**Diyala University**

**College of Education for Human Sciences**

**Department of English**

**A Study of Code-Switching Among EFL Learners**

Abstract

People who have learned two languages demonstrate an interesting phenomenon known as “code switching” by mixing words or phrases from the two tongues together during the course of speech or writing. A ‘code’ is defined as a language or a dialect. Code switching (CS) is an alternation of words and phrases between two languages or dialects. This usually occurs between people who share those particular languages.

Alternation between languages in the form of code switching is a widely observed phenomenon in foreign language classrooms. Various bilingual speakers switch their languages with ease at different points in conversation or in writing. People commonly shift code in the course of their daily conversation. Many educated people who are fluent in English as their second language (L2), often employ code-switching by inserting English words, phrases or sentences into their communications. Although participants may unconsciously perform code switching there is always a reason that this occurs. The sample comprises (60 students) from both undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Diyala University, College of Education for Human Sciences, Department of English.

1. **Definition of Code Switching**

According to Clyne (1987: 64), Code Switching is change by a speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another one. It can also take place in a conversation when one speaker uses one language and the other speaker answers in a different. Here, the switching is performed and carried out by the other interlocutor. Speakers may also start speaking one language and then change to another one in the middle of their speech, or sometimes even in the middle of a sentence.

Wardhaugh (1986: 32) defines code mixing of two codes (i.e. languages) usually without a change of topic. This is common in bilingual or multilingual communities and is often a mark of solidarity (e.g. between bilingual friends or colleagues in an informal situation).

Timm (1975: 82) and Poplack (1980: 18) specify that code switching take place between two languages, whereas Peterson broadens the term to include any alternation between two codes.

Gumperz (1982: 53) considered code switching "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystem."

Scotton (1993: 98) states that "code switching is the selection by bilingual/multilingual form of an embedded language in utterances framed by a matrix language during the same conversation". The definition given by Valdes (1981:157) as "the alternation of two languages at the word, phrase, clause, and sentence levels".

Code switching can be defined as the use of more than one language, variety, or style by a speaker within an utterance or discourse, or between different interlocutors or situations (Romaine, 1992: 110).

Code switching "occurs when a bilingual introduces a completely unassimilated word from another language into his speech" (Hangen, 1956: 40). Code switching occurs mostly in bilingual communities speakers of more than one language are known for their ability to code switch or mix their language during their communication. As Aranoff and Miller (2003:52) indicates that many linguists have stressed the point that switching between languages is a communicative option available to a bilingual member of speech community on much the same basis as switching between styles or dialects is an option for the monolingual speaker.

1. **Types of Code Switching**

Code switching takes a variety of forms. It can occur within or at the end or beginning of sentences. Thus, there are different types of code switching which are (Auer, 1995: 57-59):

**2.1 Inter-sentential Code switching**

In inter-sentential code switching, the language switch is done at sentence boundaries. This is seen most often between fluent bilingual speakers. Inter-sentential language switching is known as mechanical switching. It occurs unconsciously, and fills in unknown or unavailable terms in one language.

**2.2 Intra-sentential Code switching**

In intra-sentential 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 shift. Different types of switch occur within the clause level including within the word level some researchers call it also code mixing (Lipski, 1985:18).

**2.2.1 Tag - Switching**

Is the switching of either a tag phrase or a word, or both, from one language to another, (common intra-sentential switches).

**2.3 Extra-sentential Code Switching:-**

There is an insertion of a tag from one language into an utterance, which is from another language. For example, "***Iraqi students use some boundaries like yani (I mean) and wa (and) while speaking English.***

**2.4 Code Changing**

Another type of code switching called "code changing". It is characterized by fluent intra-sentential shifts, transferring focus from one language to another. It is motivated by situational and stylistic factors and the switch between two language is conscious and intentional (Ibid: 19-20).

