Students' perceptions towards lecturers' code-switching in english classroom setting

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Abstract: *Language code switching (CS), the shift from the target language to learners' mother tongue is a quite common teaching practice nowadays where English is used as a medium of instruction in classroom. This study aims to search for the perceptions of the non-majored students at University of Finance and Marketing towards the practice of code-switching by their lecturers in English classes. The survey involving 78 students from four different faculties revealed that the students had a positive perception towards their lecturers' code-switching as they felt more relaxed with less anxiety, learned in an interactive environment, enjoyed the class better, and made progress and improvement thanks to lecturers' code-switching practice since they could notice their mistakes, acquired more new lexis and be able to give responses to lecturers' questions. More importantly, they did not perceive that their lecturers switched code quite occasionally because of their limited English proficiency but for academic purposes: facilitating students' comprehensions and clarifications of the lesson.*

Keywords: *Code switching, language perceptions, English - Vietnamese code switching*

1. Introduction

Code-switching (CS), a situation when a person swaps languages, usually one's first and second language interchangeably, for different intentions (Gumperz, 1982) has been a topical debate among scholars. Research on CS reveals that the use of more than one language in English classroom is a common phenomenon in a bilingual class. CS has been employed by instructors not only to instruct learners to do classroom tasks but also give them encouragement to get them involved in learning activities to complete the tasks. Nguyen et al (2016) and Van (2024) find that English-Vietnamese code-switching can facilitate the teaching and learning of general English in Vietnam. Thus, CS is a common teaching method in their EFL/ESL classes.

However, many advocates of English-only policy or monolingual approach in EFL/ESL education believe that language code-switching is a hindrance in second language acquisition. One reason is that it cut down the amount of the target language exposure which is the main source of linguistic input in English classes for students. Lectures' CS practice also shows the lecturers lack credibility and language competence which might result on negative attitudes among learners.

In light of the debates surrounding lecturers' code switching, educators and researchers have different opinion on lecturers' Cs, then do the learners have the same ideas as them? There is a need to examine students' perceptions towards their lecturers' CS practice in English classes.

Research question: *What are the students' perceptions towards their lecturers' CS in English classes?*

2. Content

2.1. Literature review on language code switching

2.1.1. Code switching

The term CS has been defined in different ways by researchers. According to Myers (1990) and Wardhaugh (2010), code-switching is the alternate employment of two or more language varieties inside the same utterance or within the same exchange. Sharing the same idea, Bailey (1999) states that when bilingual or multilingual speakers utilize two or more languages in a single verbal encounter, this is known as code-switching. Language changes can happen within turns, between turns, and between sentence components. Gemperz's also defines CS as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems."

2.1.2. Code switching in EFL classes

CS has been a controversial topic among researchers and educators, especially those who focus on second language learning. Many agree that

teachers employ CS to help students learn second languages. According to Wooland (2004) there are three major reasons why CS is used in English language instruction: pedagogical, administrative, and interactional purposes.

With regard to educational goals, there is consensus regarding the usefulness of CS in pedagogy. Specifically, CS is used to make instructions clear, to translate challenging words or phrases, and to clarify complex grammar points, new terms or vocabulary. In terms of administration, CS has been found to be a useful tactic for controlling the classroom. Lecturers use CS practice in class to draw leaners' attention or give feedback on their misbehavior. In addition, code-switching has been employed for interactional goals and regarded as a communication technique to foster good relationship between instructors and students. It can create a learning environment with familiarity, less stress and anxiety in the classroom so that learners are able to learn in an effective and successful way.

2.1.3. Students' attitudes towards lecturers' code-switching practice

Despite the belief held by some that code-switching is a restriction to language acquisition, its benefits to students are undeniable. A study from Schweers (1999) reveal that a larger number of students believe that their mother tongue should be utilized in their English classes, especially for making clarifications for complex ideas, presenting new materials, defining unfamiliar words, and clarifying the connection between English and their mother tongue language.

Similarly, previous research has shown that ESL learners have positive attitudes towards code switching. They hold a view that lecturers' CS facilitates them in understanding the target language, helps them to learn a language in a better way, and they give more respect to the teachers who switch code between the English and mother tongue during lectures.

