

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF CODE-SWITCHING ON ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS' SPEAKING CONFIDENCE

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INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF CODE-SWITCHING ON ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS' SPEAKING CONFIDENCE

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Abstract

Code-switching has attracted many studies in recent years especially in non-native English speaking countries. In some parts of Indonesia, code-switching has been the topic of research. This paper particularly seeks to examine the effect of code-switching on Indonesian Medanese student's speaking confidence and investigate their attitude towards it. A total of 34 students from English Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara were chosen purposely to be involved as the participants in the study. An interview and observation were applied to assess their spoken English skill and examine how they interact with each other throughout the sessions. While the ten item questionnaires with a Likert scale were distributed to students to collate their feedback on the implementation of code-switching. It was then explicitly analyzed based on each indicator of speaking, including vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation and lecturer's role. Our findings lead to the conclusion and suggest that code-switching can be harnessed as a technique in enhancing students' speaking confidence since students think positively towards the implementation of code-switching. Hence, based on our findings, it is recommended that lecturers use English and Indonesian at an interchange to lower proficient students so as to give students better comprehension of grammar rules, structure, pronunciation, and subsequently improve their fluency and confidence in speaking.

Keywords: *code switching, English foreign learner, speaking skill*

1. INTRODUCTION

We have seen a large number of practices where Asian countries like the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and India commonly use their first language mixed with English. This has unconsciously helped their citizens become fluent in English because exposure to foreign languages is gained on a daily basis. This practice is driven by the globalization of our societies and the expansion of interaction in our communities and the world [6]. Global communication must be highly affected by the extent of exposure to the foreign language itself. Peregoy & Boyle [25] suggest that language proficiency can be obtained from the exposure to the target language which can lead to social interaction with speakers of the target language.

As for the case for Indonesia, acquiring a foreign language has been one of the challenges for almost the majority of Indonesian students. One of the terms called speaking anxiety is where students are reluctant or are not driven to initiate speaking. Some factors may contribute to this occurrence such as fear of making mistakes, fear of being an object of a fool, and low exposure to English in their daily lives. Communicating it has become a classical issue. In attempting to resolve this matter, several studies came to the surface to measure the problems faced by EFL students in speaking English and seek the way out to overcome it.

However, to this end, various practical methods have been developed in exposing students' to foreign language use, one of which is called code-switching (CS). It is one of the ways to get students exposed to their foreign language usage. Code-switching is implemented by teachers *teaching a foreign language (FL) or a second language (SL)* in language classrooms across the globe [23]; [10]; [20]; [27]; [33]. Despite the grammatical or diction errors produced by Indonesians students, the practice of code-switching could help them better understand language use. This is supported by Gulzar's idea [13] in which he maintains that code-switching serves a number of functions, including to highlight some points, to show empathy and solidarity with students and to facilitate understanding by citing the words of others. This is important as non-native speakers of English tend to have mood swings when studying a foreign language. This may result in poor understanding of language rules. Another conclusive point put forward by Al-Qaysi [2] is that code-switching may serve as boosting and effective educational methods to be applied within higher education settings.

Based on the above background, we formulate the research into the following question: How does code-switching use impact students' speaking confidence?. With that research question, the aim of this study boils down to exploring the impact of using code-switching on students' speaking confidence.

Different notion of the definition of code-switching (hereunder: CS) have been proposed. Jingxia

[16] used the term code-switching [8] refer to the concept of switching one language to another amid a conversation between speakers of the same two languages. Correspondingly, Then and Ting (2010) elucidated that CS as the concurrence in a similar utterance exchanges in a conversation related to a couple of syntactic systems. In the same way, Nilep [24] states that the term code-switching is where bilingual speakers' or language learners show their cognitive linguistic abilities, or when learners are involved in the use of more than one language. In support of this, researchers have come to a consensus that code-switching is seen systematic, skilled and socially meaningful [35] as it eliminates learners's cognitive load which facilitates understanding in the end.

These definitions suffice to highlight that CS is the change of words, phrases, and clauses in a conversation by a bilingual speaker. A slew of scholars have conducted the study on CS for multiple purposes, which lead to a number of pros and cons when the advantages and disadvantages are compared. However, CS has given positive contribution to the English teaching realm. For example, a study conducted by Garza and Nava [11] found that codeswitching is considered more of a speaking style by their respondents. This suggests that students nowadays prefer to code-switch in order to be heard or noticed. Conversely, Cook does not share the opinion of implementing code-switching because students can possibly miss out on input in the target language and miss the real L2 interaction [9]. This suggests that code-switching can potentially hinder or aid the process of communication in a foreign language.