**3. Grammatical Aspects of Code-Switching**

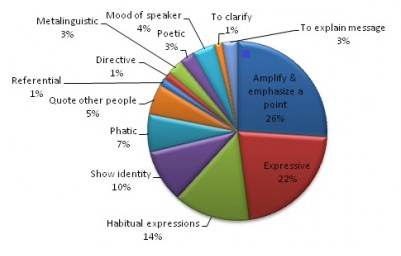
**3.1 Reasons of Code Switching**

There are a number of possible reasons for the switching from one language to another Crystal (1987: 89). The first of these is the notion that a speaker may not be able to express him/herself in one language so switches to the other to compensate for the deficiency. As a result, the speaker may be triggered into speaking in the other language for a while. This type of code switching tends to occur when the speaker is upset, tired or distracted in some manner. Secondly, switching commonly occurs when an individual wishes to express solidarity with a particular social group. Rapport is established between the speaker and the listener when the listener responds with a similar switch. This type of switching may also be used to exclude others from a conversation who do not speak the second language. An example of such a situation may be two people in an elevator speaking in a language other than English. Others in the elevator who do not speak the same language would be excluded from the conversation and a degree of comfort would exist amongst the speakers in the knowledge that not all those present in the elevator are listening to their conversation.

As Skiba (1997: 257) comments on Crystal’s discussion that, code switching is not a language interference on the basis that it supplements speech. Where it is used due to an inability of expression, code switching provides continuity in speech rather than presenting an interference in language. The socio-linguistic benefits have also been identified as a means of communicating solidarity, or affiliation to a particular social group, whereby code switching should be viewed from the perspective of providing a linguistic advantage rather than an obstruction to communication. Further, code switching allows a speaker to convey attitude and other emotive using a method available to those who are bilingual and again serves to advantage the speaker, much like bolding or underlining in a text document to emphasize points. Utilizing the second language, then, allows speakers to increase the impact of their speech and use it in an effective manner.

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 does not "***come***". Code switching is not language interference based on the fact that it supplements speech. It provides continuity in speech rather than presenting interference when used because of an inability of expression. Code switching can be used in a variety of degrees, whether it is used at home with family and friends, or used with superiors at the workplace (Crystal, D., 1987: 155). The reasons for code switching can be seen in the following (figure 1):

**Figure (1) Reasons for code switching**

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**4. Functions of Code Switching**

**4.1 The Functions of Teachers’ Code Switching**

The teachers’ use of code switching is not always performed consciously; which means that the teacher is not always aware of the functions and outcomes of the code switching process. Therefore, in some cases it may be regarded as an automatic and unconscious behaviour. Nevertheless, either conscious or not, it necessarily serves some basic functions which may be beneficial in language learning environments. Mattson and Burenhult (1999: 61) list these functions as topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions.

In topic switch cases, the teacher alters his/her language according to the topic that is under discussion. This is mostly observed in grammar instruction, that the teacher shifts his language to the mother tongue of his students in dealing with particular grammar points, which are taught at that moment. In these cases, the students’ attention is directed to the new knowledge by making use of code switching and accordingly making use of native tongue. At this point it may be suggested that a bridge from known (***native language***) to unknown (***new foreign language content***) is constructed in order to transfer the new content and meaning is made clear in this way as it is also suggested by Cole (1998:22) “***a teacher can exploit students’ previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2***”.

In addition to the function of code switching named as topic switch, the phenomenon also carries affective functions that serve for expression of emotions. In this respect, the teacher uses code switching in order to build solidarity and intimate relations with the students. In this sense, one may speak off the contribution of code switching for creating a supportive language environment in the classroom. As mentioned before, this is not always a conscious process on the part of the teacher. However, one may also infer the same thing for the natural occurrence of code switching as one cannot take into guarantee its conscious application if the Maori example given in section II is considered.

Another explanation for the functionality of code switching in classroom settings is its repetitive function. In this case, the teacher uses code switching in order to transfer the necessary knowledge for the students for clarity. Following the instruction in target language, the teacher code switches to native language in order to clarify meaning, and in this way stresses importance on the foreign language content for efficient comprehension. However, the tendency to repeat the instruction in native language may lead to some undesired student behaviours. A learner who is sure that the instruction in foreign language will be followed by a native language translation may lose interest in listening to the former instruction that will have negative academic consequences; as the student is exposed to foreign language discourse limitedly (Cole, 1998:27-28).

