English-Kurdish Code Switching of Teachers in Iraqi Primary Schools

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Abstract
Code switching (CS) as a phenomenon of switching between two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation is a widely observed topic in bilingual contexts and English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms that is employed by both students and teachers. However, there are conflicting opinions about the application of CS and its advantages and disadvantages in teaching and learning. This study, therefore, examines teachers' perceptions about the use of CS and its functions in the context of primary schools in the Kurdish region of Iraq where English is the medium of instruction and Kurdish is L1. In order to obtain a genuine reflection of teachers' CS in the classroom, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed, involving a questionnaire and interviews with the teachers. The findings of the study reveal that teachers generally have positive attitudes about the use of CS and consider it as an influential factor in facilitating teaching. Therefore, they employ all three main functional categories of CS: curriculum access, building interpersonal relationship and managing their classrooms. However, they believe that teachers should not over rely on the CS strategy as it affects the learning process and has drawbacks for the learners.
Keywords: Affective state, functional uses, Kurdish, learning success, teacher's code-switching to L1, teaching strategy

Introduction

Code switching (CS) is an unavoidable and common phenomenon among bilinguals or multi-linguals. This issue gained prominence in linguistics during 1980s and since then, several definitions have been offered to define CS. According to one definition, code switching is the alteration between two or more languages in the same discourse (Myers-Scotton, 2006; Grosjean, 1982). Another definition for CS is Gumperz's (1982) definition that refers to code switching as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems" (p.59). However, more recently, Cook (2013, 174) defines code switching as the process of shifting "from one language to the other in mid-speech" while all of the speakers involved in the conversation know both languages. Generally, it can be argued that a requirement of CS is a juxtaposition of elements from two codes (Winford, 2003: 103).

Code switching is a prevalent issue in EFL classes as it happens frequently in teacher-learner interactions in the classroom and is used by both teachers and learners (Borlongan, 2009). Due to the frequent occurrences of CS in EFL classrooms, numerous researches have addressed the issue to find out whether CS is a positive or negative phenomenon. Several researchers have highlighted the importance of CS technique in facilitating second/foreign language teaching and learning procedure (Burden, 2001; Greggio & Gil, 2007). Tien & Liu (2006) believe that CS assists the successful transfer of information from the teachers to the students particularly for less proficient students. CS extensively helps weaker students comprehend the subject. Through CS, the teacher can make "a bridge from the known (native language) to the unknown (new foreign language content)" (Sert, 2005; 3) so the information can be easily delivered to the students.

On the other hand, some researchers have negative attitudes regarding classroom code switching and consider it as a sign of linguistic deficit and incompetence (Boztepe, 2005; Probyn, 2009; Wei & Martin, 2009). Numerous educationists and ELT practitioners believe that CS is inappropriate and unacceptable in classroom context thus L1 (native language) and L2 (target language) "should be kept strictly separated" (Cummins, 2005; 588). Opponents of using CS in classrooms argue that switching to L1 undermines the process of learning so teachers have to teach entirely using L2 in order to allow the students to experience unpredictability, and develop their own in-built language system.

Encountering two opposing viewpoints regarding CS in classroom, this study intends to provide empirical evidences in favor of teachers' CS in classroom. In fact, this study emphasizes on the necessity of teachers' CS in EFL/ESL (English as a foreign language /English as a second language) classrooms as total exclusion of first language (L1) cause problems for the students. Teachers should be encouraged to use CS as a skill when it is too challenging or time-consuming for the learners to process and comprehend foreign language (L2) (Jingxia, 2010). This study presents empirical evidences about the positive influences of CS in four selected primary schools that are located in the Kurdish region of Iraq. In all of the selected schools for the study, English (L2) is used as a medium of instruction and Kurdish is the first language of students and teachers (L1).

