Perceptions of English language teachers and learners on the Code Switching practice in English language classes in University of Sindh: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract
Code-Switching is a wide spread practice in almost every walk of life, from teaching to political speeches, from media discourse to professional trainings code-switching tends to be inevitable. It refers to the use of two or more languages in a single discourse. The current research studies the perceptions of English language teachers and learners on the use of code-switching in English language classes. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The teachers hold positive opinion about code-switching. According to them code-switching serves as a teaching aid which is worth applying for the sake of learners' ease, understanding, building interest and developing attention in the language class, and lightening classroom environment. Thus, if it is properly employed in the English language classes it can bring about positive learning outcomes. The other part of research covers the learners' views on the use of code-switching. The learners come up with ambivalent response. On one hand, some of the students believe that code-switching serves as an obstacle which inhibits the direct exposure of the target language: the more the exposure and practice, the more the learning. On the contrary, there were some other learners who did not prefer code-switching for themselves but for the sake of fellow learners they endorsed it. To them code-switching helps in guiding and clarifying the fellow learners' concepts. Thus, they viewed code-switching as a learning aid as well.

Keywords: Code-switching, English, classes, language, teachers, learners, teaching, strategy

INTRODUCTION

The current research paper deals with the notion of code-switching. It is worth mentioning that some of the aspects of data have been taken from the researcher's MS thesis, titled, "Reasons of code-switching in English language classes: A qualitative study" (2017); therefore, the paper may some similarity index.

Code switching refers to a bilingual speech where the speakers systematically mix two or more languages in the same discourse without changing topic or interlocutor [1]. Such coding system is a norm in bilingual societies. But, with the globalization of English it seems to connote with switching to English from L1. Code-Switching (Henceforth used as C.S.) is widely used in different fields, including, media, professional careers, political speeches, private chats, everyday life etc.

In ELT CS is regarded as a language shift from L2 to L1 at the time of need [2]. This need can be teaching English and grammatical rules with the help of L1 [3]. Besides this, teachers switch their code according to the students' proficiency and understanding level [4]. These views deal with the EFL teachers' C.S. Another dimension of C.S is students' C.S. That is, to avoid tough vocabulary and to rephrase the words the students use of CS [2]. This shows that C.S. is a two-fold practice: one at the hands of teacher, another at students.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Design

The present study is a qualitative study. In order to collect the data we conducted a semi structure interview from all of the participants. Four English language teachers of English department were selected on convenient sampling. And 15 students from Arts and Natural Sciences disciplines were selected on simple random sampling.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the perceptions of English language teachers on the use of code switching in English language classes?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of English language learners on the use of code switching in English language classes?

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, we used the Thematic Analysis modeled by Saldana [5]. Firstly, the interviews were transcribed. From the transcription, the InVivo and Descriptive codes were identified. Thus, different categories were established. The emerging categories from the teachers' perceptions led to the development of a broad theme. As far as students' perception is concerned, there emerged two different themes due to difference of their perception on CS practice.

Credibility of research

The present research used member check and triangulation to attain credibility.

Member check

Member check or respondent validation can be attained during interview or at the end of research project [7]. Therefore, in this research the English language learners' responses were

confirmed during interview as one of the researchers jotted down specific responses and during interviews they were asked if their responses were rightly noted or not. And at some instances they even rectified the memos/notes. Whereas the teachers' feedback on analysis was attained with follow up interview. We showed them some specific themes and their interpretation and they confirmed the analysis. Thus, the credibility of the research was assured.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves gathering evidence from different sources to present a particular theme or perspective [7]. So, the findings of present study are corroborated. The teachers' perspectives are supported by the learners' views. Likewise, the students' views also align with those of the teachers.

FINDINGS

From the data it was found that the teachers' and students' perceptions show that CS is a commonplace practice in English language classes. The teachers take CS as a teaching aid for different reasons. They regard it a positive and worth applying teaching strategy to benefit the learners.