2.2. The study

2.2.1. Respondents

The respondents in this study involved 78 non-English majored students from four different faculties of University of Finance and Marketing, and of mixed genders and ages ranging from 18 to 20 years old. They had already taken a general course in English from previous semester

2.2.2. Data collection

The data was collected from a survey which consisted of a questionnaire with questions grouped into four themes (1) respondents' profile, including gender, subject, faculty and current semester, (2) students' opinion on lecturers' code-switching practice in classroom. (3) their feelings towards lecturers' CS, (4) their opinion on how lecturers' code-switching impacts their understanding of the lesson. The statements in themes 3 and 4 used a four-scale Liker: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree while the statements in theme 1 employed a four-point Likert scale: always, often, sometimes, seldom. The responses from the respondents were then analyzed by using Excell to count percentages and frequencies in order to illustrate the learners' perceptions towards lecturers' code-switching.

2.3. Findings and discussions

The respondents in this study consisted of 23 males (36%) and 55 females (64%) from four different faculties including, Business administration, Accounting, International Business, and Logistics. All of them were taking a second general English course in their third semester.

2.3.1. Students' opinion on lecturers' CS practice

The respondents' responses revealed that the lecturers used CS in English classes quite frequently for various purposes, with explaining grammatical rules (72.7%) explaining the meaning of new words (71,3%), clarifying challenging concepts (60.4% for often and 15.6% for sometimes), giving instructions to classroom tasks and activities (69.4%). The other purposes including checking students' understanding, maintaining class disciplines accounted for around 57% for *often* frequencies and slightly under 10% for *sometimes*.

At tertiary level, lecturers shift between English and Vietnamese quite frequently in English classes because they believe it can help students' learning process. They actually want to ensure learners' understanding of the lesson. However, they do not overuse CS, they code switch when necessary. Common occasions that lecturers use CS in language classroom are mainly for explaining grammatical points, new words and sentences, clarifying the difficult concepts, giving instructions to classroom tasks and activities, checking leaners' comprehension and managing classroom.

2.3.2. Learners' feelings about lecturers' CS

The results from the study showed that a large number of students agreed they felt relaxed and

comfortable to learn in the class when their lecturers used CS (77.8%), they felt easier to take part in class activities (76.7%), they gained useful information (74.2%), it made the learning more interactive (67%), it created a close relationship between lecturers and students (6.9.5%) they enjoyed the class (70.6%) and they would love their lecturers to still use CS in class (65%), All in all, a high percentage of respondents (82.2%) agreed that they did not doubt their English instructor's language competence when they code switch in class.

When teaching English to college students, it's important to provide them a relaxing learning environment that motivates them to learn, especially when they have difficulty understanding the language. If the content of the lesson is not easy for them to comprehend, they might lose their interest and feel lost behind. By using language code switching, it can produce a comfortable environment for learning, make the understanding process of the subject matter less burdensome and thus boost the learners' capacity to understand the lesson content. And when they feel comfortable with this learning mode, they get motivated to get engaged in class activities and enjoy learning. In addition, lecturers' CS creates a closer relationship between teachers and students, making them feel at ease to comprehend the lesson

2.3.3. Learners' opinion on effect of lecturers' CS on their understanding of the lesson

Majority of respondents agreed that due to their lecturers' code switching, they better comprehended the lesson (73.6%), they were able to deliver answers to the questions from their teachers (67.4%) and they acquired more lexical items (70%). They also benefited from the lecturer's explanations for challenging concepts and recognized their misunderstanding (59%). Moreover, they strongly agree that they made progress thanks to lecturers' CS practice (75.9%).

Thanks to lecturers' shifting between the target language to learners' mother tongue for different purposes, learners believe that they can better understand the lesson. Specifically, they acquire more vocabulary, getting excited to engage in class activities by giving responses asked by their lecturers. They also think that they are able to learn a lot from the lecturers' explanations for difficult concepts and know how to notice their mistakes pointed out by their lecturers, thus enabling them to correct them.

All in all, the students enjoy the classes which gives them motivation to learn and thus improve their achievement. This suggests that a positive influence on learners' comprehension level is stimulated by lecturers swapping between English and Vietnamese in class.

3. Conclusions

The study discussing lecturers' CS in English classes at University of Finance and Marketing found that CS was an advantageous tool for language teaching. From the study scope, it is concluded that CS was employed quite occasionally by lecturers as a language strategy to facilitate learning and teaching process for it provided plenty of pedagogical advantages. It was in agreement with numerous previous research that CS has been a universal phenomenon because it helps to facilitate the teaching and learning process rather than a restriction in language acquisition. The results revealed that students had positive perceptions towards CS practiced by their lecturers in class.

They believed that their lecturers' CS had positive impact on their comprehension level of the lesson content and academic performance. However, the research only focused on the perceptions of students and lecturer's opinions were not part of the study. Thus, it is suggested that research on teachers' perceptions towards CS be conducted to in order to get a comprehensive conclusion.

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