Instructors' Code-Switching in ESP Classrooms for Thai Aviation Students: Functions and Benefits

Jitrapa Sittattrakul[1]

Vongsa Laovoravit[2]

Abstract

The use of code-switching (CS) in English language teaching is still a controversial topic among scholars. This study sought to highlight a) the functions of the instructors' code-switching b) the students' psychological benefits and learning success from the instructors' code switching. 3 English instructors and 240 students attending ESP classes in a private university in Thailand were investigated. Using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires as mixed methods of data collection, the findings indicated that code-switching has been frequently used in the English for Airline Business classrooms mainly for the purpose of facilitating effective teaching and learning such as to explain grammatical structures, to introduce new vocabularies as well as technical terms, or to make the learners feel relaxed and comfortable. The study also found that majority of the low proficient students considered the instructors' code switching as a useful strategy in promoting both psychological benefits and their learning success. However, students with better English proficiency believed that code-switching did not provide much benefit to them and should be limited to the minimum as too much of switching might slow down the acquisition of the target language.

Keywords: Code-switching (CS), Psychological benefits, Learning success

[1] Lecturer, Aviation Personnel Development Institute,
Kasem Bundit University,
e-mail: jitrapa.sit@kbu.ac.th

[2] Lecturer, Aviation Personnel Development Institute
Kasem Bundit University
e-mail: vongsa.lao@kbu.ac.th

Introduction

With the importance of English as a world language, English in Thailand is the first foreign language that students must study in schools. English has been claimed as a language of opportunity since it is considered a working language especially in some specific fields such as airline business, tourism, and so on. English for specific purposes (ESP) courses are required for students in each area of study. In order to create an English learning environment, ESP teachers have been persuaded to use English as an instructional method in class. However, in reality many Thai teachers apply their native language in the process of teaching English. The use of native language in foreign language teaching is still a controversial topic among linguists. Some researchers believed that the use of L1 in English language classes is counterproductive (Mart, 2013; McMillan& Rivers, 2011; Brook-Lewis, 2009), while the others support for the "pedagogic validity of code-switching" as a benefit to students (Afzel,2013; Hidayati,2012; Brooks-Lewis,2009; Arther & Martin,2006). The study of the functions and benefits of CS in ESP courses will help provide some ideas on language development and how to implement CS in the classrooms more productively.

The research questions that this study sought to address were:

1. What are the functions of CS in the classroom context?
2. Does the instructors' CS help promote the students' psychological benefits?
3. Does the instructors' CS help promote the students' learning success?

Literature Review

Code-switching (CS) is alternative used by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation (Milroy and Muysken, 1995). Speakers code-switch because they find it easier or more appropriate, in the linguistic and/or cultural context, to communicate by switching than by keeping the utterance totally in the same language. In classroom discourse, by contrast, teachers' use of CS has been a subject of controversy. Some researchers found that CS is useful in English language classes especially at the foundation

level while the others have seen it as an undesirable method in teaching the target language.

Modupeola (2014) suggested that CS in class allows the learners to become more comfortable and relaxed in learning English language. It is also a useful tool in assisting learners to focus and participate in classroom practice and activities more successfully.

The study on CS in ESL classrooms by Magid and Mugaddam (2013) showed that L1 use in ESL classes is unavoidable at basic, secondary, and tertiary levels. Moreover, teachers have used it extensively to explain meanings of difficult words, transmit lesson content, organize ESL classrooms, guide interpretation, illustrate grammatical rules and also encourage students.

Demir (2012) mentioned that CS in class is undesirable or to be regretted since it has too many negative results. Some examples are that students do not acquire the language in its natural process, they always try to translate L2 things into their native language, they can't get the ability of thinking in the target language and so on.

Methodology

1 Participants

The participants of this study consisted of

1) 3 ESP instructors teaching English for Airline Business courses at Kasem Bundit University, Thailand. All of them obtained an M.A. in TEFL and have been teaching ESP for 3-5 years

2) 240 native Thai, Airline Business students studying in their fourth year at Kasem Bundit University, Thailand. The students' English competency was evaluated by their "Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC)" result which was taken in October 2017. The less proficient students scored from 5-400, average students scored from 405-695, and proficient students scored from 700-990.

2 Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain some insights on the instructors' use of CS in the classrooms. Each instructor was interviewed for 30-35 minutes, focusing on the functions of the use of CS in ESP classes.

Students' psychological benefits and learning success from the use of instructors' CS were evaluated by using a questionnaire adapted from Ahmad&Jusoff (2009) and Ariffin&Husin's (2011) studies. The students were divided into 2 groups: the less proficient group (n=180) and the average to proficient group (n=60). The data from the questionnaire was analyzed in terms of simple frequency counts and percentage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. The functions of CS as the medium of instruction

The results from the interviews revealed that all 3 instructors frequently mixed Thai with English in their lectures mainly to accommodate the needs of the students. The instructors believed that in a class where the majority of students were less proficient in English, CS was considered a very useful tool in improving students' comprehension towards the subject. However, they were aware that they must not overuse CS in the classrooms as it could slow down the acquisition of the target language. The instructors mentioned that CS was used for both pedagogical and social functions. Pedagogical functions include explaining grammatical structure, introducing new vocabularies and technical terms, translating ideas, discussing assignments, checking comprehension, giving instructions, and providing explanations. Social functions include reducing stress, building good rapport, and organizing students' behaviour

.2 CS and students'

psychological benefits

The results of this research revealed mixed attitudes towards the use of CS of the instructors. The students' views were summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 Less proficient students' psychological benefits from the use of CS N= 180

