IRANIAN TEACHER'S CODE-SWITCHING PRACTICES IN AN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

By

SHIMA BALOUCHI

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Science

June 2011

FPP 2011 36

To my mother, Manijeh,
For her love and constant support,

To my father, Saied,
For his guidance, hard work and patience,

And to my sister, Mina,
For her encouragement and help

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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June 2011

Chairman: **Roselan bin Baki, PhD**

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Code-switching is an alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation. The lack of adequate proficiency in the practice of code-switching among the teachers of English language becomes a central issue in code-switching implementation in Iran. Questions are raised on how teachers used the exclusion of code-switching from the classroom in teaching the English language. The main purpose of this thesis is to investigate and examine closely the functions of code-switching in a very limited and defined classroom and some of the motivations behind this usage. This study adopted a qualitative approach with some quantification of data in terms of frequency. The code-switching examples were analysed in their discourse contexts. Conversational analysis was selected as the methodology for this study. Based on different studies conducted, it is found that the conversational analysis can be usefully applied in the study of classroom language code-switching. This study is based on observations, audio recordings and teacher interviews of five English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. The participants were selected based on purposive

sampling. The observations and interviews from the classrooms were transcribed verbatim and analyzed manually.

The findings indicated that the teacher selected for this research practices code-switching more frequently when teaching grammar, give instructions and make vocabulary translation. It is found that the use of code-switching by the teacher is highly ordered. It is also found that the use of code-switching in the teacher's utterances is first and foremost to facilitate the foreign language learning and ensure understanding of the lesson among the students. In conclusion, the observed patterns suggested that code-switching in English as a foreign language classroom has a pedagogical purpose, and it serves as a valuable instrument in English language teaching. The findings of this study might illuminate practitioners of EFL regarding the roles of code-switching in the classrooms as well as to raise their awareness of the benefits of code-switching in classrooms. These results revealed that code-switching can be a highly recommendable language strategy in foreign language classrooms.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

PENGGUNAAN KOD DALAM SEWAKTU PEMBELAJARAN KELAS BAHASA INGGERIS OLEH GURU-GURU DI NEGARA IRAN

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Kod dalam merupakan penggunaan dua atau lebih bahasa secara bertukar ganti dalam satu-satu percakapan yang sama. Kekurangan kemahiran dalam mempraktikkan kod dalam di kalangan guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris telah menjadi isu utama dalam usaha melaksanakan kaedah ini di negara Iran. Isu-isu timbul apabila guru-guru tersebut tidak merealisasikan pengunaan kaedah ini semasa mengajar di dalam kelas. Tujuan utama kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk mengkaji dan memahami fungsi kod dalam di dalam kelas dengan bilangan subjek yang terhad melalui analisa percakapan. Kajian ini adalah berdasarkan lima rakaman temuramah audio etnografi kelas Bahasa Inggeris dan pemerhatian sewaktu pembelajaran, di mana peserta-peserta kajian ini terlibat secara sukarela. Hasil pemerhatian di dalam kelas dan temuramah direkod kata demi kata dan dianalisa secara manual. Hasil kajian menunjukkan guru-guru mempraktikkan kod dalam dengan lebih kerap, terutamanya untuk latihan tatabahasa, pembelajaran dan alih bahasa. Penggunaan kod dalam telah terbukti membantu pelajar-pelajar memahami apa yang diajar melalui diskusi di kalangan mereka. Kesimpulannya, pola yang terhasil menunjukkan kod dalam mempunyai elemen

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pedagogi untuk pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing. Hasil kajian ini diharapkan dapat memberi penghayatan kepada mereka terhadap peranan dan kebaikan pengunaan kod dalam di dalam kelas. Hasil kajian ini juga menunjukkan 'kod dalam amat digalakkan sebagai salah satu strategi untuk pembelajaran kelas-kelas bahasa asing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Roselan bin Baki, my supervisor, for his guidance, support and scrutiny. Enormous thanks to Sharifah Zainb Syed Abd. Rahman, my co-supervisor, whose kindness, support and cooperation is greatly acknowledged. Thanks also to my dearest friends, their support and involvement is highly appreciated. And most of all for my supportive, encouraging, and patient friend Mahdi whose faithful support during the final stages of this thesis is so appreciated.

To my beloved family, my dad, Saied and my mom, Manizheh, I am ceaselessly grateful for continuous love and all the support and inspiration. Many thanks to Mina, my lovely sister, for everything she did for completion of this thesis. I love you dear. Above all, I am eternally grateful to Almighty God for His countless blessings, guidance and love. All praise is for Him.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 29 June 2011 to conduct the final examination of Shima Balouchi on her thesis entitled "Iranian Teacher's Code-switching Practices in an English as a Foreign Language Classroom" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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This thesis was submitted to the senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations, which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or other institutions.