Code Switching in Language Learning

Modupeola (2013) regards CS as a helpful teaching strategy that provides students with

opportunities to interact and improve their understanding. In addition, it assists the flow of instruction in class as teachers can save time and keep the students motivated by switching to L1 for explaining difficult contents. In fact, learners' L1 knowledge and experiences can be exploited by the teachers through CS in order to facilitate teaching and clarify probable confusions.

Qian et al (2009) in the study of CS behavior of teachers in primary school conducted a case study to observe two EFL teachers and their CS behavior in classroom for six years. The findings of their study proved that teachers frequently employed CS to translate the new vocabularies, clarify confusing sections, highlight the important sections, communicate with students, establish solidarity or power, inspire or praise students and criticize the learners' weak performances or negative behaviors.

Ahmad & Jusoff (2009) identify the level of proficiency among learners as the determining factor in teachers' practice of CS. After investigating 257 less competent learners, the researchers found out that less proficient learners considered CS as a positive approach and supported the use of CS in classroom for teachers' communication and teaching. The findings of the study further highlighted that there is a significant relationship between teachers' CS and students' effective support as well as their learning accomplishments. The study verified that teachers' CS is an efficient and advantageous teaching approach when dealing with low proficient students.

Johansson (2014) in her study observes both students and teachers' opinion about CS phenomenon. Majority of the participated teachers and students argued that CS is an important strategy and expressed positive attitudes towards its application. Although most of the teachers in the study initially claimed that CS is not allowed in their classrooms, later they declared that they use CS as a tool of teaching grammar and in one-to-one situations. Regarding the participated students, they argued that CS is necessary in the classroom, particularly when the topic is difficult or for grammar instruction. On the other hand, students expected their teachers to make them use the target language to improve their L2 proficiency.

Although numerous teachers consider CS as a weakness and due to lack of proficiency in the target language, they consciously or unconsciously use it as a teaching strategy to optimize comprehension and uptake of the learners (Levine, 2003). Despite the fact that teachers are commonly expected to use merely target language (L2) in classrooms, they habitually and regularly switch to first language (L1) to confront and overcome several classroom issues (Makulloluwa, 2013). Considering the fact that teachers use CS mostly: (i) for pedagogical purposes; (ii) to maintain social interaction with the students; (iii) to manage the classroom; (iv) to show solidarity or empathy, to aid comprehension; (v) to offer a translation of a word or phrase; (vi) for grammar instruction, and (vii) to save time and to cover their lack of proficiency in L2 (Makulloluwa, 2013; 584).

This study attempts to scrutinize teachers CS behavior and pattern in the selected primary schools in Kurdish region of Iraq where English is the target language and a medium of instruction while Kurdish is the first language (L1).

Functions of Teachers' Code Switching

According to previous scholarly researches, teachers in EFL classes have tendency to use L1 in various situations and for different purposes including but not limited to clarifying meaning and new vocabulary, directing learners' interpretation, conveying the lesson content, explaining grammatical structures, organizing classrooms as well as inspiring and motivating learners (El Mamoun & Mugaddam, 2013). Chowdhury (2013) in her paper considers CS as a useful strategy that is employed by teachers to maintain their discipline, particularly in populated classrooms, to communicate with learners more efficiently, to clarify and translate unknown terms and vocabularies, to build interpersonal relationship with students, and to explain grammar rules. Bashir & Naveed (2015) give more examples in L1 for further clarifications and creating humor as other functions of teachers' CS in classroom contexts.

As explained earlier in the study, EFL/ESL teachers generally have both positive and negative views about the CS strategy and they practice CS either willingly and intentionally, or unconsciously and habitually for diverse reasons. Accordingly, this study intends to shed lights on teachers' CS behavior and its functions and effects on the teaching/learning process in the selected primary schools in Iraq.

Research Objectives
This study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the functions, purposes and influences of code switching on learning and teaching.
2. To examine the attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding the use of code switching in classroom.
3. To determine benefits and drawbacks of code switching predicted by teachers.