Perceptions of teachers on the use of code switching in English language classes

CS as an accepted teaching strategy in ELT

The present study shows that CS is a common practice in English language classes. The teachers highly approve its usage. Therefore, the emergent theme from the data establishes that CS is regarded as an accepted teaching strategy in ELT. This theme subsumes some other themes, such as, CS as a beneficial teaching strategy, the use of CS develops students' interest and attention in English language class, CS lightens classroom environment, and CS is essential for clarification of concept.

CS as a beneficial teaching strategy

The field of ELT demands the teachers to cater for the needs of all learners. In the context of UoS, students are enrolled from diverse background. Therefore, to take on board all of learners it is essential to apply such teaching strategy which may be beneficial for all of them.

In this connection, T3 perceived the use of CS in following words:

I believe this is a good thing. You know, my views are positive regarding this. Because ultimately the students are the main thing. We need to make them understand.

In a similar way, T1 held the view that:

This must be a teaching strategy which I am also using because you cannot teach English-through-English all the time. We have to actually make a balance in the classroom. We have to see the level of the learners and accordingly mould ourselves. This can benefit the teachers as well as learners.

Likewise, T4 perceived the use of CS in following words:

I personally believe that code switching is a way to make your students improve language. CS is of course acceptable and it is well known phenomenon that if you are switching the code in language class rooms that is really going to help your students to understand the different concepts of the language. But if they are already good enough then my priority would be direct teaching in English.

The students also regarded CS in ELT as a beneficial teaching strategy. As S8 suggested:

It is good. It is beneficial for us. When we all read in English and we are not getting any point so how can we gain benefit from it. So, teacher must understand that they have to switch their code for betterment of students.

Another student, S5 declared:

With CS we understand our teacher better. Because of CS now we are communicating English-through-English.

The literature also reveals that CS is a handy tool which the teachers take as an extra resource [7]. It aids to the learning of students. And as a teaching strategy it should be encouraged in the foreign language classes [8]. It can be regarded as a useful technique to clarify and convey the information effectively [9].

CS develops students' interest and attention in English language classes

The teachers believed that CS is a beneficial teaching strategy. They held the opinion that it develops students' interest and makes them attentive in the class. It prevents distractions which tend to happen when students feel exhausted and bored. It may be due to the monotony of Target Language. Therefore, CS can bring momentum in the language class. It can captivate students' interest and attention.

In this regard, T4 put forward her views in these words:

> *Sometimes I feel that students don't follow me. They are lost somewhere in the midst. Their attention is diverted and don't show any interest in the class. At that time I deliberately switch my code and then the students are back!*

T2 believed that:

> *When students are distracted, they are not responsive and get bored then I turn to their language. This brings a difference. This develops their interest and they pay attention. If it is only English then often they don't respond. So, to bring their attention I find it imperative to switch my code.*

The views of T1 are also parallel to other teachers. According to her:

> *I told you speaking in the class, sharing in the class, performing in the class is good for students. When I feel that my students are not interested in discussion at all. I need to perform and while performing now I am not concerned with any language at all. To involve the students, to captivate their attention I switch my code from English to Sindhi or Urdu. And this actually works.*

So, the interviews of the teachers revealed that CS removed boredom and distraction from the class. The teachers found it a pathway to capture students' attention through the use of their L1. English-through-English teacher talk creates uninterestedness and boredom in students [10]. Thus, in order to avoid distraction and boredom and to develop students' interest and attention CS does the needful.

CS lightens classroom environment

The present study shows that the teachers perceived CS as a beneficial teaching strategy in English language classes. They gave different views on it. It is generally observed that in foreign language class the students get anxious because of language barrier. They tend to remain silent and introvert. In this connection, it is responsibility of a teacher to lighten the classroom environment.

