

Code-Switching in the Classroom: The Perspectives of Bhutanese Teachers

Pema Dendup

Yadi Central School, Ministry of Education, Bhutan

peecedendup@gmail.com

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 29/08/2020

Accepted: 26/09/2020

KEYWORDS

EFL learners, culture-loaded words, intercultural awareness, word connotation, communication breakdown.

Abstract

Code-switching (henceforth as CS) is the use of two or more languages in conversation. It is sometimes known as 'language mixing'. CS may occur between sentences, known as 'inter-sentential' CS; and it may also occur within a sentence, known as 'intra-sentential CS'. CS is a linguistic feature of Multi-lingual societies, as they are gifted with more privileges to use various languages. CS in Bhutan is prevalent in offices, schools, institutes and market places, formally or informally, knowingly or unknowingly. This paper highlights the attitude of Bhutanese teachers towards CS in the classroom in the process of teaching and the purposes of CS in teaching. The data for the study comprises the responses of the attitudinal test questions designed based on a Likert Scale of 20 teacher- respondents (n=20) from the various levels of Schools in Bhutan. The findings indicate that the prevalence of CS in the classrooms is used to interpret complex ideas, translate questions, seek confirmation, check students understanding, also to build solidarity and CS is most prevalent in primary education. Therefore, CS is a unique linguistic requirement in education but there is a negative towards the use of CS in the classroom in Bhutan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bhutan has a complex linguistic situation- there are nineteen different vernaculars spoken across the country (Gyatsho, 2003, cited in Dendup, 2020). It is a Multi-lingual society, with different ethnic groups of Ngalop, Sharchop, Nepali, and other indigenous groups including the Tibetans. Several dialects are spoken across the country with Dzongkha as an official national language. Besides the indigenous languages, English is either a second or third language learned at school for Bhutanese. Not only is it the medium of instruction for the majority of subjects taught at school, but also an indispensable language for foreign relations.

The alternation of two or more languages is on the rise among bilinguals and multi-lingual and it's a powerful feature of informal communication (Garrett, 2010, p.11). Swann and Sinka (2007) observe that the definitions vary greatly that the term can also encompass switching between dialects. Bhutan, as a multilingual society, code-switching is not a new norm. It is consciously or unconsciously witnessed in various domains. It is an observed phenomenon at schools, institutes, market places, and notably, it is the language of

parliamentarians. Ryan & Giles (1982) is also with the view that school is one most important place where there is contact between speakers of different language varieties. Swords (2010) also supports that schools become linguistically and culturally diverse, and therefore, recommends for varied strategies to cater to the needs of learners.

People have different attitudes towards CS, and it is viewed both positively and negatively. CS is an issue, which has been broadly discussed and used in linguistics. It is the topic which bears a mixed attitude towards it. Though CS is an accepted norm in the Bhutanese society, in various spheres of lives, this paper studies and presents the situations that lead to CS, the types CS in the classroom and more importantly, the attitudes of Bhutanese teachers towards CS in the classroom in the process of teaching lesson delivery.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The richness and diversities in languages have empowered people to employ various languages in their day to day communication. Legere (1992, cited in Singh, 2005) explains that code-switching occurs when modern topics, such as the world of business or politics are discussed rather than traditional issues such as narrating stories from the past. It is most prevalent in multilingual and bilingual societies and its occurrence has some repercussions on the society. Dressler (1988) mentioned that language death occurs in unstable bilingual or multilingual speech community as a result of language shift from a regressive minority language to a dominant majority language. Moreover, Edwards (1994, cited in Garrett, 2010) asserts that code-switching is often frowned by monolinguals, and dismissed as 'gibberish'. Weinreich (1968, cited in Boztepe, 2003) describes the ideal bilingual as the one who "switches from one language to the other according to appropriate changes in the speech situation (interlocutors, topics, etc.), but not in an unchanged speech situation, and certainly not within a single sentence". (p.2). From a structural perspective, there are two types of code-switching; namely "inter-sentential", which occurs between sentences, and 'intra-sentential code-switching, which occurs within the same sentence (Poplack, 2001). Dolma (2010) also points out that code-switching happens to those who are not good in either language. Apparently, they lack vocabulary to converse in a single language. In Bhutan, code-switching between English and Dzongkha is a usual scenario and has even led to the genesis of Dzonglish. As it is apparent from the above lines; it mostly occurs when one is at the loss of words and it questions one's fluency. This is a serious weakness. Dorian (1998, cited in Singh, 2005) also, however, supports the lack of technical terms or concepts incur the necessity to borrow, which in turn may act as a cause for the code switch. On the contrary, Singh (2005) argues that the phenomenon is considered nothing more than speakers making full use of the resources offered by a bilingual situation, and is in no way stigmatized.