SHIMA BALOUCHI

Date: 29 June 2011

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language.
L1/NL	First Language/ Native Language
L2/TL	Second Language / Target Language
FL	Foreign Language
SL	Second Language
CA	Conversational Analysis

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

2.1   Background of the Study

English language plays a significant role in education globally. In fact, English is one of the core subjects in every school: from kindergarten until university level. Moreover, in countries where English is a second language, learning English, is important in finding jobs, upgrading oneself with regard to social status, and developing higher living standards; therefore, teaching and learning English is very important. Questions such as how to teach English and whether a teacher should use L1 in teaching English become primary questions for many researchers and attract attention for research on teaching methods (Flyman-Mattsson and Burenhult, 1999; Macaro, 2001). According to Butler (2004), traditional English instructions focused mainly on grammar and translation, while the current language policies in many countries place great emphasis on developing students' communicative skills in English. Teaching English system in Iran recently also follows the same policies.

Some studies have shown that students' first language is still being used by teachers in their classes (Raschka *et al.*, 2009). During the last twenty years, researchers have noticed a sharp increase in scientific interest of the phenomena related to the use of mother tongue in foreign or second language or code-switching (Auer, 2005). Code-switching is briefly defined as an alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation (Grosjean, 1982; Milroy and Muysken, 2000). According to

Reini (2008), code-switching is a natural phenomenon in communication, and it is one of the aims in the field of linguistic research.

Researchers usually study code-switching as a general phenomenon or sometimes would narrow their focuses in a specific context, for example, code-switching in the classroom (Auer, 1998; Cook, 2001). Since code-switching arises from teacher-student interaction in FL/SL classroom, the methods in teaching English play important roles in the classrooms, and because of this, there are a lot of discussions involving the actual interactions between teachers and students in the foreign or second language classrooms. Greggio and Gil (2007) stated that teachers' use of code-switching in the foreign language classrooms have been examined by many researchers since the 1990s. Since then, code-switching in the classroom has been defined in a number of ways by different researchers, depending on the point of view of their studies (Yletyinen, 2004). According to Reini (2008), in a foreign language classroom, the use of English is both important as the language to be learnt and the means of instruction. The reason is that in FL classrooms, in addition to the targeted language, there is usually another language being used - the learners' and teacher's native language. When the first language and the foreign language co-exist in the FL class, this leads to an unavoidable situation in which the codes are switched. Thus, code-switching is usually a natural part of language classrooms' interaction (Reini, 2008).

This research is to study the teacher's code-switching practice in FL classrooms in Iran. The tendency of using code-switching in FL classrooms is ingrained in the minds of most language teachers (Cook, 2001). Over the years, there have been many studies concerning teachers' use of code-switching in FL classrooms (Flyman-Mattsson and

Burenhult, 1999; Raschka *et al.*, 2009; Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie, 2002). Different teaching methods and approaches applied in these studies have supported the importance of code-switching in foreign classrooms. These studies endorsed that code-switching plays an essential role in foreign or second language teaching instruction. Although, as mentioned, many studies have been conducted in different countries, it seems that the code-switching phenomenon in teaching the English language is not conducted in Iran.

Code-switching in FL classrooms can be examined from various aspects. There are three basic issues regarding a teacher's code-switching which need to be addressed before the teacher starts to teach; otherwise, it would cause confusion to the readers. These issues include the function, frequency, and perception related to code-switching when attempting to teach a foreign language to the students.

In general, there are many studies that focused on these three issues related to code-switching. First, the function of code-switching is believed to facilitate the process of teaching in FL classrooms and speeding up teaching (Flyman-Mattsson and Burenhult, 1999; Raschka *et al*, 2009). Second, many studies also mainly focus on the frequency of code-switching in FL classrooms, showing different frequencies of code-switching in FL classrooms. Some cases indicated high frequency of code-switching (Polio and Duff, 1994; Crawford, 2004), while some studies indicated low frequency of code-switching in FL classrooms (Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie, 2002; Macaro, 2001). Third, some studies also investigated teachers' and students' perceptions towards the use of code-switching in classrooms (Macaro, 2001; Crawford, 2004; Turnbull, 2001). Based on the teachers' perceptions of code-switching, completely different results are found

in the FL classrooms. Some researchers received negative feedbacks towards the usage of code-switching in classrooms (Macaro, 2001; Polio and Duff, 1990), while other researchers found positive feedbacks (Moore, 2002; Crawford, 2004). All these studies investigated the teachers' use of code-switching in EF/SL classrooms in which it is indicated that teachers mostly use code-switching in their classes, whether consciously or unconsciously (Sert, 2005).

