

Code-switching in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL): Teachers and Students' Attitudes

Amaal kamal Al-Farra

A teacher of English, NRWA, Gaza, Palestine

Corresponding Author: Amaal kamal Al-Farra, E-mail: amaalkamal@hotmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Code-switching (CS) is the shifting from one language to another in conversation. It could be done within parts of a sentence as words and phrases. It is always looked upon with suspicion and not encouraged in EFL learning. This study aims to investigate the attitudes of both teachers and students towards teacher's code-switching and to identify the functions of code-switching. The data is collected through observations and interviews. Three female teachers are observed. The observations are recorded, transcribed and analyzed. The interviews are done with the teachers and 10 students from the sixth grade. The results show positive attitudes towards code-switching as it is mainly used for clarifications, giving instructions and transferring the knowledge to the students in an efficient way.

Introduction

The study of code-switching goes back to 1950s when Weinreich marked a milestone in the study of multilingualism and language contact. "For many bilingual persons, the use of the two languages is specialized according to the interlocutor, the subject matter, the occasion of the utterance, or the mode of utterance (speech or writing)" (Weinreich, 2011, p. 5).

Even the literature of different previous studies shows that the debate is mostly focused on providing the answer to a central question: Why do speakers switch codes within the same conversational utterances? An example of this is seen in a study done in Hong Kong which identifies the role of code-switching to the L1 (Chinese) as a tool to help the learner understand English as a foreign language (Lin, 1996).

Various researchers (Alhourani, 2018; Amenorvi, 2019; Abdulhady and AL-Darraj, 2019; Namaziandost, Neisi and Banari, 2019) examined code-switching, but little attention so far has been paid to the investigation the attitudes of both teachers and students towards teacher's code-switching and the identification he functions of code-switching in the Palestinian context. The current study tries to find the reasons of code-switching. There is a gap between what the educators demand the teachers do and what the teachers actually practice in their classes. In the current study, the researcher tries to investigate the attitudes of teachers and students towards code-switching and whether it is constructive or destructive in EFL learning.

Literature Review

Wardhaugh (2011, p. 84) defines code-switching as, "The term code refers to a language or a variety of a language. It refers to any kind of system that two or more used in communication."

A general definition of code-switching is used when different languages come into contact with one another in a conversation. Most of the linguists identify it simply as the alternating use of several languages. It is used when bilingual or multilingual speakers who speak two or more languages tend to code-switch when speaking to another bilingual person. So it means that the speakers often change from one language to the other using words and phrases from distinct languages even in the same sentence. (Schmidt, 2014).

Therefore, code-switching refers to language switches, dialectical variations and stylistic variations as well. It is also used in both written and spoken forms but the focus of the current study is on code-switching between two languages of English and Arabic in EFL learning in the spoken form.

In the latter half of the 1970, classroom-based research in American bilingual education programmes focused on the amount of time devoted to the use of English. During this period there was a controversy in the educational fields in the United States about the impact of bilingual classroom communication on children's language development. Moreover, code-switching is used in classroom interactions for explaining structure and negotiating meanings moment by moment (Milroy & Muysken, 1995). As it is seen, there was a contradiction towards the use of code-switching in the classrooms. The educators discouraged the use of bilingual education in American schools. However, the current study sheds the light on the effect of using code-switching on EFL learning.

There are different types of code-switching. It can be inter-sentential or intra-sentential. The inter-sentential code-switching involves switches from one language to the other between sentences. But intra-sentential switches occur within the same sentence, from a single morpheme to a clause level (Myers-Scotton, 1995). In this study the researcher deals with the two types of code switching whether it is inter-sentential or intra-sentential.

Moreover, Wardhaugh (2011) describes other two kinds of code-switching: situational and metaphorical. The situational code-switching happens when people use one language in one situation and another in a different one without changing the topic. But if the topic changes and it requires a change in the language used, metaphorical code-switching takes place.

