

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 12 : 4 April 2012
ISSN 1930-2940

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A Study of Code Switching in Relation to ESL

Nannapaneni Siva Kumar, M.A., M.B.A., (Ph.D.)
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ABSTRACT

Code Switching is a linguistic phenomenon claimed to be the most prevalent and common mode of interaction among bilingual speakers. This paper focuses on how and why teaching English using Code Switching can be an effective teaching and communicative approach and to what extent it helps the students to improve their proficiency of the target language. It also explores how far Code Switching is useful to the teachers of the English language to facilitate students' comprehension. The paper describes Code Switching, Bidialectalism Code Switching and Vernacular Code Switching, difference between Code Switching and Code Mixing, difference between Bilingual Method and Code Switching. The paper presents some of the major factors of Code Switching. Since Code Switching is widely construed as an effective social skill in communication, it is worthwhile to introduce in classrooms and analyze the relevant theory so that students will be benefited.

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INTRODUCTON

Teaching English language in India has a long history. Ever since the English landed in India, we have been taught this language. Since then many language teaching *methods and approaches* have been experimented. Of late Communicative Language teaching approach is being used. But still we haven't succeeded in making students proficient in the target language. There is a lot of gap between the theory and practice. There is every need for an eclectic approach. With the help of Code Switching we can make the non-native students comfortable in learning and using the language.

CODE SWITCHING

In simple terms, Code Switching means switching between languages, which is unavoidable among the bilinguals and multi-linguals. This concept has attracted much attention in the recent past. There is no such rule that one has to stick to only a particular code. When and where the need arises one can shift from one code to another.

There have been various definitions for Code Switching. According to Gumperz, "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems". Cook's notion of code-switching is that "going from one language to the other in mid-speech when both speakers know the same languages". Lightbown defines it as "the systematic alternating use of two languages or language varieties within a single conversation or utterance". In the context of Foreign Language classroom, it refers to the alternate use of the first language and the target language, a means of communication by language teachers when the need arises.

TYPES OF CODE ALTERATION

There are two types of Code Alteration. They are Code Switching and Code Mixing. Code Switching is also called *inter-sentential* Code Alteration. Inter-sentential alteration occurs at a clause or sentence boundary, where each clause or sentence is in one language or another. Code Mixing is also called *intra-sentential* Code Alteration. Intra-sentential alteration occurs within the clause or sentence and is considered to be the most complex form of switching. According to experts it is better to restrict to only Code Switching, (i.e.) Inter-sentential alteration.

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BIDIALECTALISM CODE SWITCHING

To the child of West Indian origin or to an African American student, teaching Standard English is the most difficult task. Current practices are not sufficient to teach Standard English successfully. Because trying to eliminate the non-standard speech by preventing and correcting non-standard features as ‘wrong’ is considered to be mistaken psychologically and socially by the linguists. There arises the need for Bidialectalism Code Switching. In this, the teacher should have some knowledge both of language being taught by him/her teaching and of the child’s dialect, and should have respect for the child’s language. In Bidialectalism Code Switching, the teacher draws upon the linguistic insights that all language is patterned and that dialects systematically contrast with each other. Contrastive analysis and code-switching, tools demonstrably successful in fostering Standard English mastery among minority dialect speakers (Fogel & Ehri 2000, 2006; Rickford 1999; Rickford, Sweetland & Rickford 2004; Sweetland 2006; Taylor 1991; Wheeler & Swords, 2004, 2006).

VERNACULAR CODE SWITCHING

Code Switching is a widespread phenomenon in bilingual speech, and therefore a great proportion of research on bilingualism is going on this topic. Avoiding shifting between languages is almost an impossible task among the bilinguals. Recently there has emerged a notion called Hinglish, i.e. is a mixture of Hindi and English, and Tenglish i.e. a mixture of Telugu and English. In university classrooms, Code Switching comes into use either in the teachers’ or the students’ discourse (Sert, 2006).

BILINGUAL METHOD

C. J. Dodson advocated Bilingual Method. It incorporates different aspects of the Direct Method and the Grammar-Translation Method. The use of mother tongue is allowed but strictly controlled and limited to the teacher. That is the major difference between Code Switching and Bilingual Method.

