

Title: Implementing Code-Switching in the Classroom

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Research Proposal:

What is Code Switching?

Code-switching is the alternation between two codes (languages and/or dialects), between people who share those particular codes. Choices about how code-switching manifests itself are determined by a number of social and linguistic factors. It is quite typical in multicultural and immigrant populations. Code-switching can take on several forms including alteration of sentences, phrases from both languages, and switching in a long narrative. In normal conversations between two bilinguals, code-switching consists of eighty-four percent single word switches, ten percent phrase switches, and six percent clause switching (Skiba, 1997, para. 2).

Types of Code-Switching

Code-switching can be either intersentential or intrasentential. In intersentential code-switching, the language switch is done at sentence boundaries. This is seen most often between fluent bilingual speakers. In intrasentential code-switching, the shift is done in the middle of a sentence,

with no interruptions, hesitations, or pauses indicating a shift. The speaker is usually unaware of the switch, until after the fact, and is seen mostly in the Hispanic communities of the United States (Lipski, 1985, p. 5).

The first type of language switching is known as mechanical switching. It occurs unconsciously, and fills in unknown or unavailable terms in one language. This type of code-switching is also known as code-mixing. Code-mixing occurs when a speaker is momentarily unable to remember a term, but is able to recall it in a different language.

Another type of code switching, known as code-changing, is characterized by fluent intrasentential shifts, transferring focus from one language to another. It is motivated by situational and stylistic factors, and the conscious nature of the switch between two languages is emphasized (Lipski, 1985, p. 12).

Reasons for Code-Switching

In some situations, code-switching is done deliberately to exclude a person from a conversation. It is seen as a sign of solidarity within a group, and it is also assumed that all speakers in a conversation must be bilingual in order for code-switching to occur. Bilinguals do not usually translate from the weaker language to the stronger one, and is used most often when a word doesn't "come". Code-switching is not a language interference based on the

fact that it supplements speech. It provides continuity in speech rather than presenting an interference when used because of an inability of expression. Code-switching can be used in a variety of degrees, whether it be used at home with family and friends, or used with superiors at the workplace (Lipski, 1985, p. 23).

Using Code-Switching in the Classroom

Code-switching can be used by teachers by integrating it into the activities used to teach a second language. By having students get in pairs and switch languages at pre-determined points in conversation, it helps them to learn each other's language. Teachers can also begin a lesson in one language, then switch to another language, forcing the children to listen carefully and comprehend both languages (Skiba, 1997, para. 12).

Code-Switching as a Language Interference

However, code switching can be seen as a language interference in the classroom. Students may see code switching as an acceptable form of communication in society, and would feel comfortable switching languages in every day normal conversation. This would put those who are not bilingual at a disadvantage, because they would not be able to communicate effectively. Code switching can be both beneficial and a possible language interference,

depending on the situation and the context in which it occurs (Skiba, 1997, para. 15).

Functions of Teacher Code-Switching

The functions of teacher code switching are known as topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions. In topic switching, the teacher alters his or her language according to the topic being taught. This is mainly seen in grammar instruction, and the student's attention is directed towards the new knowledge. Affective functions are important in the expression of emotions, and building a relationship between the teacher and the student. In repetitive functions, code switching is used to clarify the meaning of a word, and stresses importance on the foreign language content for better comprehension (Sert, 2005, para.5-8).

Functions of Student Code-Switching

The functions of code switching for students are known as equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration, and conflict control. Equivalence gives the student the opportunity to communicate without gaps because of incompetence. Floor-holding is used when a student cannot remember a word, and uses their native language to avoid a break in communication. Reiteration helps the student to become more competent in the language they are trying to learn. Conflict control may be used to avoid misunderstanding when a child does not

use a correct meaning in communication (Sert, 2005, para. 9-13).

Views of Code-Switching

Opponents of using code switching in classrooms believe that some children may be neglected if all students don't share the same native language. The competence of the teacher in the native language is also taken into consideration. Supporters of using code-switching in classrooms believe that, when used efficiently, it provides continuity in speech. This helps students with both communication and social interaction (Sert, 2005, para.15-16).

Comprehension of Code-Switched Words

Research shows that several factors influence the comprehension of code switched words. Bilinguals tend to comprehend code switched words faster when there is a phonological overlap between the two languages. Other factors include context, phonetics, words pronounced the same (homophonic), and words spelled the same (homographic).

Other research indicates that language dominance, which language is used more frequently, is important in code switching. It is shown the Spanish-English speaking bilinguals use code switching more when they have conversations in Spanish than when they do in English. Evidence also suggests that bilinguals retrieve English code switched words faster when

they listen to Spanish sentences, and are slower to retrieve Spanish code switched words in English sentences.

Code switched words may be retrieved faster than monolingual words, but only if the code switched word is in English, and the language of communication is Spanish. This suggests a reliance on a bilingual's second language rather than the first. The idea behind this view is that a language shift occurs where the second language behaves as if it were the first language, after a certain level of fluency and frequent use has occurred. The second language becomes more accessible and bilinguals tend to rely on it more (Duran, 1994, para. 4-6).

Conclusion

Through my research, the most common view that educators held of code-switching was negative. Teachers feel that code-switching should not be used in classrooms, and I would like to find out the reason behind this, and different ways that I can implement code-switching in my classroom when I begin teaching. By taking foreign language courses at Daemen College, I feel that I will be able to put the information I have gathered about code-switching to use, and discover a successful way to use it in a multicultural classroom. I am very interested in finding out why most educators are against allowing code-switching into their classrooms, as a method of introducing children of different communities to open communication.

References

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