Indeed, in order to predict whether code-switching is likely to occur in a situation, the analyst should understand the linguistic relationship of grammars of the two languages. Also, both the social and linguistic boundaries tend to be more evident than monolingual settings. The study of code-switching is related to form and function with each other and to the context in which it is used (Heller, 1988). So, this study tries to find if there is a relationship between teaching grammar and code-switching through the observations of teaching processes for different teachers.

Some previous studies stated that code-switching mostly occurs in the classroom for the students' needs such as understanding, clarification and translation of the target language. Sometimes the lack of vocabulary knowledge is one of the most crucial factors of code-switching to be happened. But, both learners and teachers should be aware of the limitations of code-switching as the extensive use of code-switching will have harmful consequences on the learners' production of the target language (Moghadam, Samad, & Shahraki, 2012). In the current study, the researcher investigates the different functions of code-switching and their effects on EFL learning.

Another previous study about the teachers' attitudes towards the usage of only English was conducted in a Japanese university. The teachers were "native- English speaker" teachers. The survey involved 29 teachers. Thirteen of them argued against code-switching to the L1. They stated that prohibiting L1 use would result in more negotiation in the target language. Twenty of them argued in favor of code-switching to L1 by the teacher. They believe that the L1 could be used to facilitate and ensure successful communication between students and teachers. The researchers concluded their study by indicating that the teachers could allow students to use the L1 selectively in some stages of the lesson while other parts of the lesson could be conducted entirely in the target language. In fact, it is important to note that all teachers who believe in the use of L1 as a means of enhancing EFL, should also be cautioned that the L1 should not be overused (McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

Bista (2010) states that the frequency of code-switching differs between graduate and undergraduate students. It is limited in graduate students because they are more fluent in using English in a variety of situations and are more familiar with the subject matter. On the other hand, the undergraduate students exhibit code-switching more frequently. This leads the researcher of the current study to choose participants from different grades to see the effect of familiarity with the target language on the number of code-switching.

Al Masaeed (2013) investigates, in his thesis, the functions and motivations of code-switching. His study contains 26 participants. Eleven of them are Moroccan majoring in English studies. Their native language is Arabic. The researcher recorded their meetings with students whose native language is English and counted their switches to Arabic language. He states that despite the code-switching, there is a language gain. So, code-switching does not affect negatively on learning the target language. He states that, "a practical use of code-switching, then, may facilitate and encourage learning, as well as foster a healthy and close relationship between interlocutors. Sometimes switching languages to provide a simple explanation can have a positive overall effect on the conversation." (Al Masaeed, 2013, p. 123).

In this study, the researcher investigates some functions of code-switching. These functions are examined in EFL learning to see if these functions or more functions are available and whether they affect positively or negatively on learning the target language.

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to shed the light on teachers and students' attitudes towards code-switching. To achieve this, the study addresses the following three questions:

1. What are the teachers' attitudes towards code-switching in EFL classroom?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards teachers' code-switching in EFL classroom?
3. What are the functions of teachers' code-switching in EFL classroom?

Methodology

Participants

The participants are three female teachers with their classes. There are (35) pupils from the first grade, (35) pupils from the third grade and (40) pupils from the fifth grade. Ten students from the sixth grade are chosen on the basis of purposive sampling for the interview. The teachers and students' mother tongue language is Arabic. English is taught as a foreign language. The participants are from an UNRWA Elementary Co-ed School.

Data Collection

The researcher uses the observation as being considered in literature as a research tool (Griffie, 2012). Regarding the observation, the teachers are not told that their code-switching behavior is the subject of observation by the researcher in the class. They signed informed consents for attending and recording their teaching processes for 45 minutes each. The observation is centered on the interaction between teachers and their students in teaching EFL. There is an open-ended interview with each teacher, separately about their attitudes towards code-switching and its functions in the class. Ten students from the sixth grade, with different studying grades, are interviewed separately to know their attitudes towards teacher's code-switching in the class.

