IRANIAN STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE FACILITATIVE AND DEBILITATIVE ROLE OF CODE-SWITCHING; TYPES AND MOMENTS OF CODE-SWITCHING AT EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Recently, the use of language learners' mother tongue, code-switching, alongside English in EFL classrooms has received considerable attention. The main objectives of this study were to present the results of a qualitative study which investigated the types and functions of code-switching at an intermediate English Proficiency level in EFL classrooms. Moreover, gender preferences were investigated. To this end, 50 hours of four class performances were observed, audio-recorded and analyzed to answer the proposed research questions. The results of this study suggested that teachers applied code-switching more frequently when they tried to give Persian equivalents of English words and expressions. It should be pointed out that the application of intersentential code-switching turned out to be more salient among both teachers and students. Code-switching was more frequent while students were carrying out the assigned tasks. Male students switched when they said humorous remarks while their female classmates switched more frequently when they asked and/or gave L1 equivalents. Filling in the attitude questionnaire, the majority of students believed that in several cases neither teachers nor students should apply Persian as much as possible, even though it facilitated their interactions.

Keywords: code-switching, types of code-switching, moments of code-switching, classroom interactions, attitudes toward code-switching

1. INTRODUCTION

Language classrooms are interactive by nature. There are two kinds of interactions in the classroom, teacher and student interaction. Although

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interaction is usually a part of every kind of education, in foreign language classrooms it has a more significant role. Classroom communication facilitates learning processes which itself enables communication in the foreign language. In foreign language classrooms the language to be learned is the target as well as the medium of instruction. However, in addition to the foreign and/ or second language as the language of instruction, usually there is another language present in the language classroom, that is, the learners' and the teacher' language. Because these two languages exist in the classroom interaction, it may lead to situations in which codes are switched, which means one language is used instead of the other. Hence, code-switching is noticed in many cases, especially at lower level of proficiency, a natural part of language classroom interactions.

Unfortunately, there has not been that much research on code-switching in EFL classrooms, because many researchers do not regard language switching in that context as code-switching at all, for example code-switching was considered to be manifestations of borrowing or lack of proficiency. Also, code-switching in foreign language classrooms has been regarded as the result of inadequate competence in the foreign language. It seems there is more need to investigate the application of code-switching in the classroom by both teacher and students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

If we want to define code-switching in a simple way, we can say that code-switching means 'alternative use of two codes or more in bilingual situation'. But from a more sophisticated view, code-switching can be defined in various ways depending on which perspective the researcher chooses to use in examination of the language switching; as there are different definitions of code-switching. Gumperz (1982) referred to code-switching as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems". Milroy and Myusken (1995) defined the term as "the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation". Cook's (1991) definition for code-switching was: "going from one language to the other in mid speech when both speakers know the same two languages". Myers-Scotton (1993b) defined code-switching as "the selection by bilinguals/multilinguals of forms from two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation".

Auer (1988) uses language alternation as a cover term for this phenomenon. He divides cases of language alternation into two categories: code-switching and transfer. Code-switching, for him, referred to language alternation that is connected to a particular point in conversation whereas transfers are connected to particular conversational structures. As we see there are various definitions with different focuses for the code-switching; as well

as different ways for describing the related terminologies to code-switching. This diversity in definition causes diversity in the focus of attention.

2.1. Types of code-switching

Based on what the researchers have found, several terms are applied referring to code switching, including: tag-switching, intersentential code-switching and interasentential code-switching.

1. *Tag-switching* occurs when a speaker inserts a tag statement from one language into another language.
2. *Intersentential switching* consists of language switches at phrase, sentence, or discourse boundaries.
3. *Intrasentential switching* involves a shift in language in the middle of a sentence, usually performed without pause, interruption or hesitation.

2.2. Works on code-switching in EFL classroom

Investigating the use of code-switching in a Turkish high school, where English was taught as a second language, Eldridge (1996) found out that students at an elementary and lower intermediate level applied code-switching in their educational conversations. His results manifested the use of code-switching at different levels of proficiency. Also he found the following functions of code-switching applied by the language learner: Equivalence, Metalanguage, Reiteration, Group membership, Conflict control, and Alignment and Disalignment.

