

Code-Switching Practices of Bilingual Teachers in Classroom Settings: A Case Study of University of Swabi



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Abstract: *This paper aims at finding the reasons of code-switching practices by bilingual speakers in the classroom settings at a government university in KPK, and to generalize the results based on the findings of a small-scale study of codeswitching between Urdu and English. It discusses how code-switching manifests itself in diverse ways and achieves different purposes. The data is taken from six recorded lectures and interviews with the lecturers in the department of English who were teaching to the students of first semester. This study aimed at finding the reasons of code-switching, the perceptions of teachers about their code-switching practices, and the functions of code-switching. The primary objective of this study is to find out, explain, record and analyze the reasons of code-switching that bilingual teachers use during lectures. Communication Accommodation Theory facilitated this study. The findings of this study revealed that lecturers used code-switching to engage with students, to translate difficult concepts, to describe, to control the classroom environment and students' behavior, and to advise or encourage students.*

Keywords: Code-Switching, Bilingualism, Communication Accommodation Theory, Teachers

Introduction

In every multilingual society, the use of two or more languages within the same context is a common phenomenon. This phenomenon happens for different purposes, and sometimes it is unavoidable. Sometimes, one language for the same context cannot fulfill our intended purposes because some concepts do not have their corresponding words in our language, so we have to switch to another language to explain that concept. This process of using two languages within the same conversation is known as code-switching. It is basically comprehended as 'the alternative use by bilinguals (or multilinguals) of two or more languages in the same conversation (Muysken, 1995, p. 7). The languages involved in this

process of code switching may not be standard languages but dialects and other varieties (Myers-Scotton, 1997).

In Pashtun society in Swabi, Pakistan, where Pashto is the local language and Urdu is the national language, the practices of code-switching are very common in schools, colleges, and other educational institutions. It serves many purposes and achieves different goals. This study seeks to investigate the sociolinguistic factors which are responsible for code-switching practices, the perceptions of bilingual teachers, and the functions of code-switching in the classroom settings. Scholars from different fields have drawn their attention to the practices of code-switching. Poplack (2001) approaches it from formal or structural

linguistics point of view, (Gumperz and Bloom 2000) have approached it from psycholinguistics point of view. Lin (2013) has approached it from educational perspective by discussing the reasons of code-switching in educational context. While many look at the practices of code-switching positively, there were times in the past when it was considered a negative practice. Grosjean (2008:20) in his paper reveals that some researchers look at code-switching as a germ that contaminates the whole purity of the substance. He is of the view that code-switching is a bad practice and those speakers who use code-switching have no control over any of their language.

In the most general sense, code-switching is actually the ability of the bilingual speakers who can use two languages for different reasons. Bialystok (2001) states that these speakers can use language more adeptly than monolingual speakers and can manipulate language for different purposes. Code-switching is actually the sign of a person's bilingual abilities. It is the manifestation of bilingualism.

Generally, there are two types of code-switching in Sociolinguistics: Situational and metaphorical code-switching. According to Gumperz and Bloom (2000: 126), when individuals switch from a prestigious language variety to a less prestigious variety due to a change in situation, this type of code-switching is termed as situational code-switching. Whereas when individuals want to achieve a certain goal through communication and switch from one language to another, this type of code-switching is termed as metaphorical code-switching.

Research Questions:

What are some factors that influence code-switching among bilingual teachers?

What are the perceptions of bilingual teachers about their code-switching practices in classroom settings?

What functions does code-switching serve in the classroom settings?

Research Objectives:

To investigate the factors that are responsible for

code-switching among bilingual teachers.

To analyze how bilingual teachers perceive their code-switching practices in the classroom.

To find out the functions of code-switching practices in the classroom settings.

Literature Review:

Although there are many researchers who have approached the practice of code-switching from different perspectives and its causes and manifestation, yet very little amount of study is there on it in the educational classroom context that why and for which purposes teachers in the KPK province and especially in university of Swabi use code-switching in the classrooms. Qian et al. (2009) have conducted their study on the use of code-switching by teachers in the primary school. They have presented two case studies to investigate why teachers use code-switching. Their findings revealed that teachers use code-switching as a discourse strategy to promote classroom interaction, and can foster good relationship between students and teachers.