Research Questions
Based on the above objectives, the following questions are formulated:
1. What are the functions, purposes and influences of code switching on learning and teaching?
2. What are the attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding the use of code switching in classroom?
3. What benefits and drawbacks of code switching practiced by teachers?
4.

Methodology
Research Participants
This study attempts to investigate and scrutinize the practice of code switching among teachers in primary level schools in Iraq. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, four primary schools were selected as the context of the study in which English is used as a medium of instruction for all subjects. 20 teachers (n=20) with at least 5 years of teaching experience who teach English language subject were recruited for this research. All of the selected teachers for the survey are bilingual speakers of Kurdish as L1 and English as L2.

Research Instruments

In order to obtain a genuine reflection of teachers' CS in the classroom, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed, involving a questionnaire and interviews with the teachers. The researchers administered a closed question questionnaire for the participants in order to elicit the respondents' attitudes and perceptions regarding the role, benefits and functions of CS in classroom. In obtaining the qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was employed. Out of 20 respondent teachers, four of them (n=4) were interviewed individually for 20-30 minutes.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire with the standardized Likert scale was adapted from Selamat's (2014) doctoral dissertation in which numerical values were assigned to each code. The employed questionnaire consists of two sets of questions with the total number of 20 questions about the functions of teachers' CS, and their opinion about the use of the CS strategy in teaching. The questionnaire was prepared in English language with general statements to elicit respondents' opinion about functions and purposes of CS. Questions 1-11 address the functions of CS in teaching and respondent teachers are required to tick the correct answer for each question based on the following scale; 1= Never, 2= Hardly Ever, 3= Often, 4= Most of the Time and 5= Every Time. The second set of questions, 12-20, enquire about the respondents' attitudes and perceptions of CS where the teachers have to respond by selecting one of the following options; 1= Totally Agree, 2= Partly Agree, 3= Neither Agree or Disagree, 4= Partly Disagree and 5= Totally Disagree.

Interview

Interviews are considered as one of the most regular methods of data collection by which qualitative data can be obtained in order to elicit the respondents' opinions and viewpoints (Saldaña, 2011). In this study, out of 20 respondent teachers for questionnaire, one teacher from every school was invited for the interview. Consequently, 4 teachers were selected randomly to be interviewed. Semi-structured interview was implemented for this study containing five questions regarding the functions of CS and teachers' perceptions regarding the application of this strategy. The respondent teachers were provided by the interview questions two days before the interview and all of the four interviews were conducted individually in the teachers' room of the schools. Interviews started with a brief introduction about the purpose of this study and lasted for 20-30 minutes.

Research Findings

The collected data from the survey questionnaire demonstrated qualitative and quantitative results regarding teachers' perceptions about CS as well as its functions in facilitating instruction and improving teaching outcomes. Based on the presented data in the Table 1, it can be argued that all of the teachers used CS spontaneously or consciously in various situations and for several functions.

As shown in Table 1, all of the respondent teachers (n=20) used the CS strategy to explain new vocabularies and clarify meanings of sentences. The majority of the teachers (65%) used this technique to explain the meaning of words and sentences regularly or always while 35% use it often. Data collected from the second question of the questionnaire reveals that all of the teachers employed CS to elaborate complicated concepts. In fact, 85% of the teachers

constantly used this method to clarify difficult subjects. For question number 3, which inquires about the use of CS for teaching grammar, the collected data demonstrated that only one teacher (5%) who did not apply CS in teaching grammar while 75% used CS for this function. The same number of teachers (75%) used CS to check on the students' comprehension of the subject matter.

In terms of using CS for organizing classroom activities and assignments, as indicated in Table 1, 25% of the teachers did not consider CS as a useful method for this function while 90% of the teachers rely heavily on CS to clarify the difference between native language (Kurdish) and second language (English). In contrast, 45% of the teachers used CS to draw students' attention to the correct pronunciations of sounds in English because of the differences in the sound systems of L1 and L2. However, out this number, 55% (11) of them referred to the Kurdish pronunciation and used it as a guide to facilitate the teaching of the correct pronunciation of sounds and words in English.