A detailed investigation of these factors could potentially assist language teachers to improve teaching technique in the classroom and to make the classroom environment livelier by increasing interactions between teachers and students and improving performance in the targeted language. In order to better understand the situation in Iran, this study aims to investigate a teacher's use of code-switching in an EFL classroom of a private institute in teaching the English language. Code-switching usually examines FL/SL classes in a university context. Since contexts in the universities are different from those in private institutes, this study plans to investigate the use of code-switching in an intermediate level of an English teaching institute.

The data are obtained from classroom observations, audio recordings and interviews with the teacher. By analyzing the data, the researcher hopes that this study will help English teachers to be more aware of their language usage in the EFL classrooms especially to assist them in using Persian. This study also examines the teacher's perceptions of code-switching in which it is hoped that teachers can adjust their language usage to meet the needs of most students better. Code-switching by teachers is a common occurrence in Iranian EFL classrooms. Therefore, this study attempts to explain the reasons for teachers to code-switch in EFL classrooms of an Iranian

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English institution; whereby firstly, the English language situation in Iran is investigated.

2.2   The Status of English in Iran and in Its Educational System

Iran is a monolingual nation, and as will mention in following there are few English speaking environments in Iran. In Iran English language teaching takes place in two different parts. The first one is the formal education system which control by government and the second one is the private English institutes. In government school the English course is conducting in Persian language, it means that the English is teaching in Persian, because of this there is few instance of code-switching in these schools but in private English institutes the medium of instruction is English. These institutes contribute to the promotion of English to a sizable number of students (Farhady and Hedayati, 2009).

The English language is a compulsory subject in the Iranian curriculum but because of the lack of attention that has been given to research within this subject, it could be argued that English has been neglected within Iranian educational system (Dahmardeh, 2009). In Iran, students have to study English for nearly seven years, yet the education they receive neither enables the students to attain full competence in using the English language nor helps them to interact with confidence. In other words, educational system in teaching and learning EFL is not effective in Iran. Teachers mostly use of grammar-translation method in most schools. The curriculum in schools is a top-down (national curriculum) curriculum; the Ministry of Education dictates all the decisions regarding the textbook selection and the exams. In EFL classroom the culture of

teaching is basically a teacher-centered one in Iran. In English classroom, teachers are not free to choose the textbooks and activities for their classes. However, not much control is exerted on teaching methodology (Eslami-Rasekh and Valizadeh, 2004).

According to Vaezi and Mirzaei (2007), one of the most serious problems that Iranian EFL teachers face in their classroom is the student's inability to communicate in English. This is due to the students' weaknesses in general English, which influence their academic success. Code-switching by teacher in EFL classroom give students some courage to use their English knowledge to communicate with other students and teacher in particular. Iranian EFL students in general seem not to be as proficient and qualified in language use and components as might be expected by having passed some courses and having graduated. Overall, some of the problems teachers and learners encounter can be traced to the textbooks (Dahmardeh, 2007).

Compared to EFL learners in other contexts, Iranian EFL students do not have much exposure to English outside the classroom. Very few English programs are broadcasted on TV or radio. Of course, through advancements in technology and the more frequent use of the Internet, satellite, and rapid growth of private language institutes in Iran, the opportunities for English language learning have greatly improved (Talebinezhad and Aliakbari, 2002).

There have been very little studies on the investigation of code-switching in the EFL context in Iran since the code-switching concept is odd for most Iranian teachers and researchers. Although they use code-switching in their classroom environment other than its application and function is unfamiliar for them. To researcher knowledge, up

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till now, there hasn't been many studies on code-switching in private English institute discourse. In a study in EFL classroom, Nazary, (2008) explained most students reported a negative attitude and rejected L1 use in their EFL classroom. Findings demonstrated that a vast number of students are not familiar with on the effectiveness and importance of L1 use in their learning process. Surprising, this is likely due to their teachers' insistence on not using the L1 and seeing it as a barrier for language learning because of their unconsciousness of the advantage of code-switching in teaching FL.

