



A STUDY ON CODE-SWITCHING IN GENERAL ENGLISH CLASSES AT A TERTIARY INSTITUTION IN VIETNAM

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Abstract. This study aims to investigate a phenomenon of bilingualism in which the use of the target language (English) is switched to the mother language (Vietnamese), known as code-switching. More specifically, the study focuses on the purposes of teachers' code-switching, the perceptions of teachers towards using Vietnamese and the amount of the usage of code-switching from English to Vietnamese in the General English classes with pre-intermediate proficiency level at a tertiary institution. A mixed-method design was employed to collect comprehensive data from the participants. Quantitative data was collected from a 15-item of questionnaire adapted from Selamat's work [13]. Qualitative data was collected through interviews with three English-as-a-Foreign-Language teachers at the research site. The findings from the questionnaire and interview revealed that the teachers used Vietnamese for pedagogical, administrative, and interactional purposes. The results of the study also indicated that the majority of the teachers code-switched to Vietnamese to accommodate low-proficiency students and explain difficult concepts of grammar and vocabulary to the students. From the findings, suggestions were put forward to how to use code-switching effectively.

Keywords: code-switching, English as a Foreign Language, General English

I. Introduction

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to teaching English to students whose first language is not English. In Vietnam, teaching EFL is taught from elementary until tertiary level. The goals of teaching EFL in Vietnam are to increase students' knowledge of foreign languages, help them use English for communication and obtain English as a skill when applying for jobs.. Gradually, English has become a part of every aspect of life today. It exists in the workplace, business, and even in education. Thus, it is added to core courses in every school and is taught from elementary to university level. At University of Foreign Languages, Hue University, EFL teachers (hereafter UFL, HU) teach General English to students of different disciplines from member universities of Hue University. The students' majors is not English but medicine, economics, physical education, humanities and so on... All the non-English major

students learn English as a compulsory general course. Each General English (hereafter GE) class is arranged based on students' enrolment in the same or a different major and especially on students' level of English prescribed by the English proficiency placement test. The total time for teaching English is 30 or 45 hours for each credit, i.e. those at beginner levels, A1 or A2 according to CEEF, 45 for pre-intermediate, B1 per semester. In second language teaching, there are many debates on the use of code-switching (hereafter CS) in language classes. Code-switching in Vietnamese EFL tertiary setting level is not an exception as teachers' CS from English to Vietnamese is a mean of providing students with the opportunities to communicate in the language apart from enhancing their understanding [4]- [6], [15]. On the other hand, Nguyen [10] suggested that the target language should be dominant in the second language classroom. It is crucial because students need to be exposed to the target language instead of mixing two distinct languages in discourse or using students' L1 only. Sharing the same idea, Wooland [15] also pointed out that overuse of CS in EFL classes may make students overtly dependent. Many researchers who have studied code-switching, therefore, are still concerned about whether the teacher should use code-switching in their language classes or use only the target language in the class. They also want to understand more about the purposes of CS, and teachers' perceptions toward the use of code-switching in EFL classes in Vietnam. This research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the purposes of *EFL teachers' code-switching from English to Vietnamese in GE classes at pre-intermediate level at university?*
2. *What are EFL teachers' perceptions of code-switching from English to Vietnamese in GE classes at pre-intermediate level at university?*

II. Literature review

2.1. Definitions of key terms

According to [5], code-switching is "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems" (p. 59). Code-switching is "an individual's use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange" [14], 2004, pp. 73-74). In this study, code-switching from English to Vietnamese is considered as the alternative use between English and Vietnamese in General English teaching.

2.2. Code-switching in EFL classes

CS has been a controversial topic among researchers, particularly those who study the field of second language acquisition. They revealed that the teachers use CS in language classes as a

strategy to facilitate second language learning [2]; the teachers used students' L1 for administrative purposes and classroom management [6]- [8]. In [15], the author found that CS in English language teaching occurs for three purposes: pedagogical, administrative, and interactional purposes.