Data Analysis

The recorded observations for each teacher are transcribed to count how many times they use code-switching. These transcriptions are categorized according to themes of code-switching functions. While listening to recordings, if an extra category is found, it is added to the other themes in order to investigate the factors and functions of code-switching.

The interviews are done with the teachers to find any matches to their actual speeches and their attitudes towards code-switching in EFL classroom. They are asked about when and why they code-switch and the functions of code-switching. Students' responses through the interviews are analyzed and organized in relation to the research three questions.

Findings and Discussion

This study adopts the qualitative approach to investigate the reasons and functions of code-switching. It agrees in its results with the findings of (Alshammari, 2011), (Yao, 2011) and (Ibrahim, Shah, & Armia, 2013). In relation to the research questions, the researcher presents the following results:

1. What are the teachers' attitudes towards code-switching in EFL classroom?

Subject (A) is a female teacher who teaches the first grade. She is 28 years old. She has been teaching EFL for three years. The researcher observed her period for 45 minutes and recorded it. By analyzing this recording, the researcher found that the teacher code switched for 182 times within 45 minutes. Lots of Arabic language was used. Some of these examples are related to checking comprehension as in this example: /Harf el o maa el olive/ "olive حرف ال o مع ال" which each means checking students' matching of the letter "o" with the word "olive". For class management, she uses lots of code-switching such as: / wʌn, t u:, θri:, Keef gæadeen, wələ wəhəd məsek elgələm/ "كيف قاعدين؟، ولا واحد ماسك القلم" which means " first counting while shouting, 1, 2, 3, show me how are you sitting? Nobody should carry his/ her pencil. For giving instructions, she said, / jəllə nhəwet əleehəm filketəb/ "يلا نحوط عليهم في الكتاب" which means " Circle in your book". Lots of fillers are used during the teacher's teaching. Most of them are unconscious habitual expressions such as: / təjeb, əjwə. Henə, jə əblə ,jəllə jə..., Aah, / "طيب، أيوة، هنا، يا أبله، يلا يا... (مع اسم الطالب)، آه" which each means " Ok, Yes, here, Oh teacher, go on you ... (and the pupil's name), Yes"

When the teacher is interviewed and asked about her attitude towards code-switching, she said, " I use code-switching when I teach abstract words. As I teach the youngest children in the school, I have to code-switch to ensure solidarity and have an intimate relationship with the children. Also, I need to code-switch as I teach them how to write the alphabet letters. I want to describe the way and directions of writing each letter and this needs to code-switch to Arabic in order to be sure of their understanding."

Subject (B) is a female teacher who teaches the third grade. She is 30 years old. She has been teaching EFL for seven years. The researcher recorded her period for 45 minutes. During this period, she code-switched for 137 times which is less than the previous teacher's code switching. Here are some examples of her code-switching. For grammatical points she said, "/ nait mə btəkhədəf in ðə, btəkhədət/" "ما بتأخذش ، بتأخذ at" in the night" which means " the word night is not followed by (in the). It is followed by at". As the case with teacher (A). Lots of fillers and unconscious habitual expressions are used. An example of the instructions she used is: / lɪsn ənd drəw rəh nesməə ɔ: nɔrsəm/ "Listen and draw. " راح نسمع ونرسم" in which she translates the rubric through code-switching.

The next day the teacher was interviewed separately. When she is asked about her attitude towards code-switching, she said, "Code-switching is inevitable in teaching English especially when I teach students abstract words. I do not have any way to demonstrate them so I have to use the equivalent words in Arabic. Also, in grammar, I code-switch to explain the rules. I have to solve problems between students as I teach young boys who have lots of problems with each other. One crucial factor is the standard and level of my students especially I teach in an environment where parents cannot follow up their children at home. So, most of them are low achievers. Sometimes I use code-switching to cheer up my upset students. Also, young learners get bored of long time of teaching as they cannot concentrate for a long time. So, I have to code-switch to tell them a joke in Arabic".