Merritt et al. (1992) studied three Kenyan primary schools where English, Swahili and the students' mother tongue were used; their aim was to make observations on how the teachers used the languages and code-switching in the classrooms. Their method of collecting data was through ethnographic observation of classroom interaction. They found out that there were four different types of code-switching: "1) code-switching is used in the reformulation across codes, saying the same thing using a different language, 2) code-switching is used in the content of the activity, bringing new information to the discourse by using another code, 3) code-switching is used in translation or word substitution within one sentence, and 4) code-switching is used with "interactional particles".

As general patterns of usage, the researchers found among other things that English was more formal as opposed to Swahili and the mother tongue which was the least formal language. Secondly, the data suggested that code-switching often functioned as an attention getting or attention focusing device.

Borlongan (2009) investigated the Tagalog-English code-switching practices of teacher and students in English language classrooms in the

Philippines to see the frequency and forms of code-switching teachers and learners applied in their educational conversations in the classroom. Concerning the frequency of code-switching in teacher speech, he found that "almost 7.5% of all the English language teacher speech contained at least one instance of code-switching". He also observed that "almost seven percent of all student utterances contained at least one instance of code-switching". To clarify whether these percentages are significant or not he said that" literature on code-switching in teaching and learning has not specified a way to quantify the significance of these frequencies and – therefore – to tell if the number of instances of code-switching in the data is indeed significant; however, if in policy, the understanding is that teachers of the English language should deliver instruction only in English, that students in English language classes should use only English in their classes, and, implicitly, that English language teachers and students of these teachers should never code-switch, then a percentage of around seven percent as the percentage of instance could already be considered a significant percentage".

2.3. Research questions

In this study the following research questions are used as the focus for data analysis:

1. What are the types of code-switching observed in teachers' and students' interactions in EFL classrooms?
2. What are the moments when there are frequent uses of code-switching?
3. What are students' attitudes towards code-switching?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants
The participants of this study were four teachers, two female and two male teachers, and fifty one language learners including thirty five female students and sixteen male students, at a language institute in Isfahan, Iran (Persia). The language learners were at intermediate proficiency levels. They attended the institute three times a week. The learners' age ranged from 16 to 30.

The questionnaire was administered to 83 students, where 33 students were male and fifty students were female, at the same institute. All the students were at the same level of proficiency, that is, the students whose interactions in the classroom were observed.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments applied in this study were a tape recorder to record the interactions, a note taking checklist for gathering data when the researcher was observing the classroom interactions, and a checklist to categorize the transcribed data. To analyze the students' attitudes towards the application of code-switching, a fifteen-item questionnaire was administered to 83 students. The questionnaire administered to the students was an adaptation of a questionnaire used by Montazar (2009).The questionnaire was a Likert scale with three choices: agree, no idea, and disagree.

3.3. Procedure

A common and reliable methodology is recording the classroom interaction and then codifying the transcribed data. This study is a qualitative and quantitative one in which the following procedures were applied for collecting the data. First, the researcher observed the classroom interactions and recorded the teachers' and the students' interactions. Then the recorded data were transcribed to identify the types, moments of code-switching in the teachers` and the students' interactions. Moreover, students' attitudes towards code-switching were assessed through the application of a questionnaire, student attitude questionnaire. The results were measured through the application of SPSS software.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Table 1. The frequency of code-switching among four groups

	Female	**%**	**Male**	**%**
Teachers	395	13.21	871	29.13
Students	1096	36.65	628	21
Total	1491	49.86	1499	50.13

Observing and recording the interaction of teachers and students and then transcribing it, we perceived that the application of code-switching was widespread in these four classrooms. The total number of code-switching turned out to be 2990, which is a surprisingly large number of occurrences.

Below you can see the frequency of application of code-switching among four groups of female/male teachers and female/male students. As the numbers imply, the female students applied code-switching more frequently than the other three groups, and the female teachers applied it least frequently.