Code-mixing can also lead to the evolution of new languages. As Muysken (1993, cited in Singh, 2005) mentioned that when code-mixing is so extreme or frequent it can lead to an origin of language known as Media Lengua 'halfway language' which is spoken as the usual everyday language.

In the field of education, some teachers use CS as one important tool to teach students and meet their diverse needs. In line with this, Swords (2010) brings out that "classrooms have become culturally and linguistically diverse, and we need teaching strategies that celebrate and use that diversity as a springboard to wider knowledge" (p.10). Various studies have been conducted into the use of CS at different levels. A study was conducted by (Shartiely, 2013) to study the various functions of CS between English and Swahili in a bilingual or multilingual classroom at the University of Dar es Salaam. Taha (2009) reports

that lecturers code-switch between English and Arabic both as a pedagogical tool and strategy to initiate effective classroom interaction and topic change and cultivate solidarity with students. Similarly, (Li, 2004) found that lecturers code-switch to between Cantonese and English to achieve a communicative goal and to clarify difficult concepts and to reduce the social distance to assist psychologically. In Shartiely (2013), code-switching in university classroom situation: A Case study of the University of Dar es Salaam, the paper delineated on how and why the lecturers at the University of Dar es Salaam code-switch during classroom interaction, this paper presents the attitude Bhutanese teachers towards using CS

3. METHODOLOGY

This study resorted to employing both structured and unstructured attitudinal questionnaire based on a Likert scale scoring procedure.

3.1. Research Questions

This research aims to address the following questions:

1. What is the attitude of the Bhutanese teachers towards using CS in the classroom?
2. What are the situations that lead to CS of languages?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of CS in the classroom?
4. What are the types of CS (intra-sentential or inter-sentential) that occurs in the classroom?

3.2. Participants

The respondents were selected from two different levels of schools, namely Primary and Lower Secondary Schools. There were a total of twenty (20) teacher participants. Fourteen participants had Sharchopkha (One of the major vernaculars in the eastern regions of Bhutan) as their first language, two had English as their first language and four had Dzongkha as their first language. Fourteen (14) participants were males and six (6) participants were females. Six participants were from Primary schools and 14 (fourteen) participants were from lower secondary school.

The participants varied in terms of their service in teaching. Five participants belonged under the category 1-5 years, 10 (participants) under the category 6-10 years, four (4) participants under the category 11-15 years and one (1) participant under the category 16-20 years.

3.2. Materials and Procedures

A questionnaire survey designed, administered and sent via emails to the respondents after seeking prior permission and consent from the participants and their respective school heads which took at least a couple of weeks. Piloting was conducted in small groups to check the reliability and validity and it underwent some change based on the constructive feedback received. The respondents were from different levels of schools, as mentioned above, and also from different geographical locations, such as rural, semi-urban and urban which facilitated to have a comparative study of the data and triangulation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data in the table below were obtained based on the attitudinal questions as per the Likert scale scoring procedures as follow: Strongly agree -5 points, Agree 4 points, Not sure 3 points, Disagree -2 points and Strongly disagree-1 point

Table1

Statement	Response Frequency					Response Agreement (%)	Response Disagreement (%)	Response Don't Know (%)
	SA	A	DK	D	SD			
Students' participation would increase if code-switching is allowed for students in the classroom.	3	11	3	2	1	14(70%)	3(15%)	3(15%)
Code-switching will not help in mastering any languages.	10	4	1	2	3	14(70%)	5(25%)	1(5%)
It would be of great help for low achievers if code-switching is used.	6	7	5	2	0	13(65%)	2(10%)	5(25%)
Code-switching would enable teachers to teach well.	1	9	3	5	2	10(50%)	7(35%)	3(15%)
When I code-switch between English and Dzongkha children seem to understand better.	6	14	0	0	0	20(100%)	0	0
Students in lower grades must be taught using code-switching techniques.	4	7	3	4	2	11(55%)	6(30%)	3(15%)
Ministry of Education should work on it and implement it.	2	3	6	7	2	5(25%)	9(45%)	6(30%)
Some subjects demand code-switching.	2	15	2	1	0	17(85%)	1(5%)	2(10%)
Teachers can deliver their lesson fluently.	0	11	3	4	2	11(55%)	6(30%)	3(15%)
Code-switching helps me to complete syllabus on time.	1	3	2	10	4	4(20%)	14(70%)	2(10%)
Code-switching should be allowed in both writing and speaking	1	1	0	5	13	2(10%)	18(90%)	0
Weaknesses in languages force a person to use different languages.	7	5	3	1	4	12(60%)	5(25%)	3(15%)
Code-switching is an unhealthy language.	6	6	3	3	2	12(60%)	5(25%)	3(15%)