Additionally, code switching to Kurdish is a common method of maintaining discipline and organizing the progression of teaching in class among the teachers as 70% of them rely on it. In terms of providing praise and remarks about students' performance in the classroom, half of the teachers (50%) utilized CS on a regular basis because they believed that praising students in their L1 had a greater influence on them and they were better motivated to learn the target language as the feedback in L1 would encourage them to learn about their weaknesses and consequently spur them to improve on their L2 acquisition process. In line with this strategy, 95% of the teachers used CS to create and improve their interpersonal relationships with students since a strong bond with students could help them to reduce their stress in learning the L2 in class.

In summary, teachers employ the CS technique for three main functional categories as proposed by Ferguson (2003, 2009). They are as follows:
1. CS for curriculum access (to assist students comprehend the subject matter of the lessons).
2. CS for classroom management discourse (to encourage and discipline students).
3. CS for interpersonal relationships (to create friendly and less threating classrooms)

Table 1. *Functions of CS practised by teachers in the classroom*

In class, I switch from English (L2) to Kurdish language (L1):	1=Never	2=Hardly ever	3=Often	4=Most of the time	5=Every time
1. To explain the meaning of words and sentences	n=0 (0%)	n=0 (0%)	n=7 (35%)	n=5 (25%)	n=8 (40%)
2. To explain difficult concepts	n=0 (0%)	n=3 (15%)	n=2 (10%)	n=3 (15%)	n=12 (60%)
3. To explain grammar	n=1 (5%)	n=4 (20%)	n=5 (25%)	n=8 (40%)	n=2 (10%)
4. To check for comprehension	n=5 (25%)	n=3 (15%)	n=7 (35%)	n=3 (15%)	n=2 (10%)

5. To organize classroom tasks	n=5 (25%)	n=0 (0%)	n=8 (40%)	n=4 (20%)	n=3 (15%)
6. To explain the differences between the students' L1 (Kurdish) and English (L2)	n=0 (0%)	n=2 (10%)	n=6 (30%)	n=8 (40%)	n=4 (20%)
7. To draw students' attention to the correct pronunciation of sounds in English	n=5 (25%)	n=4 (20%)	n=6 (30%)	n=2 (10%)	n=3 (15%)
8. To maintain classroom discipline and structure of the lesson	n=6 (30%)	n=4 (20%)	n=5 (25%)	n=3 (15%)	n=2 (10%)
9. To provide praise/feedback/personal remarks about students' performance	n=1 (5%)	n=9 (45%)	n=7 (35%)	n=2 (10%)	n=1 (5%)
10. To encourage students' participation in classroom activities and increase their motivation in learning English	n=0 (0%)	n=9 (45%)	n=5 (25%)	n=3 (15%)	n=3 (15%)
11. To build/strengthen interpersonal relationships between teacher and students and reduce students' anxiety in the classroom	n=0 (0%)	n=1 (5%)	n=12 (60%)	n=4 (20%)	n=3 (15%)

The overall results which are presented in Table 2, illustrate that 77% of the teachers used CS to convey knowledge and information to the students in general and more specifically for curriculum access. This was followed by managing their classrooms at 66.66% and lastly CS was used for building interpersonal relationship with students at 62.50%.