From among 2290 instances of code-switching, female teachers applied 395 switching, which made up 13.21% of the total switches. On the other hand, female students applied 1096 code-switching cases in their interaction, which constituted 36.65% of the all instances. Comparing the number of ode-switching among female teachers and students with those of male colleagues and classmates, we found no specific differences in the amount of code-switching in their classroom interactions.

4.1. Moments of code-switching

Regarding the application of code-switching at different moments of the classroom, we perceived that during the activities, the application of code-switching was more frequent than at any other moment in the classroom interactions. As you can see in table 2, teachers and students switched 1076

Table2. The frequency of code-switching in different moments of the class

Categories	N	%
Beginning of the class	102	3.41
Warm-up new topic/ review	95	3.17
Doing activity	1076	35.98
Teaching grammar / new vocabulary	423	14.14
Giving/receiving instruction	407	13.61
Monitoring/assisting/correcting students	118	3.94
Free discussion	383	12.8
Request for assistance	207	6.92
Other	179	5.98

times in their interactions while doing activities such as answering reading comprehension questions, doing grammar exercises and other exercises in their text books, which were a series, entitled *Tactics for Listening*.

4.2. Types of code-switching in the classroom

As mentioned previously, the following three types of code-switching were to be investigated in this study: intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching. From among these three types of code-switching, intersential code-switching was applied most frequently. Unofficial and humorous interactions as well as translating and giving equivalents of sentences, expressions and proverbs, see function part, constituted the major part of intersentential code-switching instances. But intrasentential code-switching was used mostly for giving equivalents of new words and peer interactions as well as occasions at which learners did not know the English equivalents. Tag-switching, as was expected, was applied the least frequently. Expressions such as 'you know', 'I mean', and 'well' belonged to this category. Below the number and frequency of each category is presented in the table 3.

Table 3. The frequency of types of code-switching

Types of code-switching	N	%
Intersentential switching	1745	58.36
Intrasentential switching	1183	39.56
Tag switching	62	2.07

4.3. Students questionnaire

The students' attitude questionnaire, consisted of fifteen items, administered to eighty three students, where 33 students were male and fifty students were female. In table 4, the students' answers and their frequency of occurrences are illustrated. Cronbach's Alpha for students' questionnaire was 0.84.

Most of the students answered question one negatively to show their disagreement with the application of Persian in their EFL classroom. In fact, 63.9% of students believed they should not be allowed to speak Persian in the class.

Although they believed that Persian should not be used in the class, they agreed that the use of Persian when new words, 51.8%, new grammar structure, 75.9%, differences between Persian and English grammar, 69.9%,

general differences between Persian and English, 48.2%, and giving
equivalent proverb in Persian,72.3%, were taught would be useful. Students
believed that they should not be allowed to switch when they are receiving
instruction, 73.5%, doing activity in pair groups, 73.5%, using translation to
Table7. Students' attitude questionnaire results

Point of view	Agree		No idea		Disagree	
	n	f	n	f	N	f
Students should be allowed to use Persian in EFL classroom.	20	24.1	10	12	53	63.9
The use of Persian is useful when new words are taught.	43	51.8	13	15.7	27	32.5
It is useful teacher switches when explaining new grammar structure.	63	75.9	9	10.8	11	13.2
It is useful teacher switches when explaining differences between L1 & L2 grammar.	58	69.87	15	18.1	10	12
It is useful teacher switches when explaining general differences between English and Persian.	40	48.19	16	19.27	27	32.5
It is useful teacher switches when giving instructions.	29	34.9	21	25.3	33	39.7
Students should be allowed to use L1 when doing pair works.	15	18.1	7	8.4	61	73.5
Students should be allowed to use L1 when translating an L2 word to L1 to show they understand it.	29	34.9	15	18.1	39	46.9
Students should be allowed to use L1 when translating grammar point from L2 to L1 to show they understand it.	27	32.5	17	20.5	39	46.9
It is useful teacher use equivalent proverb in Persian.	60	72.3	13	15.7	10	12
Teacher & students can use L1 to check listening comprehension.	20	24.1	17	20.5	46	55.4

Teacher & students can use L1 to check reading comprehension.	22	26.5	14	16.9	47	56.6
The class interaction fully in English makes me feel exhausted.	28	33.7	15	18.1	40	48.2
When I can't express myself in English and not being allowed to speak Persian I stop speaking.	34	41	17	20.5	32	38.5
The use of Persian in teaching increases my motivation, learning, and concentration.	26	31.3	18	21.7	39	46.9

check understanding, 46.9%, doing listening comprehension, 55.4%, or reading comprehension, 56.6%, activities.