In contrast to the above arguments, a large and growing number of studies have reported the effectiveness of code-switching in a language classroom. Several of them have investigated the positive contribution of code-switching on a particular English language-learning component such as grammar. Macaro and Tian [34] also investigated the effects of grammar on vocabulary acquisition in connection to code-switching.

Rahimi and Jafari's (2011) revealed that code-switching is effective in teaching vocabulary and grammar that used equivalent words or expressions and when replying in the native language so that misunderstanding issues can be solved and comprehensive understanding of grammatical rules can be fostered. This suggests that code-switching has given a significant contribution in the learning of vocabulary and grammar rules. Similarly, Simasiku [30] put forth that the majority of the ESL teachers approve that by using mother tongue, it is easier for learners to embed meaning to the newly attained English vocabulary.

Another point to highlight the benefits of code-switching in the learning of grammar is that it allows students to see different linguistic features between the mother tongue and the Target Language, thus making them aware of linguistic differences and be able to reduce L1 interference [7]. In addition, Sert [29] added that language instructors consider code-switching bring benefits to students significantly, especially in teaching beginner students.

In line with Sert, a study conducted by Promnath [26] in a Thailand setting, found out that the majority of the teachers showed positive views on CS and are in the agreement that CS provides benefit to students, as it is one of the most effective strategies; [10] facilitate students' understanding on the subject matter. While Simon [32] established the view that switching back to the native language allows the learner to go back to a comfortable zone of language use when the linguistic level in the classroom goes beyond the learner's competence.

De La Colina & Pilar Garcia Mayo [1], who conducted a study on twelve low proficient level learners for the use of L1 and its functions in the oral interaction, found that the usage of code-switching in language lesson focusing on function and form by teachers can provide benefits to students. Ariffin and Rafik-Galea (2009) who conducted research in Malaysia with bilingual speakers as the participants, discovered that in addition to the common nature of the practice of altering/mixing two languages, code-switching is seen as a communicative strategy.

In the same vein, Greggio, S. and Gil, G. [12] found that code-switching is beneficially contributive in foreign language teaching. In the same way, Promnath and Tayjasa [26] discovered that code-switching has a positive effect on the students' understanding as it is efficient in the classroom and bring students to self-confidence and the sense of comfort. In addition, the use of code-switching allows low proficient students to follow the lessons better than merely using English.

More studies touch on the benefits of code-switching in language learning. Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie's [28] viewed that the use of learners' mother tongue was contributive to students' proper understanding towards a foreign language (English). Furthermore, Bilgin and Rahimi [5] and Sert [29] discovered that language teachers unintentionally apply code-switching in language classes in order to serve some useful basic functions. This highlights that teachers themselves are benefited in using this technique to ease the language learning process.

Similarly, Awan and Sheeraz [4] also recommended the use of code-switching by teachers irrespective of negative comments by peers as it turns the dull communication process in classes into an effective and interactive atmosphere. This might be true in some large extent when most of the students

might feel embarrassed when trying to speak bilingually in a classroom.

Likewise, in favor of this opinion, Momenian and Samar [22] discovered that by utilizing native language in the classroom, three aspects are gained, including the teacher's linguistic level is modified according to students' linguistic level (scaffolding) and learners are engaged in interactions, inter-subjectivity is established and privacy is maintained.

The concepts as mentioned earlier suggest that code-switching does bring benefits to learners of English for three reasons: it enhances students' understanding, it boosts their confidence in speaking, and students become aware of the mistakes they are making in the classroom.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

To determine the level of students' spoken English, we conducted an open-ended interview in English to students in two classes. As a result, a total of 34 students of pre-intermediate level comprising male as well as female students from the department of English Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan were chosen to participate in the present study. Most of them are originally from North Sumatera with strong Medanese accent. In this research, the 5- point Likert scale was adopted to give students alternatives regarding their perception after code-switching.

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Table 1. Scale Score.

Scale	Range	Description
5	4.21 - 5.00	Strongly agree
4	3.41 - 4.20	Agree
3	2.61 - 3.40	Slightly agree
2	1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
1	1.0 - 1.80	Strongly disagree

We applied interviews, observation, and questionnaires to collect the data. The observation was done throughout the three sessions. It revealed the data of students' speaking errors and the corrected forms, which was explicitly sub-classified into each of speaking indicators, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency. While questionnaires, comprised of 10 item questionnaires, were distributed to students after they were treated with codeswitching, revealed students' perception of code-switching contribution to each of the speaking indicator.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, we elaborate on the findings based on the results of questionnaire distribution. There are a total of ten items as the following:

Q1: CS encourages me to use good grammar in speaking.