The table presents the findings based on the total scores and the averages of the responses agreement and disagreement of the teacher- participants. A unanimous 100% agreed with the statement “When I code-switch between English and Dzongkha, children seem to understand better”. This indicates the prevalence of CS in the classroom while teaching and the respondents are in favour of language alternation between English and Dzongkha as a useful means to aid the comprehension of any lessons delivered, mostly to explain complex ideas in the more intelligible language. More importantly, the use of Dzongkha in between English, mostly the inter-sentential CS helps build their bond of a student-teacher relationship. This confirms the findings of (Li, 2004) about the lecturer's code-switching between Cantonese and English to achieve a communicative goal and to clarify difficult concepts and to reduce the social distance to assist psychologically. Swords (2010) mentioned that “classrooms have become culturally and linguistically diverse, and we need teaching strategies that celebrate and use that diversity as a springboard to wider knowledge” (p.10). In light of this, 65% of the participants agreed with the statement, “It would be of great help for low achievers if CS is used” while handling with the low achievers. There is a multiplicity of learners; therefore, no single strategy is suitable for all learners. The need for CS arises when low achievers’ need has to be addressed so that their learning and standard is at par with high achievers. This takes place when there is an interpretation of the concept and interpretation of questions. CS in the context of Bhutanese classroom situation is also employed to seek confirmation, which is, asking questions, as stated below:

Teacher: Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. Ha go yi ga (Have you understood?)

Students: Yes, Sir.

Taha (2009) is worthy of note to discuss CS as a useful classroom technique to scale up the class participation. 70% of the teacher-participants agreed with the statement ‘Students’ participation would increase if CS is allowed for students in the classroom.’ A classroom with less or no participation can hardly achieve the learning objectives as it can kill the learners’ creativity and inquisitiveness to learn. Learners would actively participate only if what is taught is intelligible to them, and to make it comprehensive, foster involvement; CS is important. Though Edwards (1994, cited in Garrett, 2010) asserts that CS is often frowned by monolinguals, and dismissed as ‘gibberish’; but Singh (2005) emphasizes that there should not be any stigmatization related code-switching rather it should be treated as a resource. 80% of the respondents had the perception that some subjects demand to use more than one or more languages in the delivery of their lessons. More complex the subject is the more is the mixing of languages. As science subjects have more scientific jargons, the demand for code-switching is more than the arts subjects. Conversely, the teaching of history and civics would also be desirable and automatic for the use of more local terms, as they talk about on culture, values, art, building the solidarity. 55% of the respondents agreed that CS is useful in the delivery of their lessons fluently. However, interestingly, 70% of the respondents are against the view of the CS in the timely completion of syllabuses. With regards to the statement, “Students in lower grades must be taught using CS techniques”, 55% of the respondents responded positively about using CS with the students in the lower grade which can make the small children understand in their early ages of transition from home environment to a school setting. On the contrary, 70 % of the respondents view CS as a threat to learning and mastering any languages and 60% of the respondents’ label CS as unhealthy language practice. 60% of the respondents also attributed CS to speakers who have low command over the target language. To stress on this, Muysken

(1993, cited in Singh, 2005) mentioned that when code-mixing is so extreme or frequent it can lead to an origin of language known as Media Lengua ‘halfway language’ which is spoken as the usual everyday language.

Dolma (2010) also mentions about the genesis of a new variety of language, for example, Dzonglish. If this ever happens, it can put one's sovereignty at stake, because one's language is the one's identity. The occurrence of CS is the observed phenomenon and attributed with various useful functions such as fostering class participation, easing the understanding of complex ideas, building solidarity; startlingly, a majority 90% are disagreeing with the statement “CS should be allowed in both writing and speaking”. CS should not be allowed both in writing and speaking.