Following are some of the views of English language teachers:

T2 believed:

> *I can deliver lecturer English-through-English. I don't feel hesitation. But whenever I feel there is a need and this also varies from class to class. So, the need may be to lighten the classroom environment and to see the comfort level of the learners I apply CS. It removes their foreign language anxiety.*

In a similar manner, T3 declared that:

> *We have to consider the problem of the students. We are not supposed to depress our students. We have to give them comfort level. We should not be rigid in our approach. The language class should be dynamic in nature. And it is less likely that English-through-English lightens classroom. But the use of CS brings a change.*

T1 was asked if she initiated CS or students requested her, she replied:

> *I myself actually feel. This is where I should switch the code. From the performance of the students or from the faces of the students I feel that further students can't get along with English, so let's switch the code!*

From the interviews it is discovered that the teachers considered the needs of the learners. English-through-English teaching tends to make students anxious. The students want to have some ease and the teachers too adopted flexibility in their approach. Because the ultimate aim is to learn English. But if the classroom environment is rigid, neither the teachers nor the students use their mother tongue; this can create a mechanistic environment. Therefore, the teachers believed that CS can bring change and make the environment lively.

CS is essential for clarification of concept

In the context of UoS, there is a great diversity of students. This diversity of students is in terms of educational background. Those students who have sound English background they feel comfortable with English-through-English teaching. But most of the students have rural background. They lack sound exposure of English. Since the majority of students did not have sound English background therefore, the current study shows that the students lacked understanding of the different concepts, contents and the themes of the lesson in English. They wanted the teachers to apply CS for clarification of the concepts. Therefore, the teachers resorted to CS .Thus, the judicious use of CS can be reckoned as a beneficial teaching strategy.

Following are some of the views of the teachers as they perceived CS to be essential for the clarification of the concept of the students:

T1 was asked about her students' response at English-through-English teaching, she replied:

> *They don't understand properly, like they don't understand instructions properly. The task I assign them, they don't understand properly, they don't understand the concepts properly. My motive is to make them understand and clarify the concept. If they understand English-through-English then ok, otherwise I have to repeat it with CS.*

T2 believed that:

> *I announce it in my English class that our focus should be on English. We are here to learn and practice English. Not anything else. So, my preference is to teach English-through-English to have them more exposure. But many a time students request that they often miss the points. So, for students' sake, to make them clear about the topics I have to turn to their mother tongue.*

T3 was asked if she switched her code in English language class, she replied:

> *I do, I do, I do. Because I feel that there is a need of switching the code from one language to another. Otherwise I feel that they are listening, but not understanding anything. So, once I get the point that they are listening, but not understanding anything then I turn to another language.*

Students' perceptions also corroborate with those of teachers.

S7 was of the view that:

> *To make us understand she switches her code from English to Urdu or Sindhi. Or she gives examples in Sindhi and Urdu also. So she uses three languages.*

Likewise, S9 held the following view:

> *According to me in our university most of the students have studied in the government schools and you know the condition of government schools well. So, it is beneficial for students who try to clarify everything when teachers switch their code.*

In context of Pakistan, 85% university teachers at three campuses of COMSATS applied CS for the purpose of clarification of complex ideas and take CS as a teaching tool [11]. Teachers need to prefer bilingualism while clarifying difficult words, phrases and complex structures of the Target Language [12].

Perceptions of students on the use of CS in English language classes

The present research shows that CS is a common practice in English language classes in the context of UoS. The teachers regarded CS as a beneficial teaching strategy and applied it to serve the teaching purpose. So, their perception on the use of CS was positive. As far as learners are concerned, some of them considered it as a learning aid whereas others regarded it as a hurdle in learning English. They preferred English-through-English learning. Thus, for learners' perceptions the findings presented two different themes, such as, CS as a hurdle in learning English language and CS serves as a learning aid.

CS as an obstacle

CS as a hurdle in learning English

The present study shows that the learners had different perceptions on the use of CS in English language classes. There were some students who negated the CS practice and wanted more exposure to English. They gave different reasons due to which they did not encourage CS as a learning strategy.

Some of the views of the students are given below:

According to S1:

CS should not be done. Because we are in English class. English language must be preferred here with high priority. And switching the code must not be done.