Around 25 students (73%) strongly agree and the remaining 9 students (27%) agree that by code switching, they are more encouraged to use good grammar in speaking. For example, in the past, students used to say: "Are* you remember our assignment of grammar 1? (student 2)". The correct form would be: "Do you remember our assignment of grammar 1?". This is common amongst EFL low proficient learners, as they are not used to practicing it. Another example of grammatical errors made by students are in the form of parts of speech. It is also common that students commit errors in the form of parts of speech, encompassing incorrect use of noun, adjective, verb and adverb forms, such as "beauty", "beautiful" or "beautify", "beautifully". For example, student 12 and 13: Student 12: "Be carefully". Student 13: "You, too". After being corrected, the student soon realized that she should have said: "Be careful". Another example from student's conversation, when introducing themselves, in the first meeting interaction, S5 said that : "I am graduate from ...", when the correct form is "I graduated from..". This type of confusion of parts of speech can be immediately fixed by the lecturer's English use in the classroom. This is in line with the findings of Simasiku, et. al [31] who suggests that mother tongue use in the classrooms was not merely aimed for classroom management, but also for language analysis, presenting grammar rules, discussing cross-cultural issues, giving instructions or prompts, explaining errors, and checking for comprehension.

Q2: CS helps me speak with good sentence structure

With regard to the contribution of sentence structure to students speaking confidence, as many as 27 students (79%) strongly agree and 7 students (21%) agree that code-switching helps them speak with good sentence structure. For example, student 18 used to say: "My assignment is not finished, Sir.". Upon being treated with code-switching, she is more aware that such a structure is incorrect. She now said, "I haven't completed my assignment, Sir". Sometimes, the error occurs in the passive and active voice. For instance, student 29 used to say: "My notebook borrow my friend". While the correct form is: "My notebook is borrowed by my friend".

Q3: CS helps me understand grammar rules more easily.

Grammar rules is sometimes difficult to remember when it comes to applying it in conversation. From the

questionnaire, with regard to codeswitching, of 34 students, 25 students (88%) expressed that they strongly agree that codeswitching benefits them in understanding grammar rules. Nine other students considered, however, that codeswitching does not significantly help them remember grammar rules especially the trickiest ones, such as the use of who and whom. Student 17 used to say: "I want to give my pen to who does not have a pen". The lecturer explained that "whom is used *untuk menerangkan objek pronoun dalam kalimat*. So you better say: I want to give a pen to whom does not have one. *Disini anda kan mau memberikan pena ke seseorang, maka seseorang itu berfungsi sebagai objek, nah "whom" is the right word instead of "who". Please remember, ya!*

Q4: CS helps me reduce my pronunciation errors in new vocabulary

Before applying code switching in class, several students were found to mispronounce particular words, such as, analysis was mispronounced as "ænləɪzɪz", which in fact, it should be "ə'næləɪsɪs". In this particular case, the lecturer did not necessarily code-switched since it could be done by repeating it over and over again till students can perfectly pronounce it.

Q5: CS helps me reduce my pronunciation errors in acquired vocabulary

In terms of pronunciation as one of the indicators in speaking, 29 (85,2%) students strongly agree and the remaining 5 students (14,8%) agree that lecturer who code switches help them improve their pronunciation. This is reflected in a way that the lecturer himself try to pronounce words or phrases as clear as possible by taking into account stressed and unstressed syllables.

For example, the lecturer explained that "*untuk kata yang ada huruf "th" seperti "with, the" maka bunyinya hampir sama dengan ketika kita mengucapkan "tsa" dalam huruf Arab. Jadi tipis*". In this context, the lecturer emphasizes the correct way of pronouncing a certain word. Despite the fact that speaker's accents increase when speakers mix languages compared to single language contexts (Tyler, & Kroos, 2011), Harmer [14] states that concentrating on sounds, showing its specific production in the mouth would make students aware of the proper stress of words and lead them to achieving improved comprehension and intelligibility goal.