**4.2 The Functions of Students’ Code Switching**

As it is the case for teachers’ code switching, the students also are not always aware of the reasons for code switching as well as its functions and outcomes. Although they may unconsciously perform code switching, it clearly serves some functions either be reiteration and conflict control.

The first function of student code switch is equivalence. In this case, the student makes use of the native equivalent of a certain lexical item in target language and therefore code switches to his/her native tongue. This process may be correlated with the deficiency in linguistic competence of target language, which makes the student use the native lexical item when he/she has not the competence for using the target language explanation for a particular lexical item. Therefore, “***equivalence***” functions as a defensive mechanism for students as it gives the student the opportunity to continue communication by bridging the gaps resulting from foreign language incompetence.

The next function to be introduced is floor holding. During a conversation in the target language, the students fill the stopgap with native language use. It may be suggested that this is a mechanism used by the students in order to avoid gaps in communication, which may result from the lack of fluency in target language. The learners performing code switching for floor holding generally have the same problem: they cannot recall the appropriate target language structure or lexicon. It may be claimed that this type of language alternation may have negative effects on learning a foreign language; since it may result in loss of fluency in long term.

The third consideration in students’ code switching is reiteration, which is pointed by Eldridge (1996:306) as “***messages are reinforced, emphasized, or clarified where the message has already been transmitted in one code, but not understood***”. In this case, the message in target language is repeated by the student in native tongue through which the learner tries to give the meaning by making use of a repetition technique. The reason for this specific language alternation case may be two-folds: first, he/she may not have transferred the meaning exactly in target language. Second, the student may think that it is more appropriate to code switch in order to indicate the teacher that the content is clearly understood by him/her.

The last function of students’ code switching to be introduced here is conflict control. For the potentially conflictive language use of a student (meaning that the student tends to avoid a misunderstanding or tends to utter words indirectly for specific purposes), the code switching is a strategy to transfer the intended meaning. The underlying reasons for the tendency to use this type of code switching may vary according to students’ needs, intentions or purposes. Additionally, the lack of some culturally equivalent lexis among the native language and target language, which may lead to violation of the transference of intended meaning--may result in code switching for conflict control; therefore possible misunderstandings are avoided.(Ibid:308-309).

**5. The Test**

**5.1 Sample of the Test**

The participants of this study were 60 students from Diyala University, College of Education for Human Sciences, Department of English. Of them, 56 were undergraduate students and 4 were Postgraduate. The ages of sample ranged from 22 to 31 from both sexes males and females. For all the participants, first language (L1) was their national language, and second or target language was English (L2). The proficiency of English for this study was measured using their test scores of daily and monthly exams. While the subjects’ proficiency in their native tongue was assumed to be of a higher level, one or two questions in the questionnaire (appendix 1) were intended to assess their proficiency level of first language. Students who participated in this study learned and exercised the second language in a classroom setting. The sample spoke both L1 and L2 outside the classroom as well as during classes.

It was found significant that students sometimes switched from one language to another during the general medium of instruction. Information regarding each participant’s English language background was obtained from questionnaire (see appendix 1).

**6. Data Collection: Design and Procedure**

**6.1 Design and Procedure**

Data was collected by using a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and classroom observation. Participants were not informed that their code switching behavior was the subject of observation by the researcher in the class. Observation was carried out in two undergraduate level classes and postgraduate class. While observing these undergraduate level classes, the researcher had a chance to record the classroom interactions and the particular circumstances where code switching occurred. Even when responding to questions from the teacher, some students suddenly replied in their native language as if the teacher understood those terms. Students were comfortable talking in their native language. They would ask the teacher for the meaning of unfamiliar terms, or seek possible equivalents in English. Lessons on various topics were developed in the speaking class so that participants would have enough room to express their views, opinions and arguments. When they come across a new word in the lesson they would jot it down quickly and pass it to each other, sharing the meaning with their friends. Many of them whisper to convey to their friends the possible meaning. The observations were conducted for a periods of 45 minutes.

**6.2 Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed step by step in the order that the questions appear. It was compared and contrasted with related studies. Aspects of the findings were graphically displayed.