CODE SWITCHING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Code Switching in Foreign Language classroom has recently attracted scholars'/researchers' attention. Advocates of English language oppose to switching the code in the language classrooms. These advocates strongly propose that English teacher must exclusively use only the target language and should not shift to mother tongue now and then. They argue that it is not necessary that the learners understand each and every word used by the English teacher in the classroom.

Some researchers like Chaudron, Ellis and Wong-Fillmore stressed that it is important for second language and Foreign Language teachers to expose learners to as many language functions as possible in the target language. Ellis argued that the use or overuse of the mother tongue by second language and Foreign Language teachers will deprive learners of valuable target language input. Wong-Fillmore thought that learners' constant listening to their teacher' use of the mother tongue produces in them a tendency to ignore the target language and therefore they do not benefit fully from valuable target language input.

In reality avoidance of the mother tongue does lie behind many teaching methods. Methods like Direct Method and Audio-Lingual Method, which have been used in the classroom since 19th century, strictly permit only the target language to be used in language classroom, with an apprehension that the students' native language might interfere with the students' attempts to master the target language.

On the other hand, researchers, such as Stern (1992) and Cook (2000, 2001) argued that students' mother tongue deserves a place in Foreign Language classrooms. They questioned the long-held belief of excluding the mother tongue from the classroom. Cook believed that to let students use their mother tongue is a humanistic approach, as it permits them to say what they really want to say. It was taken for granted for a very long time that in English language classrooms, only English should be used which made language teachers fail to look rationally at ways in which the mother tongue can be integrated in the classroom.

FUNCTIONS OF CODE SWITCHING

According to Gumperz (1982), there are six functions of Code Switching: quotation, addressee specification, repetition, interjection, message qualification and personification. According to Sert (2006), the function of teachers Code Switching in the classroom is as follows:

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topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions but some basic functional perspectives as: equivalence, floor holding, reiteration, and conflict control come in students' Code Switching.

TEACHERS' CODE SWITCHING

It is worthwhile to know where and why teachers switch code in Foreign Language classroom. As Sert pointed out, first function is *topic switch*, the teacher alters his/her language according to the topic that is under discussion. This is mostly observed in grammar instruction, that the teacher shifts his language to the mother tongue of his students in dealing with particular grammar points, which are taught at that moment. Here the attention of the students can be drawn by their mother tongue. Cole (1998): suggested that "a teacher can exploit students' previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2".

The second function is *affective function* that serves for expression of emotions, which is very much useful to build a good rapport with students. Students should understand the correct emotion when they are learning Foreign Language. Affective function can create a supportive language environment in the classroom.

The next one is *repetitive function*. For better comprehension of the students teacher employs this repetitive function. The teacher switches code to mother tongue of the students in order to clarify meaning, and in this way stresses importance on the Foreign Language content for better comprehension.

STUDENTS' CODE SWITCHING

As Sert identified, the first function of students code switch is *equivalence*. Because of the lack of proficiency in the target language, students switch code and make use of mother tongue for the equivalent of a certain lexical item. So *equivalence* function gives the student the opportunity to continue communication by filling the gaps resulting from target language deficiency.

The second function is *floor-holding*. This function works similar to the equivalence. Students who don't know or who can't recall the appropriate language structure of the target language they use floor-holding. This function helps students to continue their conversation

without gaps.

The third function is *reiteration*. Students use mother tongue by using reiteration to give a clear meaning. They use this function may be because when they feel that they haven't conveyed the message or meaning appropriately in the target language.

The next function of students' Code Switching is *conflict control*. Students use this function where there are no culturally equivalent words or phrases in among the mother tongue and target language which may not convey the intended meaning and to avoid the misunderstandings.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English has been a part of Indian Education System since India got Independence. English Language experts have tried many permutations and combinations to teach target language efficiently to the learners. But unfortunately experts haven't succeeded totally. This is mainly because there is a lot of gap between the theory and the practice. There is a need to train the teachers according to the theory because they are ones who teach the students. Though many theories (Direct Method and Audio lingual method) propose not to use mother tongue in Foreign Language classrooms, most of the teachers switch code for various reasons. As it is suggested, Code Switching in language classroom is not always a blockage or deficiency in learning a language, on the other hand it may be considered as a useful strategy in classroom.

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