Rezvani et al. (2011) have also conducted a study of the same nature with a different case study. Their paper titled "Code-Switching in Iranian Elementary EFL Classrooms: An Exploratory Investigation" discusses the syntactical identification of code-switching and what functions do these switches between two codes perform. Their findings revealed that teachers use the mother tongue of the students in the classroom to enhance understanding and promote teacher-student relations, and classroom interaction. The results showed that it was fruitful for students when difficult concepts would be taught to them in their native language.

Raschka et al. (2009) in their research paper also explored two sides of code-switching: positive and negative. While some considers code-switching a bad practice, but the results show that it promotes interaction and enhances understanding. The findings of their study revealed that one language rule for the classroom is a lazy rule and code-switching cannot be avoided.

Another interesting study of the same nature by

Meij (2010) titled “Codeswitching in English courses in Chinese universities” explores and examines the views of both teachers and students regarding code-switching. The results showed that the students desired frequently from the teachers for code-switching in order to understand their lectures easily, and the teachers also wanted to frequently switch from English to Chinese because they were found to be better in explaining a concept in their native language.

Taha (2008) has carried out his research on code-switching practices at university level in Sudan. He focused on the teachers’ code-switching between Arabic and English. The findings of his study revealed that although there is a policy of using English as a medium of instructions in the educational institutions but teachers tend to switch to Arabic language to facilitate classroom interaction, promote motivation, and enhance comprehension.

Research Methodology:

Research Design:

This study is qualitative in nature. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews and observation of the lecturers in the department of English, University of Swabi. The sampling technique applied in this data was purposive. The participants under study were permanent lecturers at the department of English and they use lecture methods for teaching which also suits the nature of this study.

Theoretical Framework:

This study was carried out under the guidelines of Communication Accommodation Theory by Howard Giles. This theory was taken as a theoretical framework. It provides a defining structure to understand how language behave in social interaction. It states that sometimes people adjust their language according to the situation to achieve certain goals (Giles & Coupland, 1991). This theory suits the nature of this study because it explains why individual ls use code-switching to accommodate their interlocutors.

Data Analysis:

The collected data which was collected through

semi-structured interviews and observation was first transcribed and then analyzed under the guidelines of Communication Accommodation Theory by Howard Giles. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. Recurring themes were identified related to the factors responsible for code-switching, perceptions of bilingual teachers regarding code-switching, and the functions of code-switching practices.

Results and Discussion:

After the thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews, the results revealed that the teachers at the department of English in University of Swabi frequently change their language according to the situation to fulfill different needs and goals. It was also found out that teachers are aware of their use of two languages during their lectures. Although the language of instructions (LoI) at the university is English, yet the teachers intentionally switch to the native language of the students, which is Pashto, to accommodate the students, and to better explain a concept. This is what Communication Accommodation Theory posits that individuals sometimes change their language variety according to the situation to perform different functions and achieve different goals. The teachers at the department of English in University of Swabi use two types of code-switching: situational and metaphoric code-switching. As the results from the classroom observation and recorded lectures revealed that there were 120 instances of code-switching practices in the classroom by the teachers during their lectures. When the instances of code-switching were analyzed thoroughly, it was found out that 70% of code-switching were intra-sentential while 30% were inter-sentential code-switching (See Table 1). The total time of recorded lectures was 450 minutes, in which the intra-sentential code-switching occurred on average after every 7 minutes, and inter-sentential code-switching occurred after every 15.3 seconds.

Table 1 shows the types of code-switching and how many times it occurred (in Percentage):

The results showed that the teachers mostly use intra-sentential code-switching. Examples of the

occurrence of code-switching during lectures are provided below to illustrate it further.

Type	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Total
Inter-sentential	10	3	2	-	9	12	36
Intra-sentential	20	12	10	5	22	15	84
Total							120

Excerpt 1:

The following excerpt is from the recorded lecture of a lecturer who teaches Pakistan Study to the first semester students at the department of English:

“Pakistan did not get freedom from the British in one night, *buhat qurbaaniyaa deni parhi* (a lot of sacrifices had to be made), and then we got freedom. *toh Is leyai* (so that is why) we have not to let those sacrifices go in vain.”

It can be seen from excerpt 1 that the lecturer is trying to foster patriotism in students and to explain how their forefathers had sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the country. He switches from English to Urdu within the sentence to achieve a certain communication effect.