S4 believed that:

CS creates hurdle in learning of English because English language is actually the way of communication. It is a language ultimately. So, when we are prone to CS and when somehow we get addicted to it... Because CS means somehow you are just trying to hide the lack of vocabulary. And you are not actually accepting that some words are not in your knowledge. So, rather than learning those words we are just trying to avoid.

S9 said:

If I had good educational background and had proficiency in English, I would not have opted for CS.

According to S2:

We have to make ourselves habitual of English. Sometimes it may not be necessary to switch our code but we have habit of switching the code. Code switching distracts from direct learning.

So, the above views suggest that some of the students had certain reservations on the use of CS in English language classes. They opined that CS distracted them from direct exposure of English. In fact, it is responsibility of a teacher to set certain limits to switch the code. If students unnecessarily switch the code, then this can distract them from learning. And CS can really be a hindrance in learning English. But if there is a judicious use, that is , as per need of the learners, then it may aid to learning. However, due input and exposure are certainly appreciated.

Preference to English-through-English Learning

Another subtheme of the present research is the preference of students on English-through-English learning. There were some students who asserted that the more practice they would do, the more they would learn. To them CS was not a learning strategy. It was rather an obstacle in the direct exposure of English.

In this regard, following are some of the beliefs of learners on English-through-English learning.

S9 opined:

> *I personally suggest we prefer English-though-English learning. If students have queries, they might ask and discuss with the teacher after class that they could not understand.*

Likewise, S11 said:

> *Some students who want to improve their speaking power they don't go for CS. They say, either right or wrong, we have to speak English. They don't want to switch the code. On the other hand, there are some weak students, they go for CS.*

S3 was asked to what extent he would go for CS and English-through-English learning, he replied:

> *Overall from 100%, only 10% we need to switch the code. 90% English-through-English learning is more appropriate.*

S6 said:

> *In our English language class I prefer English-through-English because in English class, English is compulsory. It helps me in reading and also when I came in university, I have improved my language because I practice English.*

The findings show that some students were reluctant on the use of CS as a learning strategy. They preferred to learn English-through-English. The learners should be trained to apply different learning strategies where they could have more exposure to the Target Language. Such strategies may be chunking, graphic organizers/mind mapping, goal setting, self-assessment, and so on, so that the learners may have direct access to English language learning [13].

CS as a Learning Aid

The second major theme about the perceptions of learners' CS is CS as a learning aid in English language classes. This main theme subsumes two subthemes, which are, CS helps in clarification of concept and CS helps in filling lexical gap.

CS helps in clarification of concepts

This study presents two different themes on the learners' perceptions on the use of CS in English language class. Some students reckoned it as an escape whereas others took it as a learning tool. Those who had positive views on CS, they held the view that it helped them in clarification of complex ideas, concepts and contents which they came across in the language class. It is also a fact that when the learners interact with one another, with pair and group activities they share different ideas. In the midst if they have any complication they often turn to CS to clarify their concept. Hence, L1 helps them in learning easily and quickly.

Following are some of the views of the students who favored CS as it helped in the clarification of their concept:S1 was of the view that:

> *As a student if my fellows don't understand anything, if they are confused because they are from Sindhi medium then I accept CS for them.*

S11 declared:

> *Personally I do not do CS. But I have to, for the sake of my friends. To help them out and to clear their concepts and confusions I take the help of CS.*

S7 preferred to have more practice and learn directly through TL, but to clarify her fellows she said:

> *I communicate with them in Sindhi. Because they do not understand English properly. Even they are very weak in English. So, to help them out and to make them understand, I use CS.*

So, the above views reveal that there is a diversity of learners in terms of their learning approach. On one hand, some of them did not personally want to employ CS in English language classes, but to help their fellows, to clarify their concepts and to guide them they took the help of CS. On the other hand, there were some students who recognized CS as a learning aid and took benefit from it. Therefore, EFL teachers should facilitate the learners to use their L1 to get the learning outcomes. Thus, it helps in learning.

