

Afghan EFL Lecturers' Perceptions of Code-Switching

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Abstract: Code-switching is explained as switching between two languages at the same time while conversing in the same discourse. The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers toward code-switching. This study used a qualitative research approach in which the data was collected via semi-structured interviews with five EFL lecturers. The lecturers were interviewed to explore their perceptions and reasons for code-switching, and the extent to which they practice code-switching in their classrooms. The results revealed that the lecturers in the study had positive perceptions of code-switching and believed it as a beneficial strategy in facilitating the learning process. However, they also conveyed that an excessive practice of code-switching should be avoided. The study results also disclosed that the lecturers practiced code-switching for various functions such as explaining difficult concepts (translation), explaining complex grammatical points, clarifications, and giving instructions. Finally, the paper provides recommendation for further research.

Key Words: Code Switching; Perceptions; Afghan; EFL Lecturers; EFL Context.

1. INTRODUCTION :

A large population of the world is deemed to be bilingual or multilingual today. A bilingual person is the one who has command of two languages, and a multi-lingual person is the one who has the command of more than two languages (Mackey, 1962). These bilingual or multi-lingual speakers usually utilize two or more language when they talk or shift amongst languages. This sort of usage of languages is referred to as Code-switching. According to Mackey (1962), code-switching does not only mean the use of two distinct languages at the same time, but it also denotes to the utilization of two or more varieties of one particular language as well. Code-switching is a particularly popular topic in countries that use two languages or are bilinguals.

Different authors have defined code-switching in distinctive ways. Valdes-Fallis (1977) describes code-switching as using two languages at the same time. Heller (1989) asserts that generally, code-switching is the use of two or more languages inside the continuous dialogue. Chana (1984) refers to code-switching as the “juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems.” A similar definition is provided by Weinreich (1953) who asserts that code-switching happens when bilinguals switch from one language to the other because of change in a dialogue.

From the definitions above, we can conclude that code-switching is the switching amongst two or more languages simultaneously when using words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in the same dialogue or conversation by bilinguals or multi-lingual.

Code-switching is used for different functions and purposes. Gumperz & Hymes (1972) categorize code-switching as situational and metaphorical. The former happens with the change in the situation while the latter happens with the change in the topic. Furthermore, Gumperz (1982) reveals six main functions of code-switching:

1. **Quotation marking:** in this situation, code-switching is used for quoting or reporting another person's utterance.
2. **Addressee specification:** in this situation, code-switching is used to invite someone to join in the dialogue. In other words, by using code-switching one can direct the message to other addressees in a conversation.
3. **Interjections:** here code-switching is used to “mark an interjection or sentence filler” (p.77).
4. **Reiteration:** in this function code-switching is used for elaborating or better comprehension. In other words, in reiteration, a message in one language is repeated in the other with the intention of clarification or emphasis.
5. **Message qualification:** code-switching is used to emphasize a statement above.
6. **Personalization versus objectification:** “personalization vs. objectification relates to things such as the distinction between talk about action and talk as action, the degree of speaker involvement in, or distance from, a message, whether a statement reflects personal opinion or knowledge, whether it refers to specific instances or has the authority of generally known fact.” (p.80).

Meanwhile, some scholars argue that another key purpose of code-switching is identity-making. In other words, people code-switch with the intention of showcasing their belonging to a specific ethnicity, tribe, or religion.

The phenomenon of Code-switching is quite common in language classes as well. According to Lin (2008), code-switching is the practice further than a single linguistic code by teachers and students. Lin adds that one can easily observe code-switching in English language classrooms of EFL countries. Pei-shi (2012) asserts that code-switching in EFL and ESL settings have been extensively studied since the 1990s. Hence, there is a huge quantity of literature available regarding code-switching in bilingual contexts, both EFL and EFL (Gumperz, 1982; Lin, 2008; Li, 2008; Pei-shi, 2012).

In researches carried out on code-switching, one of the most common topics is concerned with the examination of students and teachers' perceptions toward code-switching. In the meantime, Schweers (1999) and Tang (2002) describe code-switching as a debatable issue in the language classroom, and both students and teachers have varied perceptions toward the phenomenon. In other words, a number of researchers reveal that the students and teachers had positive perception toward code-switching, but other researchers suggest the opposite results.