Nazari (2008) mentioned that undoubtedly, there is a positive role of L1 in designing a classroom syllabus, English language teaching methods, classroom management, instructing language learning skills in Iranian foreign language classroom. At the end, Nazary (2008) believes that Iranian teachers and students should free themselves of the old misconceptions and try to praise the existed alliance between the mother tongue and foreign languages.

The teachers' intentions and motivations influence or even determine not only what to say but also how to say it, namely, how to construct teachers' discourse to realize certain purposes (Lin, 1990). Motivation is a very important factor in English teaching and learning in EFL classroom. By using code-switching the teacher let students know what is going in the classroom and encourage them to participate in class activities. Actually, code-switching is a strategy for teacher to make the FL lesson more intelligible and will be avoid of students despondent to learning foreign language (Jingxia, 2009).

According to (Macaro, 2001) it is important for EFL teachers to provide as much English input as possible for students since as mentioned, English is spoken as a foreign language in Iran and there is not much opportunity for students to use English language outside the classroom setting. It was also discovered that teachers used Persian in their classes. Because of this, this study tries to help teachers become aware of their actual language use in the classroom, and thus teachers can consciously make use of English and Persian practically to facilitate students' English learning.

2.3 Statement of the Problem

Teaching English in Iran, compared to other Asian countries, is more problematic (Dahmardeh, 2007). In Iran, due to political and cultural reasons, English does not receive much attention, suggesting that English language has no importance (Vaezi, 2009). In Iran, English language teachers are often the only competent and trusted input of English providers for students. Students in Iran do not have the opportunity to be exposed to the English language outside the classroom setting. Therefore, as input from teachers plays a critical role for students to learn English, it is important for the teachers to provide English language input as much as possible (Hayati, 2010). It should also be mentioned that many students are not learning the English language seriously, and because of this, English is regarded as a very difficult and demanding course. In addition, many English language teachers do not consider English as an important subject in schools. They are less inclined and lack of enthusiasm in improving their teaching methods (Hayati, 2010). This situation leads to an extensive use of code-switching in teaching the English language.

The theoretical literature of English language classrooms state that code-switching established in EFL classrooms in many countries is the same as in Iranian private EFL classrooms. Data-based studies of code-switching by teachers have revealed that some teachers do not know how to code-switch in their EFL classes (Eslami Rasekh and Rezvani, 2011); resulting in students' deprivation of understanding regarding code-switching strategy which could otherwise enhance the learning process. As a consequence, the students do not get the help that they need. Code-switching may show positive impacts on the students if teachers apply code-switching in their conversations effectively during the teaching and learning process. The application of code-switching by intuition is detrimental to the students (Willans, 2011). As a result, the students are not getting what they should because the code-switching applied is not purposefully and systematically planned. Therefore, students are not become profession in foreign language in which the end product is not obtained.

Intuitive uses of code-switching will demoralise teachers too. Teachers will be overwhelmed with frustration and lack of motivation in the long run because their hard works do not produce satisfactory results. Moreover, the use of code-switching without proper knowledge and skills will develop negative beliefs in the long run. This does not only affect the teachers in terms of their professional development but they might also regard inappropriate code-switching practice as the correct one.

At the same time, some teachers are also invited to assist curriculum planning by the Ministry of Education. During this process, they may infuse their code-switching practice into the curriculum. As a result, the malpractice of code-switching becomes more widespread. Consequently, various parties involved, students, teachers and the

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nation at large will be at the losing end. These problems warrant a detailed study on code-switching practice among EFL teachers in Iran.

2.4 Objective of the Study

The present study aims to:

(1) Identify the functions of code-switching used in EFL classrooms.

(2) Find out how the teacher use code-switching during the teaching and learning process in foreign language classrooms.

(3) Investigate when, why and how often code-switching is used by the teacher.

2.5 Research Questions

This study focuses on code-switching practices of a selected teacher and its different functions throughout the language learning process in an EFL classroom in Iran. To obtain a clear understanding of the teacher's practices of code-switching, this study is attempted to investigate the following research questions:

(1) How often does code-switching take place in the EFL classroom in Iran?

(2) What are the functions of code-switching in the EFL classroom?

(3) What are the teacher's perceptions of the use of code-switching?

2.6 Significance of the Study

The issue of code-switching in a FL classroom has been extensively studied due to its influences on second or foreign language teaching and learning. Difficulties can arise

in teaching students with low or no code-switching usage in EFL classrooms (Qing, 2010). Teachers may use Persian often and the students are likely to get fewer and fewer opportunities to be exposed to the English language or to use the English language in the classroom. By examining the teacher's use of code-switching, it is hoped that in the future code-switching can be used more appropriately to help students in learning the English language. The issue involves balancing the level of code-switching appropriate for teaching/learning and the effects are not only obvious on the various domains of language performance but also on teachers' attitudes and perceptions of language teaching in general (Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie, 2002; Flyman-Mattsson and Burenhult, 1999; Macaro, 2001; Greggio and Gil, 2007).