Table 2. *Functional categories of CS*

Function 1: Code switching for curriculum access	
To explain the meaning of words and sentences	100%
To explain difficult concepts	85%
To explain grammar	75%
To check for comprehension	60%
To explain the differences between the students' L1 (Kurdish) and English (L2)	90%

To draw students' attention to the correct pronunciation of sounds in English	55%
Average	77.50%
Function 2: Code switching for classroom management	
To organize classroom tasks	75%
To maintain classroom discipline and the structure of the lesson	50%
Average	62.50%
Function 3: Code switching for interpersonal relations	
To provide praise, feedback or personal remarks about students' performance	50%
To encourage students' participation in classroom activities and increase their motivation in learning English	55%
To build/strengthen interpersonal relationships between teacher and students and reduce students' anxiety in classroom	95%
Average	66.66%

For the second set of questions (12-20), all the participants believed that CS would facilitate the teaching and learning process and that it was beneficial for both learners and teachers (refer to Table 3). However, 85% of them argued that CS made the students more dependent on the teachers ultimately causing a lack of confidence in themselves. Despite accepting that CS will facilitate teaching, 15% of the teachers expressed their disagreement for including CS as an integral part of the lesson plan. Furthermore, the majority of the participants did not support the idea of total exclusion of L1 and a strict separation of L1 (Kurdish) and L2 (English). As for question 16, 75% of the teachers believed that CS should be teachers' last option. Therefore, teachers have to avoid it for as long as possible.

In terms of efficiency of the CS strategy, 90% of the teachers considered it as a timesaving and effective method of teaching while 10% were neutral regarding the statement. 45% of the teachers supported the statement that L2 can be best learned when L1 is totally excluded.

Table 3. *Teachers' perceptions and beliefs about code switching*

I believe that:	1=totally agree	2=partly agree	3=neither agree or disagree	4=prtly disagree	5=totally disagree
12. Code switching will facilitate the language learning process	n=16 (80%)	n=4 (20%)	n=0 (0%)	n=0 (0%)	n=0 (0%)
13. The practice of code switching	n=5	n=12	n=3	n=0	n=0

will increase the students' reliance and dependency on the teacher	(25%)	(60%)	(15%)	(0%)	(0%)
14. Code switching should be included as an integral part of the ESL lesson	n=5 (25%)	n=4 (20%)	n=8 (40%)	n=3 (15%)	n=0 (0%)
15. There should be a strict separation of the mother tongue and English in the EFL classroom	n=0 (0%)	n=1 (5%)	n=10 (50%)	n=6 (30%)	n=3 (15%)
16. Code switching should only be used as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted	n=11 (55%)	n=4 (20%)	n=2 (10%)	n=2 (10%)	n=1 (5%)
17. Code switching is an efficient, time-saving technique	n=13 (65%)	n=5 (25%)	n=2 (10%)	n=0 (0%)	n=0 (0%)
18. English is best taught in English-only classrooms	n=6 (30%)	n=3 (15%)	n=7 (35%)	n=3 (15%)	n=1 (5%)
19. The use of other languages in the EFL classroom will result in a decline in the standards of English	n=0 (0%)	n=5 (25%)	n=3 (15%)	n=6 (30%)	n=6 (30%)
20. The more English that is used, the better the results for the learners	n=6 (30%)	n=7 (35%)	n=7 (35%)	n=0 (0%)	n=0 (0%)

The findings of the study regarding teachers' attitudes and viewpoints of CS presented in Table 3 can be categorized into two categories of positive opinions regarding the influence of CS on L2 learning process, and negative opinions regarding the influence of CS on L2 learning process. The sum of percentages from respondent teachers' answers for each statement who selected option 1=totally agree, and option 2=partly agree is used to identify whether teachers have positive or negative opinion about a particular statement. The percentages for participants who selected options 3=neither agree or disagree, option 4=partly disagree and option 5=totally disagree are not considered in the Table 4. As shown in the following table 4., teachers mostly expressed positive opinions about CS application with 78.33% positive opinions. Nevertheless, teachers' negative perceptions about CS reveal that they have certain reservations of negative influences of CS on learning outcome.