Though, the attitudes of teacher and students toward code-switching has been studied by researchers in many countries; for example, Schweers (1999) in Spain, Tang (2002) in China, Nazary (2008) in Iran, Kim Anh (2010) in Vietnam. However, there is a lack of empirical research to investigate the issue in Afghan context. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to explore the perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers toward code-switching in the English Department of a public university. More specifically, this research tends to investigate the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers toward code-switching?
- For what purposes do the lecturers code-switch in their classes?
- To what extent do the lecturers use code-switching in their classes?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Code-switching is an arguable topic in the language classroom. There are certain rules regarding the use classroom language for students and teachers. These rules are specified in language teaching methodology which teacher used in classrooms. Certain approaches encourage code-switching, while others are against it arguing that code-switching may hinder the acquisition of target language (Lin, 2008).

According to Harmer (2007), Tang (2002), Schweers (1999), and Myers-Scotton (1993) instructors often code-switch in their classrooms for different function and purposes:

- Interpretation and clarification of subject;
- Explain complex grammar points, phonology, cross-cultural issues, and spelling;
- Explain complex ideas;
- Evaluation of comprehension;
- Management;
- Save class time, as a substitute for a lengthy explanation in the target language;
- Affirmation and stimulation of participation;
- Pass on meaning through providing the L1 equivalence through translating L2 items or sentences;
- Humour and sign of bilingual identity.
- Explanation of errors;

2.1 Perceptions toward Code-switching in Language Classroom

As mentioned earlier, perceptions or attitudes toward code-switching are different. On the one hand, some studies indicate that students and teachers held positive attitudes toward code-switching and argued that it is beneficial. The main arguments in favor of code-switching are: a) interpretation and clarification of subject, b) explain complex ideas; c) management; d) affirmation and stimulation of participation; and e) saving time.

On the other hand, there are also researches that indicate the pupils and teachers had negative perceptions toward code-switching. The main arguments against code-switching in EFL classes are that code-switching hinders language learning (Eldridge, 1996); hence, they argue that merely the target language ought to be utilized in class. Eldridge suggests maximizing the use of the target language and minimizing code-switching. Cook (2002) supports Eldridge's argument and asserts that the maximum usage of the target language creates a more genuine and credible class.

Below is an account of a number of previously conducted studies investigating the perception or attitudes of teachers and students toward code-switching.

2.1.1 Studies Reporting Positive Perceptions toward Code-Switching

Schweers (1999) conducted a study, at the University of Puerto Rico, examining the attitudes of teachers toward code-switching. Her research revealed that code-switching does not only obstruct learning but plays a facilitating role in language learning (assists in comprehension). The study adds that when the teachers used Spanish in the class, it made students feel relaxed and confident and also assisted the students to acquire the English language better. The study results also discovered that teachers used code-switching for various purposes such as explaining difficult terms, complex ideas, complex grammatical rules, and giving instructions.

Tang (2002) directed a similar research in Chinese EFL setting. Questionnaire, classroom observations, and interviews were used to collect data. The research revealed that the teachers and learners mutually advocated the judicious and appropriated use of L1 in their classes. Both the teachers and students expressed that code-switching did not only obstruct learning but plays a facilitating role. The study also adds that teachers code switch for different purposes such as explaining the meaning of difficult terms, complex grammatical rules, complex ideas, and giving instructions.

Ahmad & Jusoff (2009) studied the attitudes of teachers and learners in University of Malaysia. The research discovered that the teachers maintained positive attitudes toward code-switching. Moreover, the findings reveal that the teachers saw code-switching as a beneficial practice in teaching but only in teaching students with low level of proficiency in English. The teachers used code-switching for: classroom management, clearing up new terms, comparison of L1 and L2 grammar, review of comprehension, and building a stress-free atmosphere.

Al-Nofaie (2010) carried out a similar study in Saudi Arabia. The research used questionnaires, four observations of one classroom, and interviews to collect data. The study revealed that the teachers and learners had positive attitudes toward code-switching. Furthermore, the results indicate that the code-switching was practiced in special circumstances. Though the teachers stressed the significance of code-switching in their classrooms but also argued that “the untimely and excessive use of L1 should be avoided because it may hinder learning English” (p. 90).