Answering the last two questions, 41% of students believed that not being allowed to speak Persian led them to be silent in the class while 46.9% of them believed that the use of Persian in the class had no effect on their learning, motivation, and concentration.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has presented the results of a qualitative research on the use of code-switching among Iranian EFL teachers and students. The data analysis has shown that the application of code switching in these four classrooms was considerable. Compared to other researches done in instructional settings, the application of code-switching in Iranian EFL classroom was more noticeable than in other countries with respect to EFL or ESL classrooms interactions.

Moreover, it has been discovered that 'doing activity' was the moment in the classroom where code-switching was applied more frequently than at any other moments of classroom. At this time, students applied code-switching most frequently to check whether they did their activities correctly or not, to correct misunderstandings, and to get confirmation from their teachers. The second moment at which the application of code-switching was more frequent than other moments was when instruction was the focus of attention, whether giving instruction or receiving it. Contrary to the previous moment, students applied more code-switching than their teachers although its use in many cases, especially by male teachers, was really unnecessary.

Teaching new vocabulary and grammar points was another moment where students and teachers switched considerably. Teachers applied code-switching while they were teaching or explaining a new vocabulary; meanwhile, there

was a great use of code-switching among students when they wanted to say the equivalent words or expression in Persian. Students also asked their questions in Persian when they were taught new grammatical structures or points to check whether they learned the grammatical point correctly and to clarify their misapprehension. Their teachers, also, replied in Persian when they asked questions in Persian.

As mentioned previously, the three main categories of types of code-switching considered to be investigated in this study were intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching. Among these three categories, the application of the intersentential code-switching, with the portion of 58.36%, was more than intrasentential and tag switching. Its use was more frequent at the teaching and learning of new vocabularies and grammatical points. The next type of code-switching applied repeatedly by students and teachers was intersentential code-switching which consisted 39.56% of the total application of code-switching. This type of code-switching was used more frequently at free discussions and teaching and learning new vocabularies and grammatical points.

5.1 Students' attitudes toward application of code-switching at classroom interactions

Students, generally, believed that Persian should not be used in the classroom. But they thought when more intricate subject matters such as grammar structures, new words, explanation of differences between Persian and English, and giving equivalent proverbs in Persian were concerned, Persian could be effectively used. We would have a more careful look at the questionnaire and students' answers to it.

5.1.1. Students should be allowed to use Persian in EFL classrooms

Answering this general question, the majority of students believed that the application of Persian at the classroom should not be allowed. Out of 83 students, 53 of them believed that it would use Persian in the classroom and only 30 of them agreed to use Persian during classroom interactions.

5.1.2. The use of Persian is useful when new words are taught

From this question to the end of the questionnaire, the questions are made more specific to see the students' attitudes towards the use of Persian in teaching different segments of English as a second language.

About half of the students, 51.8%, believed that the use of Persian would not be helpful when they were learning new vocabularies. While 27 students, about 32.5% of them, agreed with the application of code-switching in teaching and learning new vocabularies.

5.1.3. It is useful if the teacher switches when explaining new grammatical structures

Students showed the highest agreement to this question in comparison to other questions of the questionnaire. More than 75% of the students believed that the application of their native language would lead to the better understanding of grammar points and structures. This shows that there is a great tendency among Persian students to learn grammatical structures in their native language. One reason for this tendency is the way   grammar is delivered to them. Enough allotted time and understandable explanation are not considered by many teachers in their classes. Moreover, the claimed communicative syllabus of books used in language institutes hinders the direct and comprehensive teaching of grammatical structures.