Subject (C) is a female teacher who teaches the fifth grade. She is 23 years old. This is her first year in teaching EFL. The researcher observed her period for 45 minutes and recorded it. By analyzing this recording, the researcher found that she code switched for 101 times within 45 minutes. It is the least code-switching among the three teachers. Some examples of her code-switching are: for class management she said, /lisn, bæʃ jə əblə ismɑʃ ʃə btehki zmeiletko/ "بس يا أبله اسمعوا شو بتحكي زميلتكوا" Listen" which means "listen to what your colleague says". An example of explaining new words is: /slippers jəni ʃebʃeb/ "يعني شيشب slippers ". She translated the word into its vernacular form according to the cultural linguistic form in this area.

The next day the researcher interviewed her. When she is asked about her attitude towards code switching, she said, "I'm a new appointed teacher. First, I tried to prevent myself from code-switching. I tried to use only English language but my students did not understand what I say. So, I usually use code-switching specially in explaining structures, new words, giving instructions, correcting errors and checking students' comprehension. But I try gradually to limit the use of code-switching in order to encourage students to use English language."

As it is seen, the code-switching is getting less as the pupils grow and get familiar with the foreign language.

2. What are the students' attitudes towards teachers' code-switching in EFL classroom?

The researcher interviewed ten students from the sixth grade whom she teaches. They were chosen from three different classrooms. Some of them are high achievers and the others are medium and low achievers. All of them preferred code-switching in EFL. They say that English is a difficult subject. Their parents do not know English to help them at home. They depend on their teacher at school and code-switching helps them understand the target language. Sometimes they do not understand the teacher's questions and need clarifications. Also, they face difficulties in expressing their ideas in English. Low achievers said that they do not know how to answer and respond to the teacher. They cannot form long sentences so they use some words in English, then they switch to Arabic. Moreover, they do not understand the rubrics of their textbook. They always need help and clarifications and that is done through teacher's code-switching in the class.

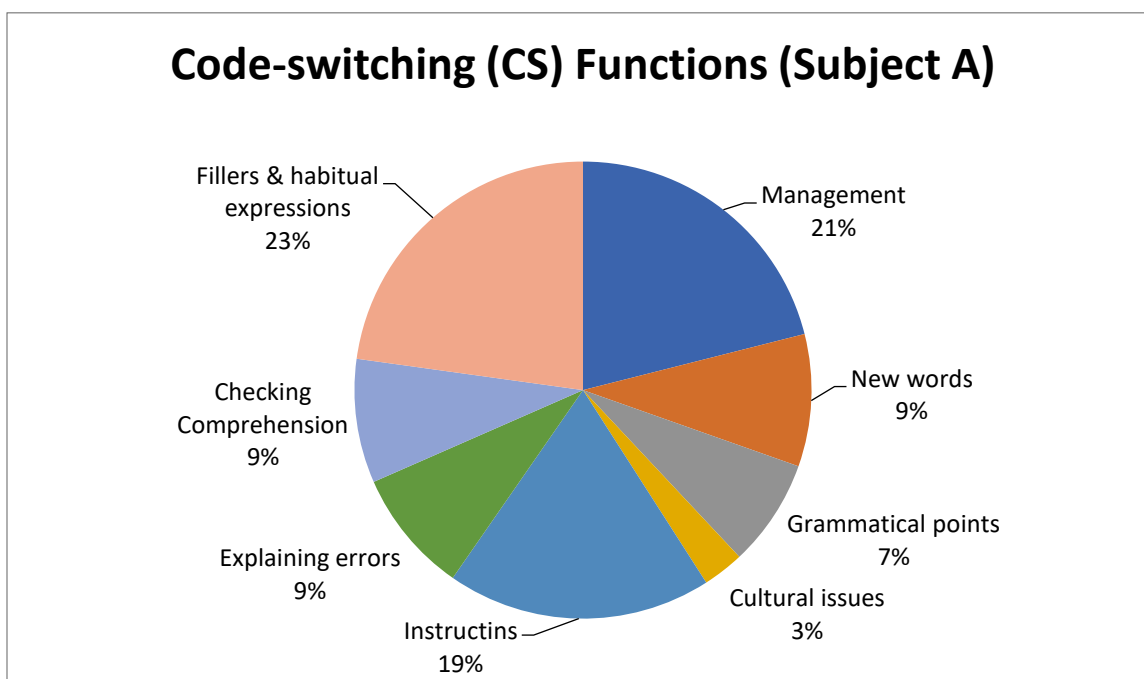
3. What are the functions of teachers' code-switching in EFL classroom?