In an Indian university, Younas et al. (2014) carried out a research investigating attitudes of students and teachers and how EFL teachers influence the target language learning. The study revealed that both students and teachers had positive attitudes toward code-switching. Furthermore, the study adds that nearly all the students indicated that they felt happy with their teachers’ code-switching. The students believed that code-switching reduced the pressure of learning the English language. The teachers mostly practiced code-switching when students had difficulty to comprehend certain vocabulary, concepts, and terms of English.

2.1.2 Studies Reporting Negative Perceptions toward Code-Switching

Cheng (2013) examined the perceptions of teachers toward code-switching in China. The findings of the study discovered that the teachers had negative perceptions of code-switching. The study puts forward two primary reasons why the teachers had negative perceptions of code-switching. First, the teachers believed that if they code switch, school rules would be broken as they are told by the school administration only to use the target language. The second reason was that if students code-switch, their language competence is doubtful. In Saudi Arabia Dweik’s (2000) study reveals similar negative perceptions. The teachers who code switched were described as weak in English.

Rahimi and Jafari (2011) investigated students and teachers’ perceptions toward code-switching in Iran. Their study brought to light that the majority of the learners and teachers thought that sometimes the use of L1 (Persian) should be minimized even in the situation where it might scaffold learning since code-switching decreases the practice of the target language in the class.

Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz (2011) conducted another study in Iran investigating the perceptions of teachers and ‘pre-university students.’ Video recordings, class observations, and interviews were used as research tools. The study revealed that an excessive use of L1 had a de-motivating influence upon the learners. The study further reveals that when the teachers used Persian, usually to translate from English, this made the students expecting Persian every time and the students also started to use Persian excessively.

Dykhonova (2015) conducted a study in Kazakhstan. The results of this study indicate that most of the teachers had negative perceptions of code-switching. Furthermore, in regards to the code-switching by the teachers, most of the students also had negative or at least neutral attitudes. The teachers conveyed that they do their best not to code-switch in their classes, but when it happens, it is only for clarification of ambiguous terms or concepts that take much time explaining in the target language (English).

As discussed throughout the paper, code-switching is a common phenomenon in EFL classrooms. The function and purposes of code-switching differ as of one person to another and also from one condition to another. Hence, it is valuable to explore, in general, the perceptions of Afghan EFL university teachers toward code-switching and also explore the functions, reasons, and contributions of code-switching in their classes.

Therefore, this small qualitative research aims to explore the attitudes of Afghan EFL lecturers code-switching, and the functions, motives, and influences of code-switching in EFL classes as of the perspectives of the lecturers.

3. METHODOLOGY:

This study is described as a case study, and it is utilized to extract an in-depth understanding of the issue. A case study according to Frankel & Wallen (2004) can be referred to as a detailed study of an individual, a small group, an organization, community, or even a country.

The study uses purposive sampling in which the participants of the study are five Afghan EFL university lecturers. All five participants are currently pursuing their postgraduate Master's Degree in Education TESL, at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia. Since the study is qualitative, semi-structured interviews were used as the main instrument to collect data. Berg (1989) states that semi-structured interview is directed in "a systematic and consistent order, but it allows the interviewers sufficient freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted to inquire far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions" (p. 17).

The interviews were conducted in five sessions, each session with one participant which took about 15 minutes. The interviews comprised of four main questions:

- Do you practice code-switching to your classes? Why or why not?
- What are the functions of your code-switching?
- How does code-switching contribute to the learning process?
- To what extent do you code-switch?

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the research findings based on the interviews carried out exploring the perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers in a public university toward code-switching. The results of this study are presented under four main themes: reasons for code-switching, functions of code-switching, advantages of code-switching, and the frequency of code-switching.

4.1. Reasons for Code-Switching

First and foremost, in response to the first question (Do you practice code-switching in your classes? Why or why not?), all five lecturers revealed that they usually do code-switching during their instructions. The lecturers stated that they most often code-switch while teaching freshman classes since those students usually do not demonstrate a high level of proficiency in the English language. One of the participants stated that he usually code-switches in his English classes in faculties other than the Language and Literature Faculty where English subject is taught as ESP and students possess a low level of English proficiency. However, he uttered that when teaching in English department, he rarely practices code-switching.