CS helps in filling lexical gap

Vocabulary is a building block of any language. If a foreign or second language learner has grip over Target Language he tends to feel confident and have flow in speech. But if one does not have proficiency in it, there are more chances of either giving up in the middle of the speech, or he may take the help of CS to complete the sentence and convey the message properly. Likewise, in this research the findings show that most of the low proficient and shy students took the help of CS to fill the lexical gap.

Following are some of the views of students on it:

S7 said:

> *I would prefer English, but if there is a problem of vocabulary then it is better to switch the code rather than just giving up!*

In a similar manner, S4 said:

> *I prefer to use English, but when I fall short of words due to vocabulary problem then I switch to Sindhi or Urdu.*

Another student, S13 was asked if she switched the code, she said:

> *Sometimes, we don't know proper English. So sometimes some English words do not come in our mind, so to fill the gap we switch our code.*

The findings show that there are some students who regard CS as a hindrance in English language learning whereas others believe in its efficacy. They accept it as a learning strategy. It can be noted that though some preferred to learn English-through-English, but they opined that CS paved a way for better understanding. If they did not want to switch their code for their own self, yet for the sake of fellow students they resorted to CS.

DISCUSSION

The present research shows that all the participant teachers highly approved of CS as a teaching strategy. Because in English language classes if the teachers teach only English-through-English then the teaching purpose may not be served. There are some students who are from elite schools of urban areas, whereas others may not have such exposure. Therefore, they may not be able to compete the elite school students because of the language gap.

However, ELT demands teaching for all so that the learners' learning needs may be catered well. There are some instances where L2 may not convey the sense properly. The students find it hard to comprehend the concepts or meanings clearly. At the expense of avoiding L1, it takes too long to create any sense. For example, structural concepts like, subject-verb agreement, change of voice, tenses etc. need some explanation in L1. Therefore, it is considered essential to use CS for the clarification of difficult ideas. Moreover, besides teaching, the teacher has to the see the comfort level of the learners so that it may be a student-friendly class. A foreign language may create a distance and a communication gap between teacher and students. But L1 can bridge that gap by building a rapport between teacher and students, ultimately, L2 learning can take place comfortably. Thus, CS can be regarded as a beneficial teaching strategy in English language classes.

With regards to the learners' CS the study shows that the learners prefer to learn English-through-English. English-through-English learning has its own merits. But as a learning strategy it can be more time taking. Thus, it can be a slow process. In the course of learning, the learners may come across some difficulty and many a time due to lack of vocabulary the students lose their confidence. And they end up with choppy conversation or no participation at all. Therefore, it can be said that English-through-English learning may be emphasized but the teacher ought to adopt flexibility. If the learners are stuck somewhere and are unable to keep up with the pace due to language barrier, they may be allowed to change their code to convey message or clarify their concepts and other related issues. Thus, keeping in view the previous literature and the current study it can be said that CS seems to be a building block to learn English. Despite learners' reluctance yet they feel compelled to switch the code for learning purpose. However, their reluctance highlights the negative aspect of CS as well. It is therefore, suggested that there should be a definite policy on the language use, so that, there can be a judicious use of CS for teachers as well as learners. In this way, CS can serve the purpose of teaching as well as learning. And it can be declared as a teaching as well as learning strategy.

CONCLUSION

The current study shows that CS covers multiple areas in ELT. For example, teachers use C.S. for clarification of difficult vocabulary, complex concepts; lighten classroom environment and developing students' interest and attention. The teachers personally

preferred to teach English-through-English, but to address the needs of the learners and to see their comfort level they took it as a beneficial teaching strategy. Whereas, the students had different views. Some of the them had negative views on CS as a learning strategy. They preferred to learn English-through-English. On the other hand, there were some other students who regarded CS as a learning strategy. Interestingly, those students who preferred to learn English-through-English even they also declared to use CS for filling the lexical gap, and clarification of concept and guidance to fellows. This shows that CS is a common practice despite learners being reluctant to it.

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