This states the importance and the need to use English only or Dzongkha only while delivering English lesson and similarly, use the other target languages judiciously in both spoken and written. The findings indicate the incidences of CS in the classroom, but there is a negative attitude towards using CS in the classroom.

Analysis of Open-Ended Questions Survey Responses

Do you think this type of language mixing in the classroom is good or bad? Why?

The open-ended responses have been analysed by coding the responses into two categories: positive and negative. The alphabets used as codes are (P) for positive and (N) for negative.

Table 2. Types of responses.

Respondents	Responses	Code
Teacher 1	It does not look nice.	N
Teacher 2	The problem in speaking and writing.	N
Teacher 3	Students will fail to learn the language properly.	N
Teacher 4	Good for the lower classes.	P
Teacher 5	Not good for instructions.	N
Teacher 6	Convenient for the lower classes.	P
Teacher 7	Students can't master any language.	N
Teacher 8	Weaker students can understand.	P
Teacher 9	Affect the written language.	N
Teacher 10	Will create confusion.	N
Teacher 11	Good for the lower classes.	P
Teacher 12	Lessons taught can be understood.	P
Teacher 13	Discourages from learning a good language.	N
Teacher 14	Students would wait for an explanation.	N
Teacher 15	Not a healthy habit.	N
Teacher 16	Students won't be able to talk in good language.	N
Teacher 17	Not bring any improvement.	N
Teacher 18	Makes concepts clear.	P
Teacher 19	Students will not catch up.	N
Teacher 20	Will not help in mastering any one language.	N

Table3. A number of participants in each category of responses.

Themes	Code	No.of participant (n=20)	Percentage
Positive	P	6	30%
Negative	N	14	70%
	Total	20	100%

The open-ended survey question presents the convergence of the finding from the closed-ended question. In other words, both closed-ended and open-ended questions show the practice and incidences of CS in the classroom. As per the data, 30% of the respondents had a positive attitude towards mixing different languages in the classroom while teaching. To them, though the use of CS has some repercussions in the learning and mastering of language in the classroom in particular and development of new and unhealthy languages, CS may be used in the classroom. To quote some remarkable responses of the respondents: Teacher 4 remarked, CS is “Good for lower classes.” And similarly, Teacher 6 remarked, CS is “Convenient for lower classes.” Teacher 8 also remarked that CS is “good for weaker students to understand.”

70% of the respondents view code-switching negatively while teaching, though it is prevalent and the need is felt usually in the lower grades for easy comprehension of lessons. Teacher 13 remarked CS, “Discourages from learning a good language.” Teacher 16 also had a similar opinion, “Students won’t be able to talk in good language.” Likewise, to Teacher 15, CS is “Not a healthy habit” and similarly, teacher 16 expressed that “Students won’t be able to talk in good language.” On the whole, the findings of the open-ended response state that there is a negative attitude towards employing CS in the classroom.

Table 4. Shows the number in each category of response type and their percentage.

Responses	Number	Percentage
Always	1	5%
Most of the time	3	15%
Sometimes	16	80%
Never	0	0
Total	20	100%

The table illustrates the occurrence of CS in a classroom situation in the process of teaching and learning. A majority 80% of the participants use code-switching 'sometimes'. It means that CS is not a must everyday practice. It is necessitated by a situation. 15% of the respondents use it 'most of the time' and 5% of the respondents use it 'always' and there is none who never uses code-switching in the classroom. The greater use of CS, 'most of the time' and 'always' is determined by their difficulty level of the subject taught and grades level.

5. CONCLUSION

Code-switching is prevalent in Bhutanese classroom. The teachers use CS to explain a complex concept, to build up a student-teacher relationship for a better and conducive learning environment, seek confirmations and translate questions. The use of CS aided in catering the need of diverse learners. Importantly, CS is feasible with learners of lower

grades; as their second language would be less intelligible. However, CS is viewed negatively, though there is an incidence of its prevalence. It is a barrier to learning the target language and mastering the language. On a larger level, CS can lead to the birth of unhealthy languages which at the later ages pose a threat to the dominant languages. The findings indicate that CS should not be encouraged in both spoken and written languages in the classroom despite its significant functions in the classroom instruction. Therefore, there is a negative attitude toward the use of code-switching in the classroom.

5.1. Limitations

The findings of this paper are based on small convenient sampling; and therefore, the findings of this research cannot be generalised. A bigger sampling could have been undertaken for reliability. The subject of the research was restricted to a handful of teachers and a similar survey could have been administered to a group of students for better triangulation of the data. The survey was also confined to questionnaire survey responses only. For better triangulation of data, an interview, a video /audio recordings and observation of teaching could have been conducted. This paper calls for a larger sampling and in-class observation of teaching to gather data.