"When I am teaching English in the sub-faculties, faculties other than English language and literature, I code-switch from Dari to English in order to let the students know that they are studying English and they are in English class." (Teacher D)

In terms of the need to code-switch from English to Dari or Pashto, Teacher A stated that he often code-switches in his freshman class because it is difficult for his students to understand certain concepts. Thus, code-switching helps his students to learn difficult topics such as complex grammar concepts, and difficult terms. Moreover, he believes that when he code-switches, it saves him time to do other activities.

"I most often code-switch in freshman classes because sometimes it's hard for the students to comprehend some concepts which are taught and code-switching saves time for the teacher." (Teacher A)

Likewise, Teacher B expressed that the reasons he usually code-switches in his classes due to the fact that code-switching facilitates the learning process and provides opportunities for his students to get the most from his instruction.

"I do code switch as it facilitates the learning process and it provides an opportunity for the students to get the maximum learning out of the class." (Teacher B)

On the other hand, Teacher C stated that since English is learned as a foreign language in Afghanistan, even he as an English teacher sometimes forget the meaning of simple words; hence according to him code-switching really helps him in explaining complex terms and lets one make sure the skills are properly conveyed to the learners.

"Sometimes when I code-switch, just I want to make sure that the skills are properly transferred." (Teacher C)

The other participants expressed similar reasons for code-switching in their classes. Teacher D uses code-switching to make sure that low-level students have comprehended the lesson. Teacher E declared that in his freshman class, the majority of his class request him to do code-switching and that is the reason why he usually code-switch in his classes.

“I can tell you that, more than fifty percent of them or 65 or 60percent would like me to talk to them in their own language.” (Teacher E)

4.2. Functions of Code-Switching

In response to the second interview question regarding the functions or situations where to practice code-switching, the respondents expressed that they code-switch from the English language to students' L1 to translate difficult English terms or sentence or when they tell a proverb or anecdote to facilitate the learning process. Moreover, three of the participants indicated that they practice code-switching more often in teaching complex grammatical rules such as active and passive voices, subject-verb-agreement and verb tenses.

“More specifically, I do code-switch in my grammar subject instruction. When teaching complex grammatical concepts, students request from me to explain the subject in their L1. Also, sometimes when I want to compare some English grammar concepts with Dari grammar, I code-switch from English into Dari.” (Teacher B)

In general, all five participants utilize this linguistic approach to translate difficult words, phrases, and sentences into students' mother tongue. Furthermore, these lecturers use code-switching to give more clarification on the topic under discussion in the class since they believe code-switching into the students' native takes less time for explaining difficult concepts. Hence, one participant (Teacher C) considers code-switching as gap filling tool which eases the process of conveying a message by the lecturers to the learners.

“In a situation where the teacher tells a joke and proverb related to the topic which is under discussion. Generally, code-switching serves as filling the gap.” (Teacher C)

4.3. Advantages of Code-Switching

All participants mentioned various advantages for the application of code-switching in EFL classes. They inclined that code-switching helps the learning process to a great extent. Thus, the participants mentioned that code-switching is a useful linguistic tool in the process of learning. According to these lecturers, code-switching assists lecturers to explain complex concepts using little efforts and time. Furthermore, they believe that it eases communication between students in the class and helps lecturers to convey their messages to the students in a situation where it is difficult for the students to comprehend the message in the target language.

Teacher A considers code-switching as a bridge between the native language and the target language:

“Basically, code-switching is a bridge between the native language and the target language. It has helped me on many occasions to keep the interaction going with the students and as well as between the students. Through code-switching, I was able to pass the message comprehensively.” (Teacher A)

Teacher D mentioned an exciting experience regarding his students' attitudes towards code-switching. He stated that whenever he code-switches from English to Dari and explains things, he observes a kind of gestures and expressions on students' faces indicating that they have learned what was discussed in English earlier. Similarly, Teacher E stated that application of code-switching helps him a lot especially during tests and finally examinations when students find it difficult to understand the test instruction in English. He added that when he explains questions on test in Dari, it really helps his students to know exactly how to do their tests.