As for pedagogical purposes, there has been an agreement on the effectiveness of CS in pedagogy. In particular, CS was used to facilitate students' learning in language classes [1], [3], clarify the instructions, translate difficult words or phrases, and explain difficult grammar and new vocabulary [9], [10]. Regarding administrative purpose, code-switching was used as an effective strategy for exercising classroom management [15]. The teachers switch codes to get students' attention, or comment on the misbehavior of the students [16]. Besides, code-switching was used for interactional purposes, it was considered a communicative strategy to build rapport between teacher and students and between students with each other. A study [16] revealed that CS was for creating a stress-free classroom environment so that students could learn effectively and successfully.

III. Research Method

To achieve the aims of the current study, a mix-method approach was employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire for this study was adapted from Selamat's work [13] to suit the context of the present study. Specifically, the first part of the question was structured to collect information on participants' background such as age, gender, teaching experience, and qualifications. The second main part of the questionnaire consists of two sections. Section 1 has two questions about whether the teachers use code-switching in their classes. Section Two - *the practice of teachers' code-switching*, includes 15 statements about the purpose of teachers' employing CS from English to Vietnamese. The teacher participants are asked to put a tick in the right box representing their level of agreement, ranging from strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), neutral (N), agree (A) to strongly agree (SA). Due to time constraints, the questionnaire was administered online through Google Form. The usage of an online questionnaire gives respondents the simplicity to answer it at their own best time. Recently, online data collection is widely used in research studies. It has little impact on the respondents, and it is well-established [13]. In order to triangulate the data, the researcher interviewed three EFL teachers to find out their purposes and perception toward CS in their classes.

Teacher participants

The participants of the research were 41 EFL teachers teaching General English courses at a tertiary institution. Thirty-nine were female and only two were male teachers. They have been

teaching General English courses from A1, A2 to B1 levels. All of the participants were M.A. holders and graduated with a degree in TESOL. Some are doing their Ph.D studies and four have obtained their Ph.D degrees.

IV. Results

This section explained the findings both from the questionnaire and the interview. A total number of 39 (95.1%) respondents agreed that teachers use CS from English to Vietnamese while teaching English. However, another 2 (4,9 %) participants disagreed with using CS in their classes. The findings from the interview also revealed that CS from English to Vietnamese was employed by teachers. In support, in an interview, two of three participants stated that they practically switch to Vietnamese in the class. For example, Teacher C mentioned in the interview, he switched to Vietnamese (about 50 %) during his teaching. In contrast, Teacher B stated that she used about 75% of English in her classroom interactions because language classroom input should be in the target. This could be due to multiple purposes such as administrative, pedagogical or interactional, which will be demonstrated in detail later based on the results from the questionnaire and interview with the teachers.

Regarding the frequency of the use of CS from English to Vietnamese by the teachers, the results of the study also indicated that (Fig. 1) that 58.5 % (24) respondents sometimes switched to Vietnamese in English classes. Notably, 4.9% (2) of respondents denied the use of CS in their class. This result was compatible with the findings from the interview. Take some of the teachers' particular statements as examples: *"I sometimes code-switch to Vietnamese because my students can focus and participate in tasks and activities more effectively and successfully"* (Teacher A) or *"I sometimes code-switch to Vietnamese to help my student enhance their understanding of the lesson content"* (Teacher B). Interestingly, Eldridge J. (1996) and Schweers (1999) stated that CS should be used intentionally and for specific pedagogic purposes at a low level, and gradually, the use of CS should be limited, even minimized to zero so that the students' exposure to the target language optimally. The following figure presents the results from the questionnaire in relation to the frequency of CS by the teachers in their classes:

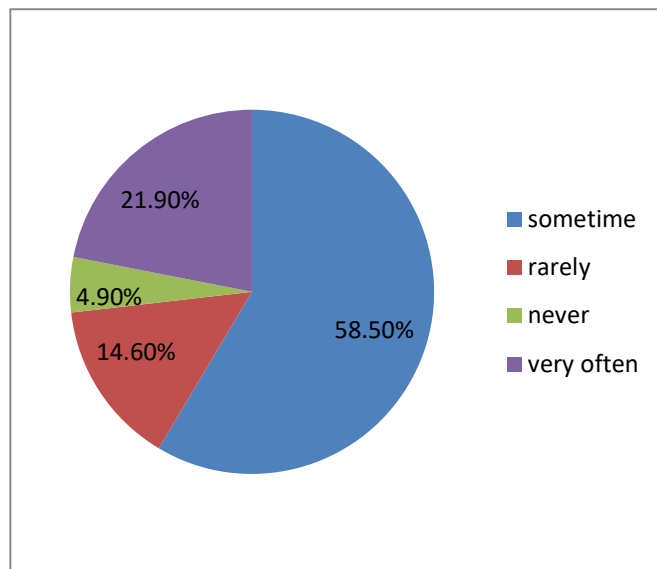


Figure 1: The frequency of code-switching use by teachers

In what follows, the pedagogical purposes were highlighted from teachers' CS practices in the classrooms and interviews from teachers

Code-switching for pedagogical purposes

This study reported findings similar to previous studies, CS was used for different purposes, but clarifying the meaning of difficult concepts (63.4%), explaining grammar structures and rules (63.4%) and explaining new words and sentences (63.4%) were highly agreed by teachers [5], [7]. Data from the interview also present similar results. Below are some examples:

I think using code-switching in teaching English is so interesting and effective because I do not need to force students to remember a number of difficult terms and concepts by heart, which is too stressful for them. In fact, besides learning English, they need to learn other subjects at school, so I think that is one of the reasons why they are not interested in English. However, when I use code-switching in class, my students seem to feel much more comfortable, which can facilitate their English learning process. (Teacher B).

I can frankly say that, during English lessons, I mostly used Vietnamese while teaching both grammar and new concepts because I wanted to help my students can understand the key knowledge to pass the tests successfully (Teacher A).

Figure 2 illustrates the teachers' CS for pedagogical purposes which were revealed from the questionnaire:

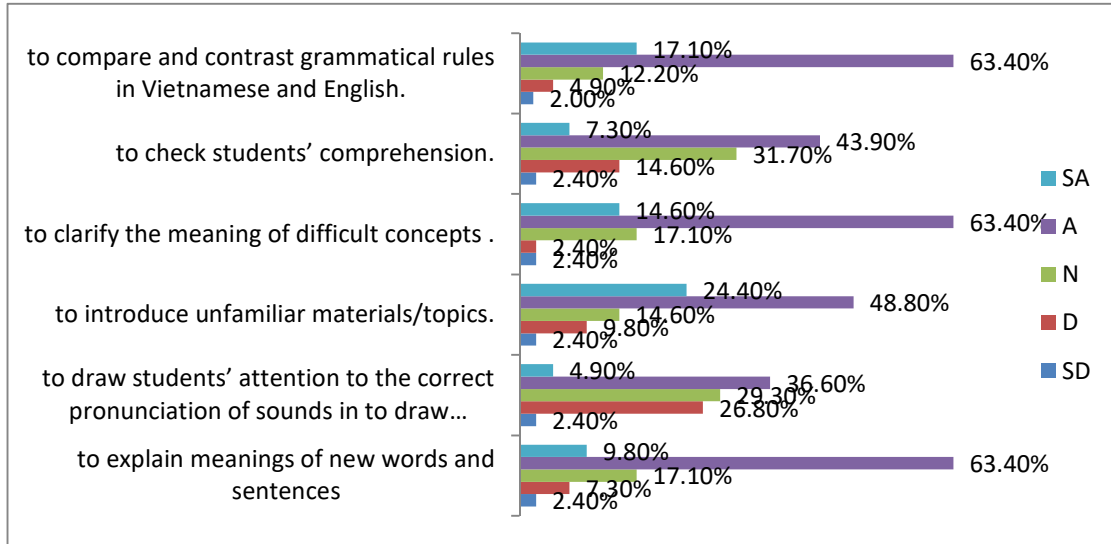


Figure 2: Code-switching for pedagogical purposes

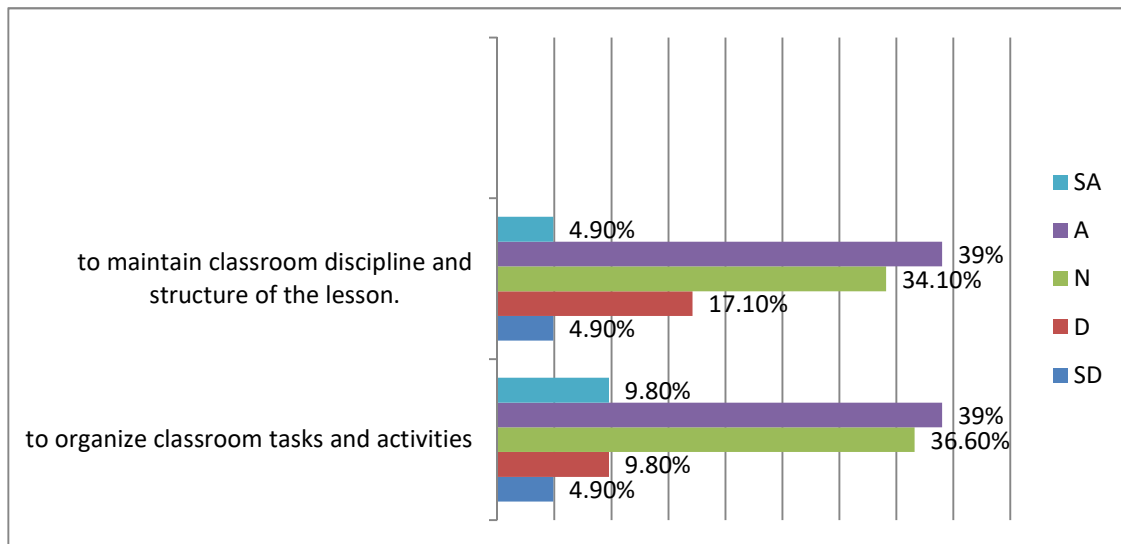


Figure 3: Code-switching for administrative purposes

Code-switching for administrative purposes

The findings from the questionnaire (Figure 3) were in line with those of the previous studies [4] and [7]. 39% of respondents showed that teachers agreements on the use of CS to maintain classroom discipline and structure of the lesson and 39% also agreed that CS was employed to organize classroom tasks. *In the interview, teacher A confirmed that he sometimes switched to Vietnamese to manage his class.*

Code-switching for interactional purposes

Figure 4 illustrates the findings from the questionnaire in relation to some different purposes of teachers’ CS. Notably, 31,75% of respondents agreed that CS was used in case they wanted to give feedback to their students like praising, and remarks. However, in the interview, *Teacher C stated that she sometimes used Vietnamese when her students tried their best to give answers unsuccessfully.* Besides, the current study reported that CS was used to create a more comfortable learning atmosphere (48.8%) and increase students’ motivation and confidence in learning English (36.6%) and build the relationship between teacher and student (43.9%). In the interview, *Teacher A stated that teachers switch to Vietnamese when the level of English used in the textbook is difficult to the student’s level of understanding or when the teachers intend to reduce students’ stress.*