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. I would prefer if the instructor uses both Thai and English so that I can understand the lessons better.	61	34	5	0
2. The instructors' CS helps me feel satisfied with my learning.	60	24	14	2
3. I feel more relaxed when the instructor uses Thai in the class.	51	30	17	2
4. The instructors' CS helps me enjoy my lesson.	41	33	25	1
5. I feel less lost when the instructor switches to Thai.	58	32	10	0

Table 2 Average and proficient students' psychological benefits from the use of CS, N= 60

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. I would prefer if the instructor uses both Thai and English so that I can understand the lessons better.	10	31	56	3
2. The instructors' CS helps me feel satisfied with my learning.	10	36	47	7
3. I feel more relaxed when the instructor uses Thai in the class.	13	30	45	12
4. The instructors' CS helps me enjoy my lesson.	9	33	47	11
5. I feel less lost when the instructor switches to Thai.	10	29	51	10

The analysis of the data indicated that there was a difference in the attitudes of the two groups towards CS in terms of psychological benefits. Most of the less proficient students favoured the use of CS, because it could assist

them in comprehending the lectures and help them feel relaxed and enjoy their lessons better. On the other hand, more than half of the average to proficient students believed that CS did not provide much benefit to them. They could understand the lessons and find the class enjoyable even without the instructors' CS.

3 Code-switching and students' learning success

The result of the analysis showed mixed attitudes towards the use of CS by the instructors on students' learning success. The students' views were summarized in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 Less proficient students' learning success from the use of CS

N= 180

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. The instructors' CS helps me understand the English lessons better.	49	37	9	5
2. The instructors' CS helps me understand grammatical aspects.	46	29	16	9
3. The instructors' CS helps me understand new words.	47	39	9	5
4. The instructors' CS helps me carry out the task successfully.	39	37	19	5
5. The instructors' CS helps me understand difficult concepts.	44	43	11	2

Table 4 Average and proficient students' learning success from the use of CS N= 60

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1. The instructors' CS helps me understand the English lessons better.	14	34	45	7
2. The instructors' CS helps me understand grammatical aspects.	16	31	44	9
3. The instructors' CS helps me understand new words.	15	33	46	6
4. The instructors' CS helps me carry out the task successfully.	10	25	55	10
5. The instructors' CS helps me understand difficult concepts.	15	34	44	7

The data revealed that there was a difference in learning success from the use of CS between less proficient students and average to high proficient students. Majority of the less proficient students believed that the use of L1 could help them comprehend the lessons more easily and successfully. However, more that 50% of the average to high proficient students confirmed that they could finish the task and understand difficult concepts even if the instructors used English only as an instructional method.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has found that Thai-English CS was frequently used by ESP instructors for pedagogical functions such as to explain grammatical structures, to introduce new vocabularies as well as technical terms and social functions such as to make the learners feel relaxed and more enjoyable. This finding is consistent with the studies of Ahmed (2009), Kumar (2012), Mohamed & Abdelrahim (2013), and Seyyed &Zohre (2015) that most students held positive attitude towards the instructors' CS especially the low proficient learners. The findings of this

study reveal that students believe that the instructors' CS assist them in comprehending the subject matter as well as the activities they engage in. In addition, CS has made them feel less tense and become more comfortable to learn.

CS is unavoidable when teaching Thai students especially whose English competency is low. Using L1 in an English class is not only effective but also necessary for the students with limited ability to learn the language more effectively. However, CS should be kept to the minimum so that the students can be more exposed to English, which highly helps in improving their linguistic competence.

References

Afzal, S. (2013). Using of the First Language in English classroom as a way of scaffolding for both the students and teachers to learn and teach English. **International Research Journal of Applied and Basic Sciences**, 4(7), 1846- 1854.

Ahmad, B. H., & Jusoff, K. (2009). Teachers' code-switching in classroom instructions for low English proficient learners. **English Language Teaching**, 2(2), 49-60.

Arthur, J. & Martin, P. (2006). Accomplishing Lessons in Postcolonial Classrooms: Comparative Perspectives. **Botswana and Brunei Darussalam Comparative Education**, 42(2), 177-202.

Ariffin, K. and Husin, M.S. (2011) Code-Switching and Code-Mixing of English and Bahasa Malaysia in Content- Based Classrooms: Frequency and Attitudes. **The Linguistics Journal**, 5, 220-247.

Brooks-Lewis. *(*2009). Adult Learners' Perceptions of the Incorporation of their LI in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. **Applied Linguistics,** 30(2), 216-235.

Demir, H. (2012). The role of native language in the teaching of the FL grammar. **Journal of Education**, 1, 21–28.

Kumar, N.S & Narendra, M. (2012). A study of code switching in relation to ESL. **Language in India.** V (12), pp. 57-61.

Magid, A. & Mugaddam, A.H. (2013). Code Switching as an Interactive Tool in ESL Classrooms. **English Linguistics Research**, 2(2), 31-42.

Mart, C.T. (2013). The facilitating role of L1 in ESL classes. **International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences**, 3(1), 9-14.

McMillan, B. A., & Rivers, D. J. (2011). The practice of policy: Teacher attitudes toward "English only". **System,** 39(2), 251-263.

Milroy, L. and Muysken, P. (eds.) (1995). One Speaker, Two Languages: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Code-Switching. **New York: Cambridge University Press.**

Modupeola, O. R. (2013). Code- Switching as a teaching strategy: Implication for English Language teaching and learning in a multilingual society. **IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science,** 14, 92-94.

Seyyed, H.T. and Zohre Q,. (2015). L1 Use in EFL Classes with English-only Policy: Insights from Triangulated Data. **C.E.P.S Journal**, 5(2).,159-175.