“We do Code-switch to help them and when we explain things in Dari and the students show a kind of gestures and expressions that they learned what was discussed in English.” (Teacher D)

“Sometimes students find it difficult some students find it difficult to understand easily the instructions of the test right? Then it makes me to code switch to interpret or translate the sentences the questions to their own language to their mother tongue.” (Teacher E)

4.4. Frequency of Code-switching

The last interview question asked the participants to what extent do they practice code-switching in their classes. All five lecturers had a similar opinion and expressed that they practice code-switching in a controlled manner that is where it is necessary and advantageous to the learning process.

“I do code switch but not very excessively. I only use the first language of the students at occasions where I feel it would help the students better learn what I am teaching.” (Teacher A)

I wouldn't say I practice code-switching quite a lot in my classes since I believe that excessive code-switching hinders learning. Therefore, I code switch under necessary circumstances, that is when I believe that students can benefit if I code-switch.” (Teacher B)

“Well, I do view code-switching as an effective strategy to help the learners in their learning process but only if its use is controlled or limited to a few time. This is because code-switching excessively prevents the students from the exposure to the target language. (Teacher E)

5. DISCUSSION:

The results of the study reveal that both lecturers (direct participants) and students (indirect participants) maintained positive perceptions toward code-switching. They viewed code-switching as a useful tool in the process of learning the foreign language (in this case English). Although this particular study is centered on the perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers, not students, from the responses of the teachers' it could be inferred that Afghan students were in favor of code-switching in their English Classes. This claim is established upon the replies of three teachers who stated that sometimes their students want them code-switch to their L1. For example, Teacher D expressed that his main reason to practice code-switching was that his students insisted that he code-switch into their L1. Furthermore, the results of the study point out those Afghan EFL lecturers' code-switching practices were quite similar in purpose to those of their counterparts in Iran, China, Turkey, Philippines, etc. where the English language is learned as a foreign language. Similar to the findings of this study, in those contexts, EFL teachers also practiced code-switching for the purpose of clarification, conveying messages to their learners, explaining complex concepts and motivating students' engagements in the instruction. Likewise, teachers code-switched in order to explain a grammatical point which as they believed would otherwise be difficult for the learners to understand it in only English (Schweer, 1999; Tang, 2002; Al-Nofaie, 2010; Khonakdar & Abdolmanafi-rokni, 2015).

In terms of the advantages of code-switching for facilitating the learning process, the findings of the study revealed that especially in the freshman classes where most of the students demonstrated low English proficiency, teachers practiced code-switching and believed that it could be utilized as a great communicative tool. Similarly, the belief that when teaching low English proficient students, teachers' code-switching is an effective teaching strategy is supported by (Ahmad & Jusoff (2009). Likewise, Abad (2010) asserts that for creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere where students fully engage and interact, code-switching can be used as a handy and useful tool.

Furthermore, as discussed in the literature review section of this study, code-switching too often can prove disadvantageous and hinder the learning since it is believed that code-switching very often prevents students from speaking the target language (Schweer, 1999; Tang, 2002). Likewise, in this study, the lecturers also supported the idea that the practice of code-switching in language classroom should be limited. The lecturers expressed the same reason found in the studies of Schweer (1999), Tang (2002), Ahmad & Jusoff (2009), and Karunaratne (2009) who state that excessive dependency on the mother tongue in EFL classrooms prevents from the achievement of already set objectives of lessons.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS:

The purpose of this study was to investigate Afghan EFL lecturers' perceptions regarding code-switching. The findings of this study reveal that Afghan EFL lecturers practiced code-switching on different occasions and for various purposes especially as they felt that code-switching helps to ease the process of learning. They sometimes utilized code-switching to explain complex concepts while putting less effort and saving class time. On other occasions, they utilized it when teaching complex grammar points and explaining difficult vocabularies or terminologies. As part of reviewing the related studies, this paper also presented the findings of the related literature in different countries within similar EFL contexts. Moreover, the paper illustrated both advantages and disadvantages of code-switching presented in the related literature to build the background for this research. The findings of this paper indicate that all the participating lecturers in the study held positive perceptions regarding code-switching and its various functions.

However, the study has only used a qualitative research method and investigated only the perception of the lecturers; thus, makes it difficult to generalize the results. Therefore, it is recommended that to have a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of code-switching in Afghan EFL context, a further study that also investigates students' perceptions and views about code-switching be carried out as the students are equally essential stockholders in teaching and learning process.

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