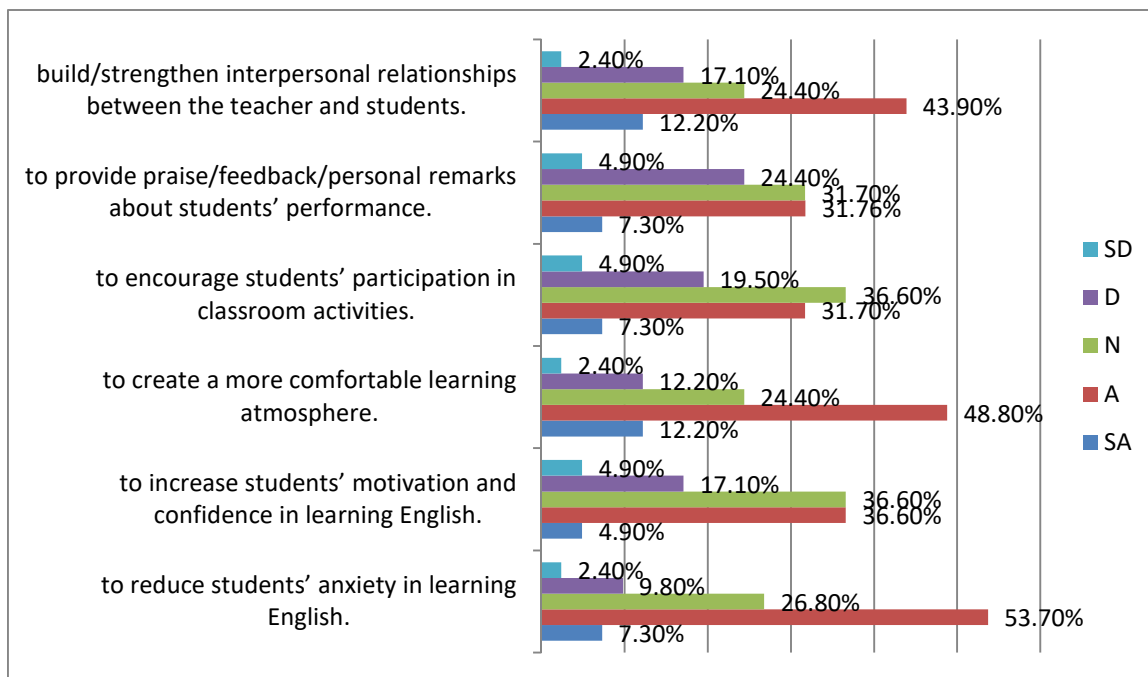


Figure 4: Code-switching for Interactional Purpose

V. Discussion

Overall, it could be seen that code-switching from English to Vietnamese was widely used by the EFL teachers in this study, which was in line with [7], [8],[10]. It was found from the findings from the questionnaire and interview that EFL teachers sometimes employed CS in their classes. These results were supported by the previous studies [4], [6], [10], [14].

In terms of the purposes of the use of CS by EFL teachers, this study reported similar findings to previous studies, including code-switching for pedagogical purposes [4], [6], [10], [14], administrative purposes [4] and [7] and interactional purposes [5], [7].

The majority of EFL teachers in this study hold a positive perception toward the use of code-switching from English to Vietnamese in the classes [2], [3]. Two out of three teachers agreed that CS was also seen as a strategy to facilitate students' understanding, motivate students, and save time. In contrast, one out of three teachers stated that EFL teachers should use the target language in the classroom and minimize the overuse of Vietnamese in the classes. Apart from those findings, it was worth noting that EFL teachers in this study perceived that the use of CS should be considered as an instructional strategy in their L2 classes.

VI. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate whether EFL teachers made use of CS from English to Vietnamese and what CS by the teachers was used for and finally how EFL teachers perceived the use of CS in their GE classes. The findings revealed that code-switching is seen as a pedagogical strategy and is most widely used by EFL teachers in GE classes at pre-intermediate level. Code-switching is employed by teachers to give more clarifications and explain difficult concepts to the students, explain the grammar rules explicitly. It is also used to give feedback or personal remarks about the students' level in the class. More interestingly, apart from the previously reported benefits of CS, this study also maintained that CS could help teachers deal with their lack of confidence about their pronunciation and avoid students' judgments. In summary, the use of code-switching by EFL teachers in English language learning classes is indispensable. It is suggested that the EFL teachers should use CS from English to Vietnamese judiciously and the frequency and the amount of using CS should be also dependent on the students' proficiency level.

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