CODE-SWITCHING IN EFL CLASSROOMS: FUNCTIONS AND LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract. This thesis examines the functions of code-switching between the first language and English in EFL classrooms and learners' perceptions of this practice. Based on classroom-based and survey research from various EFL contexts, the main discourse functions of code-switching are analysed and their relation to learners' attitudes and proficiency level is discussed. Practical recommendations on the balanced use of the first language in EFL instruction are proposed.

Keywords: code-switching, EFL classroom, learner perceptions, first language use, classroom discourse, Uzbek EFL learners.

Introduction

Multilingual classrooms are the global norm, yet language teaching policy has often been shaped by a monolingual ideal in which the exclusive use of the target language is treated as the marker of effective instruction. In EFL contexts, including Uzbekistan, teachers and learners nevertheless move between English and their shared first language during lessons. This practice, known as code-switching, has long been viewed with suspicion. However, classroom research shows that it serves identifiable communicative and pedagogical purposes rather than reflecting a failure to use English. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the functions of code-switching in EFL classrooms and learners' perceptions of it.

Theoretical Background

Code-switching is the alternating use of two languages within a single interaction. Poplack (1980) distinguishes two main types:

– inter-sentential switching – between sentences;
– intra-sentential switching – within one sentence.

The functional-pragmatic approach treats classroom code-switching as a purposeful discourse strategy rather than a sign of linguistic deficiency. Cook (2001) argues that judicious first-language use can support, rather than hinder, second-language learning.

Functions of Code-Switching in the EFL Classroom

Classroom studies show that code-switching is functionally motivated. In Turkish EFL classrooms, both teachers and students switched languages for a wide range of purposes, with inter-sentential switching occurring more often than intra-sentential switching (Horasan, 2014). The most common functions are: meta-language – explaining grammar and vocabulary; checking comprehension; seeking equivalents of words; classroom management and giving instructions; creating a supportive, friendly atmosphere.

Learners' Perceptions of Code-Switching

Survey research reports generally favourable attitudes. A study of Turkish university students and instructors found that both groups viewed code-switching as a facilitating tool while stressing the need

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for balanced use (Karakaya & Dikilitaş, 2020). In Libyan EFL classrooms, teacher code-switching was positively associated with students' attitudes and motivation (Adriosh & Razı, 2019). At the same time, lower-proficiency learners tend to value code-switching more than advanced learners, and excessive reliance on the first language may limit the development of speaking and writing skills.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Replacing strict "English-only" policies with a balanced approach to first-language use;
2. Using the first language mainly for explaining difficult grammar and checking comprehension;
3. Reducing code-switching gradually as learners' proficiency increases;
4. Raising teachers' awareness of the functions of code-switching;
5. Considering learners' opinions when planning classroom language use.

Conclusion

Code-switching in the EFL classroom is not a failure of language pedagogy but a systematic communicative resource. Moderate and purposeful use of the first language can support comprehension, motivation and classroom rapport, provided it does not replace sustained engagement with English. Further research in the Uzbek EFL context would help develop context-specific guidelines for its use.

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