The three teachers agree on certain functions of code-switching. It is used for clarifying difficult concepts, explaining new words, classroom management, presenting grammatical items, giving instructions, solving problems and making the learning process more effective. But they also agree upon the limited use of code-switching.

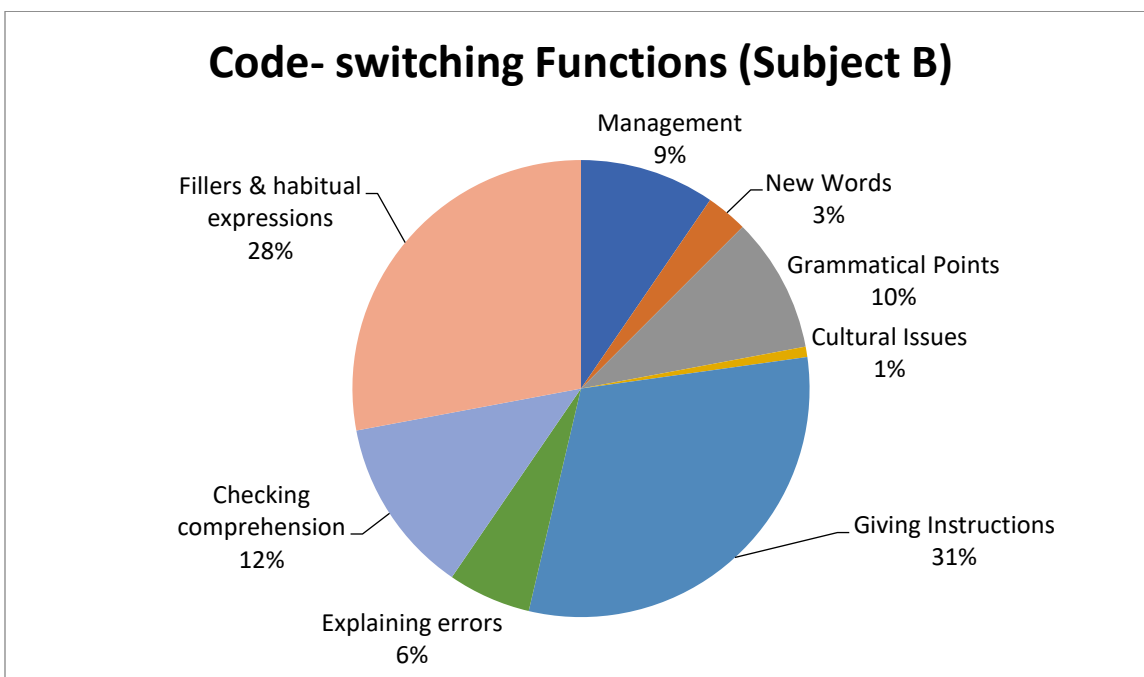
The researcher uses measures of frequency which are identified as types of descriptive statistics. "Measures of frequency are used to indicate how often a particular behavior or phenomenon occurs." (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 251). The researcher has the following frequency table to show the number of code-switching for each teacher. It is based on different language functions.