This study also assesses the effectiveness of code-switching in teaching foreign language to students who come from a wide range of linguistic levels and English knowledge backgrounds. Investigation on the factors affecting code-switching in teaching FL is hoped to solve the issue regarding students who are more comfortable in using their native language in learning FL, consequently, to develop a more productive learning environment. This study is the first to report on the functions and frequencies of code-switching in EFL classrooms in Iran. There are only a limited number of studies regarding the usage of L1 in L2 classes in Iran. The study highlights the important role of teacher's code-switching and the important role of this teaching strategy in EFL classrooms, particularly EFL classrooms in private institutions in Iran. More importantly, it offers the theoretical basis for the application of code-switching techniques in the classroom.

2.7 Limitations of the Study

This study provides an analysis of code-switching functions in a private English institute in Iran. However, it is limited in several ways: first, the population of the subjects is limited and code-switching practice is only observed in one EFL classroom. Only one teacher along with his 32 students in an intermediate level classroom is observed. Sample size is small in which it only reveals a teacher's language use, thus it is difficult for people to understand how most teachers practice code-switching in their classes. In the same way, the results might not be able to indicate as a conclusion to other classrooms at different levels, since this study examines solely the intermediate grade.

Second, this research only takes into account the teacher's point of view; therefore insights from the students on code-switching are neglected. This research does not conduct interviews with the students on the effectiveness of the teachers' code-switching especially with regard to understanding the lessons. Another limitation of the study is related to the research procedures. Since the study is classroom-based and the researcher used audio recordings, not all of the utterances are clearly recorded especially from the students. Although the students are not the focus of this study, their interactions with the teacher have an impact on the teacher's responses.

2.8 Operational Definitions

The following terms will be used frequently in this thesis, thus specific meanings of each term are mentioned as below.

Teacher's perceptions: According to Yu (2004), teachers' perceptions will influence everything they do both within and beyond classroom situations. Teachers must consciously be aware of their perspectives about learning and teaching in order to make informed decisions. On the one hand, teachers must express their own personal sense of implicit and explicit ideas, theories and practices on the other hand they must also increase their tolerance and understanding of diverse opinions and viewpoints in order to make the language classroom a more welcoming environment, encompassing dignity and respect for both students and teachers alike (Williams and Burden, 1997). Dewey (1933) stated that teachers' perceptions construct their practices which in turn lead to whatever progress, which the learners and teachers will achieve. Practice and progress in language learning and teaching will reconstruct teachers' perceptions on L2 development. The progress that needs to be achieved is determined by teachers' perceptions and practices; however, this does not mean that the learners do not have the right to construct their own learning environment.

Code-switching: Carter and Numan briefly defined the term as "a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse" (2001, p.275). In this study, code-switching refers to the action of the teacher or the students switching the code, for example, when they switch from English to Persian or vice versa.

Practice: The practice is a technique, method, process or activity acquired through experience or exercise. Practice is an act of rehearsing a behavior repeatedly for the purpose of improving or mastering it. How well one improves with a practice is dependent on several factors, such as the frequency of which he or she engages in and

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the type of feedbacks available for improvement (Ericsson *et al.*, 1993). In this study, practice refers to the process of performing code-switching in EFL classrooms.

First language (FL) / Native language (NL): A first language (also native language) is the language a person has learned from birth or speaks the best, and it is often the basis for sociolinguistic identity. The term native language is used to indicate a language that a person is as proficient as of a native individual of that language's base country or as proficient as the average person who speaks no other language but that one language (http://en.wikipedia.org). Persian is the L1 of the students in the present study in Iran.

Second language (SL) / Target language (TL): Someone's second language is a language which is not their native language but which they use at work or at school (http://dictionary.reverso.net). Target language is a language, especially a foreign language that one is in the process of learning (http://dictionary.reference.com). English is the TL in this study.

English as a foreign language (EFL): The study of English language by non-native speakers living in a non-English speaking environment (http: //dictionary. reference.com). EFL is when the English language is neither widely used for communication nor as a medium of instruction. In other words, learners of English do not have enough opportunities to use the language outside the classroom (Carter and Numan, 2001).

English as a Second language (ESL): The study of English language by non-native speakers in an English speaking environment (http: //dictionary. reference.com).

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