Q6: CS helps me understand new words better

It is commonplace to find that EFL students tend to use the same vocabulary over and over again. For example, student 20 said: "Learn English is sometime difficult, sir". In this instance, the student commit two errors, first is the form of "learn" which should be "learning" or "to l'arn", second is "sometime". The lecturer explained the use of sometimes and some time in Indonesian: "*sometimes itu adalah kadang-kadang, sedangkan some time adalah suatu waktu, suatu saat, jadi artinya beda, it has different meanings*". "So, you should have said: learning English is sometimes difficult, not learning English is sometime difficult". In terms of new words, the lecturer gave an example of the word with same meaning, that is "challenging". The lecturer said: "*kita bisa pakai kata challenging untuk menggantikan kata difficult. So, learning English is sometimes challenging, jadi kalian bisa pakai kata ini ke depan untuk lebih profesional*". The students soon used it in (22) speaking and want to commit to resorting to new words everytime she hears a new one. Lin's [19] findings indicate that code-switching seems to increase the amount of cognitive processing made by students. Lin

Q7: CS helps me utilized the words learned in class, in an accurate manner for the situation given.

Students are often faced with ambiguity when choosing a certain word in a certain context. That what makes students hesitate to speak in English because they perceive that saying out loud wrong words will impede their interlocutor's understanding. That being said, having been exposed to extensive code-switching, our participants strongly agree (90%) and other 10% agree that they can utilize the words learned in class effectively, though slowly but surely. For example, student 8 used to say: "You did a well job" when it should be "You did a good job".

Q8: There is some hesitation in speaking but I manage to complete my thoughts

The majority of students think that a lecturer who code switches help ease their speaking anxiety. This has lightly contributed to the problems faced by students in coping with their interfering factor in speaking English. Hesitation occurs when students are mind blocked and have no sufficient vocabulary in mind. However, this can be solved by triggering them to speak and giving prompts. For example, student 14 said: "I live in a small village that". In the middle of the conversation, the lecturer gave a clue: "what does it look like, how many people live there?, how far is it from the main road?". These kinds of responses will encourage students to continue speaking till they feel confident and remember the words associated with the topic.

Q9: Thoughts expressed completely with few pauses or hesitation.

While of 34 students, 27 students (79,4%) maintained that lecturer who code switch helps them overcome hesitation in speaking. While 7 students (20,6%) agree that lecturer who code switch help them complete the sentences. For example, student 22 used to say: "I ummmmm think that ummmmm everybody should English ... ". This is commonplace amongst EFL learners where they hesitate in speaking English due to uncertainty in picking up the right word.

Q10: The lecturer provides oral corrective feedback when I commit errors in speaking

The majority of students agree that a lecturer who provides correction on students' speaking in a target language help them speak better English in a classroom. This is shown by the consistent motivation provided by the lecturer. This can be done by motivating students with new concept in English and thus encourage them to speak. This is in line with that Harmer [15] proposed, where three aspects such as prompter, participant and feedback provider will get students to talk fluently. Lecturer in this case through code switching is providing feedback to students.

Based on the results as mentioned above, we can draw a bigger picture. Firstly, students are made aware that lecturers provide more words of encouragement, and better feedback to students. Furthermore, the majority of our students feel that they are motivated to use English as a communication language in class. This is due to the fact that lecturers' extensive use of English encourages them to speak in English properly in class and outside of classrooms.

The present findings validate the role of code-switching in boosting students' confidence in speaking English in a classroom since in the classroom in which code switching is used, the atmosphere is anxiety-free and thus influence them to be more actively engaged in classroom activities. This study is parallel with that of Lee [18] who found that the use of native language allows for knowledge improvement, building confidence as well as fostering cultural and social identity. In addition, exposure to code-switching provides students with the opportunity to be engaged in an effective and prosperous learning and finally become speakers of the target language [8]. Having said that, with all respect, being native speakers of Indonesian (L1) made it challenging to consistently use English at all times and to search for appropriate terms and concepts.

4. CONCLUSION

In general, we can conclude that code-switching brings a positive impact on students' speaking performance. The majority of them agree that it helps them initiate speaking, and teacher's feedback help them continue their speaking pauses. Our findings are in supportive of Broke-Utne (2000) study where code-switching is reported as an effective teaching and learning technique in English-delivered classes. The findings of the present study are also in agreement with the findings of Makulloluwa [21] which revealed that the majority of students showed positive attitude towards the use of first language in combination with the foreign language being taught for its ability to facilitate language mastery by making the input more coherent with lower affective filter. When the affective filter is high, students tend to experience stress. The results are also in line with Johansson's [17] findings in which she discovered that the majority of the students favored a combination of English and their mother tongue in grammar instruction classes.

Despite not all scholarly works are supportive of our findings, it is still worth noting that the implementation of code-switching has a contribution in levelling up students' confidence in language learning. Our findings should make an important contribution to English Language Teaching sphere especially in the context of teaching English to higher education institution students with English acting as a foreign language.

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