

In response to question two, ‘Does the teacher’s code-switching reduce as you go to higher classes?’, 24 students (80%) responded that the teachers’ code-switching reduce as students become more senior. 5 students (16.7%) were indecisive and only one (3.3%) disagree to this. This means that at beginner level code-switching helps the students a lot, as they are not use to the second language L2. As they go to senior classes, they become proficient in second language L2 and this proficiency reduces code-switching. As they gain confidence, teachers start reducing code-switching slowly and gradually.

2.3.3. Code-switching Facilitates Learning

In response to question three, ‘Does teachers’ code-switching facilitate learning?’, teachers’ code-switching facilitates learning. 21 students (70%) agree to this statement, 6 (20%) were indecisive and 3 (10%) disagree. This shows that students are in favor of teachers’ code-switching in English language classroom. This is because it helps the students to understand the content of class easily when their teachers switch codes.

2.3.4. Negative Impact of Code-switching on the Understanding of Students

In response to the question: ‘Can teachers’ frequent code-switching create a negative impact on your understanding of English?’, 10 students (33.4%) are of the opinion that a frequent switching of codes by the teachers can create negative impact in their comprehension of English, 4 students (13.3%) were indecisive and 15 students (50%) disagree, so they think that teachers’ code-switching does not create negative impact on their understanding of English. This means that there is no negativity in switching codes by the teachers. It means that students take code-switching of their teacher positively because it makes their lesson easy and more understandable.

2.4. REASONS FOR CLASSROOM CODE-SWITCHING BY STUDENTS (OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS)

2.4.1. Use of Urdu in English Learning Class

In response to question 1, ‘Do you like your teacher use Urdu in the English learning class?’, 20 students (66.6%) responded positively, 9 students (30%) said they did not like it and 1 student liked it only in extreme situation when there is great difficulty in understanding English. This shows that students find it easy to learn L2 if L1 is used during teaching.

2.4.2. Necessity of Urdu in English Learning Class

In response to the question 2 ‘In your opinion, when do you think Urdu is necessary in the English learning class?’, 13 students (44.8%) think that Urdu is necessary to explain difficult words and phrases, 7 students (24.1%) replied that in English learning class, Urdu is needed for students’ understanding, while 6 students (20.7%) are of the opinion that Urdu is necessary for better teacher student communication; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p > 0.001$). As all the students are in favor of code-switching the reasons are varied, majority find this useful for teachers’ explanation of difficult words and phrases.

2.4.3. Major Reason for the Necessity of Urdu

In response to question ‘If you think using Urdu is necessary, what is the major reason? 9 students (30%) think that Urdu is necessary to explain difficult words and phrases, 12 students (40%) replied that in English learning class, Urdu is needed for students’ understanding, while 4 students (13.3%) are of the opinion that Urdu is necessary for better teacher student communication; this difference is significant (Chi Square Test; $p > 0.001$). Questions 2 & 3 are similar but phrased differently. Hence, there is difference in responses.

2.4.4. Students’ Perception of Use of Urdu Being Helpful in English Learning Class

In response to question four, ‘Do you think it is helpful to use Urdu in the English learning class?’, 25 students (83.3) % think that it is helpful to use Urdu in the English learning class, two students (6.7%) responded otherwise and three (10%) were other responses. In response to the same question when asked by different angles students are of the opinion that Urdu is helpful in English learning class.

2.4.5. Teacher use of Urdu in English Learning Class

In response to question five, ‘How often did the teacher use Urdu in the English learning class?’, 20 students (80%) answered that their teacher never/rarely uses Urdu in English class while five (20%) students replied that their teacher uses English often/ most of the time in class. The response is quite contrary to teachers’ responses but may be that code-switching of small words or phrases may have missed the notice by the students.

2.4.6. Percentage of Usage of Urdu in English Learning Class

In response to question six ‘in your opinion, what is the percentage should the teacher use Urdu in the English learning class?’, 24 students (80%) are of the opinion that teachers should use less than 30% Urdu in English learning class, 6 students (20%) think that teachers should use Urdu more than 40%.

2.4.7. Proficiency Matters If the Teacher Switches Codes Frequently

In response to question seven ‘In your opinion, could you become more proficient in English if the teachers switch codes frequently?’, 16 students (53.3%) responded that they could become more proficient in English if the teachers switch codes frequently, 10 students (33.3) replied ‘no’ and 4(13.3%) were remained neutral.

2.4.8. Proficiency Matters If the Teacher Delivers Lesson Entirely in English

In response to the question: ‘In your opinion, could you become more proficient in English if the teachers deliver lesson entirely in English?’, 19 students (63.3%) responded that they could become more proficient in English if the teachers deliver lesson entirely in English, eight students (26.7%) replied otherwise and three students (10%) gave other responses.

3. CONCLUSION

This study carried out an in-depth analysis in teachers’ and students’ practices regarding switching of codes in language classroom discussions from different aspects and concluded that the reasons for teachers’ switching of codes differ according to the lesson topic, teaching experience and the students’ background. The research also concluded that switching of codes can provide better understanding and it empowers the language teachers to engage and bind the entire classroom in the learning process. The teachers, however, should always keep in mind that the primary medium of instruction is English and the use of code-switching must be minimized. Due to the ease of teaching and learning some, teachers and students may develop a tendency to overuse the practice of the practice of switching codes offered by a pervasive utilization of code-switching as a regular characteristic of language teaching rather than an exception. As students’ poor level of understanding in English may be the cause of code-switching, students’ proficiency need to be enhanced at their preliminary level, i.e., at the school and college level. If the students achieve sound basis and good know-

ledge of English at the primary and secondary levels, the teachers' code-switching at the advanced level will ultimately become target oriented and occasional.

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