REFERENCES

- Boztepe, E. (2003). Issues in Code-Switching: Competing Theories and models, 3, 2-27. Retrieved on 29 August from <http://journals.tc-library.org/index.php/tesol/article/view/32/37>.
- Dendup, P. (2020). The Beliefs and Practices of Bhutanese English Teachers in Teaching Grammar in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classroom in Bhutan. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 1(2), 84-99. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v1i2.32>
- Dolma .(2010,19 June). On the birth of Dzonglish.The Bhutan Observer,p.1. Retrieved on 2September from http://bhutanobserver.bt/2910-bo-news-about_the_birth_of_dzonglish.aspx#sthash.6whuElvs.dpuf
- Garrett. (2010). Attitudes to Language. New York: Cambridge University Press. http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/e02610/csl_introduction.pdf
- Jones, C.M., & Singh, I. (2003). Exploring Language Change. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Li, D.(2008). Cantonese-English code-switching research in Hong Kong: A Y2K review. *World Englishes* 19(3): 305-322.
- Mohan, M. (1994).Understanding Language Change. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- Poplack, S. 2001. Code-switching: Linguistic. In N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes (eds.) *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*. pp. 2062-2065.
- Ryan & Giles. (1982). Attitudes towards language variation. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.
- Shartiely, N.E. 2013. Discourse Strategies of Lecturers in Higher Education Classroom Interaction: A case at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Doctoral dissertation. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

- Swann, J. and I. Sinka. 2007. Style shifting, code-switching. In D. Graddol, D. Leith, J. Swann and M. Rhys (eds.) *Changing English*. New York: Routledge
- Taha, T.A. 2008. Language alternation in university classrooms. *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 35(4): 336-347.
- Wheeler, R., & Swords, R. (2010). Code switching Lesson. *Grammar Strategies for Linguistically diverse writers*, 109-112.
http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/e02610/csl_introduction.pdf

APPENDIX

Attitudes of Bhutanese teachers towards code- switching in the classroom.

This survey questionnaire survey is being carried out to collect data related to code-switching in the classrooms and find out the attitudes of the Bhutanese teachers towards it. ***Code switching is when a person mixes two languages in a single sentence or a conversation (Heller, 1988)*** Please kindly help me by putting down your honest responses and opinions. Instructions for each of these questions are provided against the required questions. Any findings related to this questionnaire shall be maintained confidential.

1. What is your first language (L1)?

.....

2. Are you a male or a female? (*Tick inside the appropriate box*).

Male ☐ Female ☐

3. What are your teaching subjects?

.....

4. How long have you been teaching? (**Please encircle your category**).

a. 1-5 years c. 11-15 years

b. 6-10 years d. 16-20 years

Others:

(Specify).....

5. Which languages do you often mix?

.....

6. I code switch when concepts are difficult. (*Tick your choice*).

Agree ☐ Disagree ☐

7. I don't like code switching to happen in the class.

Yes ☐ No ☐

8. How often do you code switch?

(Please encircle your choice).

- a) Always c) Sometimes
b) Most of the time d) Never

9. **Read the following and encircle any one choice. Explanations of ratings are provided below as follows:**

5-Strongly agree 4.Agree 3.Don't know 2.Disagree 1.Strongly Disagree

a) Students' participation would increase if code switching is allowed for students in the classroom.					
b) Code switching will not help in mastering any languages.					
c) It would be of a great help for low achievers if code switching is used.					
d) Code switching would enable teachers to teach well.					
e) When I code switch between English and Dzongkha children seem to understand better.					
f) Students in lower grades must be taught using code switching techniques.					
g) Ministry of Education should work on it and implement it.					
h) Some subjects demand code switching.					
i) Teachers can deliver their lesson fluently.					
j) Code switching helps me to complete syllabus on time.					
k) Code switching should be allowed in both writing and speaking					
l) Weaknesses in languages force a person to use different languages.					
m) Code switching is an unhealthy language.					

10. Do you think this type of language mixing in the classroom is good or bad? Why?

Author's Bio

Pema Dendup *is a school teacher at Yadi Central School, Bhutan. He holds an MA in English Language and Linguistics from the National University of Brunei Darussalam, Brunei. His research interests are in Applied Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis.*