Only about 13% of the students disagree with explanation of grammar in Persian and this shows that Iranian students have serious problems in learning grammar when is taught in English to them.

5.1.4. It is useful if the teacher switches when explaining differences between L1 & L2 grammar.

The question and the answers to this question are somehow in agreement with the previous question and the answers to it. About 70% agreement versus 12% disagreement showed that students thought direct teaching of grammar differences would help them learn better.

5.1.5. It is useful if the teacher switches when explaining general differences between English and Persian.

In comparison with the previous question, less students agreed with the switching between two languages. It may be implied that students had less problems with general differences between Persian and English compared with learning grammar points. About 48% of students considered switching would be useful in this case; while 32% of them believed its application would be unnecessary.

5.1.6. It is useful if the teacher switches when giving instructions and answers to this question
5.1.7. Students should be allowed to use L1 when doing pair works.

Students showed somehow a strong disagreement with switching to Persian when they do pair works. We can notice Pair Exercises in Iranian institutes more than 90% of which use Interchange Series for this purpose. The activities are done in groups consisting of 2-4 students who should share their

knowledge and experiences about the given topics. One reason for this disagreement could be the point that students felt more comfortable when speaking to their peers and any correction from them would be more tolerable than when their teachers would correct their wrong English structures or misuses of words. Pair works was considered to be a good source of peer interaction in the classroom.

5.1.8. Students should be allowed to use L1 when translating an L2 word to L1 to show they understand it.

34.9% agreement versus 46.9% disagreement didn't show considerable differences in language learners' attitudes toward the use of code-switching to get confirmation from their teachers. For 18% of students the application of Persian or absence of it in giving equivalent Persian words made no difference.

5.1.9. Students should be allowed to use L1 when translating grammar point from L2 to L1 to show they understand it

Like the previous question, the percentage of the agreements and the disagreements as well as students with no idea distributed to some extent equally. However, there is a greater tendency that Persian should not be used when students wanted to check their understanding and learning of grammar points.

5.1.10. It is useful teacher use equivalent proverb in Persian.

Proverbs are one the main weaknesses of Iranian EFL learners. Because of the limited contexts of use of English and its components such as proverbs, many learners consider proverbs difficult to memorize and use. One of the ways to help the students to learn them better is providing the equivalent proverbs in Persian. 72.3% agreement to this question confirmed this problem among Iranian EFL learners.

5.1.11. Teacher & students can use L1 to check listening comprehension.
5.1.12. Teacher & students can use L1 to check reading comprehension.

These two questions dealt with switching and checking comprehension, reading and listening comprehension. Generally students disagreed with the application of code-switching to check reading and listening comprehensions.

5.1.13. The class interaction fully in English makes me feel exhausted.

One of the main claims about giving the students the right to speak their native language in the classroom interaction is that delivering all the subject materials in English makes the students tired and they will give less required attention to the lesson. 48.2% of the students believed that they had no problem with the classroom at which they would not be allowed to speak Persian while 33.7% of them believed that not being allowed to apply Persian made them exhausted, which may be lead to paying no attention to the lesson.

5.1.14. When I can't express myself in English and not being allowed to speak Persian I stop speaking.

41% believed that stopping them not to use code-switching would cause them not to continue their speech and interaction especially in the teacher-student interactions. On the other hand, 38.5% of the students believed that prevention from using Persian had no effects on their interaction and they would continue their speech. Answers to this question, to some extent, depend on the how proficient students are. The more proficient they are, the more the possibility of expressing themselves easily in English with no reference to Persian.

5.1.15. the use of Persian in classroom increases my motivation, learning, and concentration.

Thirty nine students, 46.9% of total, considered no role for the application of code-switching in increasing their motivation, learning, and concentration during the classroom interaction. 31.2% of other students believed that the absence or presence of the application of Persian in the classroom would have some sort of effects on their motivation, learning, and concentration.

It can be concluded that although the findings of this study were intended to cover main aspects of code-switching in the classroom interactions, much more should be done in this field to enhance our understanding of learning and classroom interaction demands in EFL situation where, in many cases, like Iran, classroom is the only place students are exposed to English.

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