Table 4. *Positive and negative opinions of teachers regarding the use of CS*

(1) positive opinions regarding the influence of CS on L2 learning process	
Code switching will facilitate the language learning process	100%
Code switching should be included as an integral part of the ESL lesson.	45%
Code switching is an efficient, time-saving technique	90%
Average	78.33%

(2) Negative opinions regarding the influence of CS on L2 learning process	
The practice of code switching will increase the students' reliance and dependency on the teacher	85%
There should be a strict separation of the mother tongue and English in the EFL classroom	5%
Code switching should only be used as a last resort when all other options have been exhausted.	75%
English is best taught in English-only classrooms	45%
The use of other languages in the EFL classroom will result in a decline in the standards of English	25%
The more English that is used, the better the results for the learners	65%
Average	50%

The findings of the interview revealed that all four teachers considered CS to be an invaluable and helpful teaching strategy that could be utilized by teachers to convey knowledge and to assist EFL leaners comprehend the subject matter. Despite highlighting the positive influence of CS on learning outcomes, teacher A mentioned that teachers should avoid over-reliance on CS and try to use this technique only if it is necessary. Furthermore, teacher B highlighted the importance of having a plan for CS application. She stated that if there are no plans for using CS in the classroom, students would rely heavily on their L1 which colud affect their L2 acquisition. Like Teacher A, Teacher C argued that CS should be used only when it was required to save time and clarify difficult content. She further explained that since students were at the primary level, they needed more CS to fully comprehend the subject matter. Lastly, Teacher D claimed that although she used CS spontaneously and regularly for various functions, it was better for students to listen to more English from their teachers.

Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate teachers' attitudes and beliefs in terms of using CS in the classroom and its functions, benefits and drawbacks for the students. The findings of the study are consistent with the findings of Selamat (2014), Ariffin & Rafik-Galea (2009) and Then & Ting's (2011) studies, which investigate the teachers' perceptions and viewpoints about CS and its functions, advantages and disadvantages for the students' learning in the context of Malaysia. As evidently highlighted in the findings of the questionnaire, all of the participating teachers believed that CS assisted instruction and facilitated the acquisition process of the target language. In addition, the findings of the interview also support the idea that CS was an invaluable strategy for curriculum access. As discussed earlier in the study, teachers believe that the practice of CS was essential for teaching as it has quite positive pedagogical values. However, over-reliance on this strategy is not desirable as it might result in the decline in students' L2 proficiency and in their confidence level. The majority of the teachers present an overall positive attitude regarding the use of CS in the classroom. Although some of the teachers express their reservations about using CS by considering it to be an inappropriate practice, they agreed that it was an essential part of their teaching.

Since 78.33% of the teachers express their positive opinion for CS application in class, it is pertinent for policy makers and educators in Iraq to provide a planned and organized system for using CS in the English classrooms. This would ensure better confidence in teachers using CS to facilitate their teaching and at the same time improve learners' acquisition without further doubts and concerns of using this strategy. As argue by Selamat (2014), application of code switching in the English classroom is unavoidable since it is not achievable to entirely exclude the use of L1 during lessons, particularly by second and foreign language learners. Consequently, by the systematic use of CS, teachers would be well advised to have systematic plans for effectively managing code switching in the English classroom to avoid over reliance on it as well as its negative implications on the L2 acquisition process.

Conclusion

All the teachers agree on the benefits and merits of the CS strategy in their teaching as a majority of the teachers presented their positive attitude regarding the CS application. In fact, it can be claimed that CS is used by all of the teachers in their classroom for all three main functional categories of CS: curriculum access, classroom management discourse, and interpersonal relationships. However, the main function of CS practise extensively by the teachers is to convey information and instruct students. Moreover, it is revealed that teachers also employ the CS strategy to build interpersonal relationship with students and motivate them, and to a lesser extent to manage their classrooms. In conclusion, it can be said that the teachers are aware of their CS and despite expressing contradictory views about the negative aspects of using this strategy in the classroom, they all agree that it was an unavoidable and essential practice to overcome the challenges of teaching a foreign language particularly at primary school level in Iraq.

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