**6.3 Participants’ Knowledge of First and Second Languages**

In responses to the question ***“Which language do you often speak at Diyala University?***”, 20% of the participants said that they often speak both languages. 46% reported that they often speak only their native language (L1), and 34% reported that they speak English language (L2). This shows that most of the sample speak English less frequently than their native language in English classes (Figure 2).

In another question from the questionnaire, ***“What language(s) was/were used in teaching you before joining college?”*** A range 50 % participant answered that they were taught in native language, where 10% participants were instructed only in English, 25% participants answered that they were taught in both languages (native and English), and 15% participants answered that they were taught in other languages like Kurdish besides their native language (see figure 3). This indicates that many students were instructed in their native language in primary and middle school classes.

To determine the competence of participants in their second language the question was ask: ***“What languages do you use to interact with your teacher in your class?***” In response it was found that majority of them (10%) spoke in native language, 75 % in English and 15% in both languages to interact with teaches in home school or the university. It shows that many students practice their second language very much in their native places (Figure 4).

**6.4 Frequencies of Code switching**

The frequency of occurrence of code switching was a factor included in this study. The results indicate those undergraduate and postgraduate students code-switched less frequently. Analyzing responses from the questionnaire (figure 5) shows that 35% switch the code 1 to 5 times, 20% switch 5 to 10 times, 40% switch 10 to 15 times. Whereas 5% switch code15 to 20 times.

The frequencies of Code Switching which occurred in this study were:

1-5 times 35%

5-10 times 20%

10-15 times 40%

15-20 times 5%

Another question asks: ***"What language(s) do you normally use to communicate with your friends at Diyala University at your Department?"*** After analyzing, the results the responses were 60% in native language (L1), 15% in English (L2) language, and 25% in both languages native and English (L1, L2) (see figure 6).

In socio-linguistic analysis, participants showed various responses regarding the factors of code switching. Many of them agreed with the options mentioned in the questionnaire (see appendix 1). However, some of the participants responded to the factors of code switching in different perspectives. Both views of code switching factors are considered in this study. Factors affecting code switching suggested in the questionnaire include:

a) No similar words in English

b) Did not know the English words

c) To fill the stopgap in speaking

d) Easier to speak in own language

e) To add emphasis

f) To avoid misunderstanding

In each 45 minutes’ class observation, several examples of cross coding occurred. Factors were noticed such as the surrounding circumstances in which coding happened, whether the coding was voluntary or spontaneous, whether the students were comfortable or uncomfortable. The frequency of switching was recorded on the basis of students’ interaction during the class time. In the interview, students were asked: ***“Why did you switch the codes in class?”*** The majority of the participants reported that they did not know the English word(s). Many of them responded that the class was boring and code switching made it more interesting. Participants agreed that they switch the code in the classroom so that others would not understand the matter they are conveying.

After data collection, this study found that 30% of the participants responded that "***it is easier to speak in their own language than to speak in English",*** while 20% said that ***"there were no similar words in English",*** were as 5% said ***"did not know the English words"***, 15% said that ***"the reason they code switched was to avoid misunderstanding"***, 10% said ***" to add emphasis"*** in the foreign language so that other would notice them and be impressed, and 20% said ***"to fill the stopgap".*** Obviously, students are not as competent in speaking English, the new language they are learning, as in their native tongue. Those participants whose second language competence is less always have difficulty in finding equivalences of L1 and L2.

In this case, the student makes use of the native equivalent of a certain lexical item and therefore code switches to his or her native tongue. This factor is mostly noticed among students who are acquiring a second language. During conversations in their off class, the students filled in the stopgaps using their native tongue (see figure 7).

In summary, the study revealed that the factors that influenced code switching were:

***No similar words in English 20%***

***Did not know the English words 5%***

***To fill a stopgap 20%***

***Easier to speak in own language 30%***

***To add emphasis 10%***

***To avoid misunderstanding 15%***

The underlying factors for using code switching may vary according to students’ needs, locations, setting, intentions or purposes. Nevertheless, all these factors seem, in one way or another, influential in second language acquisition for bilingual students in classroom setting.