Language Functions	Teacher (A)	Teacher (B)	Teacher (C)
1. Class management	36	13	16
2. Presenting new words.	16	4	16
3. Presenting grammatical rules.	13	13	8
4. Cultural issues	5	1	4
5. Giving instructions	32	42	18
6. Explaining errors	15	8	5
7. Checking comprehension	26	17	22
8. Sentencefillers (Habitual expressions)	39	38	12
Total	182	137	101

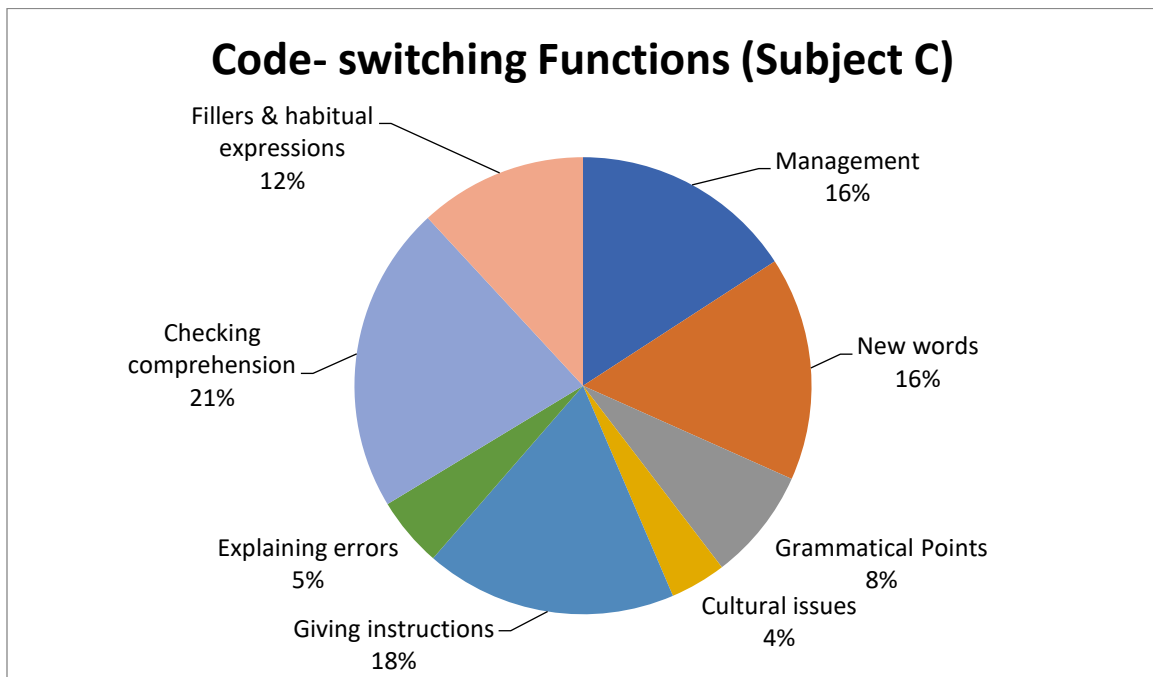
As it is seen in the table, most of the code-switching is done in the first grade. Code-switching is getting less in the third grade and the least in the fifth grade as the students are more capable of using the English language.



Regarding teacher (A), most of her CS is done for giving instructions and class management.



The pie chart shows that teacher (B) uses CS mostly in giving instructions.



This last pie chart shows that teacher (C) uses CS mostly in checking comprehension and giving instructions.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the teachers should only use English in teaching EFL without switching to mother tongue language, the actual classroom practice is really different as seen in the observation of the three teachers. The results showed that code-switching has functions. It is used for class management, presenting new words, presenting new grammatical points, explaining errors, checking comprehension, as fillers and for cultural issues. Some habitual expressions are used unconsciously as the word /jəllə/ ڤلّ"which has an affectional dimension. Sometimes it is used to fill a pause or a moment of hesitation as it has been observed. Indeed, both teachers and students showed positive attitudes towards code-switching in EFL learning. Based on the results of the study, a number of recommendations are suggested to teachers and supervisors. Firstly, Code-switching is necessary in EFL classes but not to be over-used. There are different techniques in the communicative approach that can be followed instead of easily code-switching to Arabic. Secondly, lots of training courses should be done from time to time to the teachers to assure the minimum use of code-switching. Moreover, code-switching has some functions which should be taken into consideration and allowed to be used by the teachers.

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