Excerpt 2:

The following excerpt is from a lecturer who teaches Functional English to the first semester students:

“Adjectives modify a noun or a pronoun. It is simply *ism-e-sifat* (an Urdu word for adjective) which gives information about a noun or *ism yaa naam* (name). For example, the words *khoobsurat yaa barha waghera* (beautiful or big) are adjectives.”

It can be seen from excerpt 2 that the teacher is trying to explain the concept of adjectives to her students through the help of Urdu. She switches from English to Urdu within a sentence to explain a difficult or new words. This switch happens to accommodate the interlocutors. This type of code-switching is termed as metaphorical code-switching.

Excerpt 3:

The following excerpt is from a professor who teaches History of English Literature at the

department of English:

“History or the beginning of the English literature dates back to 450 AD, *Yeh us waqt ki baat hai* (It is the tale of that time) when England was not known as England at that time. There were two major tribes, *qabeelai* (tribes) living there.

From this excerpt it can be seen that the teacher has used intra-sentential code-switching to create suspense and to get the attention of the students, and to explain the term “tribe” to the students in Urdu. It can be observed that the teachers intentionally switch from English to Urdu based on the premises that students will understand it better in Urdu than in English. This type of code-switching where people switch to facilitate the communication process and to create a certain communication effect is termed as metaphorical code-switching.

1: Factors Influencing Code-Switching:

The results showed that there are many sociolinguistics factors that are responsible for the practice of code-switching. The most common ones are:

Linguistic Competence:

Sometimes, teachers do code-switch to showcase their bilingual proficiency. This also happens when a teacher is aware of the dominant language of the students so he switches to that language for understanding a difficult concept.

Pedagogical Goals:

Generally, teachers switch from one language to another to clarify a concept and to teach new vocabulary with the help of the native language of the students.

Classroom Dynamics:

In order to encourage students' participation in the class and to reduce anxiety, teachers often switch to the language of the students. It increases students' comfort and confidence. It also strengthens their sense of identity and belonging.

2: Perceptions of Teachers about Code-Switching:

When the teachers were asked about their perceptions on their code-switching practices, all of them had positive reviews about it and they reported that the classroom environment compels them to switch from English to Urdu. Even though the language of instruction (LoI) in the university rules is English but they switch to Urdu to clarify a concept or when they realize that the students are not following up. One of the teachers reported that:

Excerpt 1:

"I try my best to follow the university regulations on the use of English but the classroom environment compels me to switch from English to Urdu because I know my students better. When I explain a concept in Urdu, the students immediately turn their attention and start noting down in their copies."

The aforementioned excerpt shows that the teachers are sometimes compelled by the classroom environment to switch from English to Urdu. The teacher argues that he switches from English to Urdu because he wants his students to understand him better in their native language.

Excerpt 2:

"Sometimes my students look at me as if there is a ghost standing in front of them.... (smiles) that is the time when I switch from English to Urdu because I know well that they will be able to pick up the concepts more easily if I lectured in Urdu, so I switch."

The aforementioned excerpt reveals that the teachers deliberately switch from one language to another to facilitate the learning process. It also shows that learning is done better in the language that is most familiar to the students.

Zabrodskaia (2007) also observes this that teachers intentionally use two languages in the classroom to teach academic content. This code-switching happens according to the need of the situation. It shows that to foster classroom interaction and motivation, it is better to use a familiar language of the students.

Conclusion:

The current study revealed that using two languages in the classroom is a positive thing and cannot be avoided due to certain reasons. One such reason is the language policy of the universities that forces a language for instruction which is not familiar to the students, especially in a country like Pakistan where Urdu is the most familiar language of the masses. Lecturers at the University of Swabi also do code-switching in the classrooms due to different sociolinguistic factors. Even though they are cautioned against using Urdu in the classroom, yet they cannot avoid it. The results of the data showed that teachers consider code-switching an integral and important part of the learning process. It is done to accommodate and facilitate their students. The findings revealed that two major types of code-switching take place in the classroom: intra-sentential and inter-sentential. This also shows that people cannot be separated from their linguistic roots. It is not the story of only University of Swabi but can be seen in almost every other bilingual society. Code-switching is the manifestation of bilingualism which has become an integral part of every classroom.

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