Skiba (1997: 217) suggests that code switching is used in language classrooms because of an inability of expression and it provides continuity in speech rather than interference in the flow of linguistic expression. In this respect code switching can be seen as a supporting element in communication of information and in social interaction.

**7. Conclusions**

Throughout the classroom observation and questionnaire, the researchers have reached the following results:

1. Code switching takes a variety of forms. It can occur within or at the end or beginning of sentences.
2. Class observation, personal teaching experience and interviewing the participants have led to the conclusion that code switching is a natural phenomenon among bilingual foreign students. The frequency of code exchange is not the same among undergraduate and postgraduate students. The incidences are more specific and limited in postgraduate classes whereas postgraduate students exhibit code switching more frequently. This is because postgraduate students are more fluent in using English in a variety of situations and are more familiar with the subject matter.
3. 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.
4. It is observed that in many cases, code switching has been a useful tool in adult language learning classroom; however, in undergraduate classes, it can be more disturbing and unwanted.
5. In many circumstances, a teacher may encourage students to exchange codes seeing it as an advantage for learning the target language.
6. Other times learners try to get best possible answer in English class to show they know it. This item was seen in the undergraduate class in which learners were eager to tell the correct meaning or answer to their teachers.

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**Appendix ( 1 )**

**University of Diyala**

**College of Education for Human Sciences**

**Department of English**

**2014-2015**

**Instruction: Please fill this questionnaire completely by selecting the options.**

1. **Which level are you studying at Diyala University?**

**Undergraduate……….. Post-Graduate……….**

1. **What language(s) do you often speak at Diyala University?**

**Native ……… English …...... Both languages ……..**

1. **What language(s) was/were used in teaching you before joining college?**

**Native…… English....... Both languages …... Other languages ……..**

1. **In what language did you interact with your teacher in your class?**

**Native….... English....... Both languages ..…..**

1. **How often do you switch/change your language from one to another during one class period?**

**1-5 times ..…. 5-10 times..…. 10-15 times..…. 15-20 times..….**

1. **What language(s) do you use to communicate with your friends at Diyala University at your Department?**

**Native…….. English ....... Both languages …….**

**7. Why do you use words in your own language even while speaking in English?**

**E.g. using such words like *wa* و , *yanee* يعني ..etc.**

**Please choose as many possible reasons as you like:**

**Not similar words in English……. Did not know the English words…….**

**To fill the stopgap……. Easier to speak in own language……..**

**To add emphasis ……. To avoid misunderstanding………**

**Thank you!**

**جامعة ديالى**

**كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية**

**قسم اللغة الإنكليزية**

**دراسة تداخل اللغة الأم لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية**

**مدرس مساعد : أطياف حسن إبراهيم1**

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**1. قسم اللغة الانكليزية ، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية ، جامعة ديالى .**

**2. قسم اللغة الانكليزية ، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية ، جامعة ديالى .**

**المستخلص**

**ان الذين تعلموا لغتين لديهم ظاهرة التداخل بين اللغات (اللغة الام ولغة اجنبية) بواسطة تداخل كلمات او عبارات بين اللغتين معا" عند الكلام او الكتابة. ان تداخل اللغة هي عبارة استبدال كلمات او عبارات بين لغتين او لهجتين. يحدث هذا عادة بين الناس الذين يتكلمون لغتين مختلفة.**

**ان التبادل بين اللغات على صيغة تداخل اللغة هي ظاهرة تم ملاحظتها في صفوف لتعلم اللغات الأجنبية. ان المتكلمين ثنائي اللغة بسهولة يستبدلون لغتهم اثناء المحادثة او الكتابة. ان الكثير من الناس المثقفين الذين لديهم طلاقة لغوية في اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة اجنبية ثانية أحيانا" يستخدمون كلمات تتداخل مع لغتهم الام اثناء استخدام عبارات او جمل اثناء التواصل. الكثير من المتكلمين يتداخلون بين لغتين بدون أدارك ذلك ودائما" يوجد سبب لذلك. ان عينة البحث تشمل (60 طالبا") من الذين هم في مرحلة التخرج والدراسات العليا تم اخذ العينة من طلاب قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة ديالى.**