

# **Conversational Code-switching among Turkish Learners and Teachers of English: Its Impact on Second Language Acquisition**

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## **Introduction**

This paper investigates the language choices of Turkish learners following the teachers' code-switching (CS) between Turkish and English in English second language (ESL) classrooms at a Turkish university in İzmir. By applying a conversational analysis (CA) approach, this paper illustrates how teacher-initiated and teacher-induced CS in an ESL classroom interaction can illuminate a particular interactional phenomenon and show its systematic properties.

Although several CS studies have been carried out in ESL classroom settings, the number of studies with respect to English-Turkish CS is limited. Eldridge (1996) focuses on teachers' attitudes on Turkish-English CS in the secondary school setting and outlines the implications of these for teacher training. My research focuses on teacher-learner interactions in ESL settings at a tertiary level. More specifically, I attempt to describe how teachers use CS within ESL lessons on the one hand. On the other hand, I examine the learners' responses to their teachers' use of CS and the impact this phenomenon has on their use of the target language, English. An understanding of the linguistic processes at hand will benefit teachers, curriculum developers, researchers, and learners of English and will yield a contextualised perspective on the phenomenon of CS, its form, and its function in the organisation of language usage in ESL classrooms.

## Theoretical Concepts

The definitions of bilingualism and bilingualism in CS research more specifically, range from free conversation (Auer 1998) to institutional talk (Valdés-Fallis 1978). Institutional talk differs from free conversation in the sense that there is an 'asymmetrical power relationship' (Markee 2000). In accordance with Valdés-Fallis' (1978:3) definition that a bilingual is one with varying degrees of proficiency in two languages and one who can draw from both languages in the same conversation, I regard the teachers and learners of my study as bilingual speakers of English and Turkish.

CS itself may be defined in terms of sociolinguistic (Milroy and Muysken 1995) or pedagogical (Martin-Jones 1995) perspectives, among others, and as ordinary (Wei 2002) or classroom (Martin 1999) talk. My research is related to the pedagogical perspective of CS in classroom talk. According to Valdés-Fallis' (1981: 95) CS is 'the alternating use of two languages at the word, phrase, clause, or sentence level.' This definition forms the basis of my article. The data collected for this study may be categorised into two types of CS viz. teacher-initiated and teacher-induced CS. I define 'teacher-initiated CS' as a type of CS in which the teacher switches to Turkish or English according to the pedagogical focus at a given point in time (e.g. to give L1 equivalents, to ask for L2 translations, etc.). The learner's response in either Turkish, English or Turkish-English CS indicates his/her alignment or misalignment with the teacher's pedagogical focus. On the other hand, I define 'teacher-induced CS' as a type of CS in which the teacher encourages learners to take a turn in Turkish, while using English (e.g. asking for the Turkish equivalent of an English word in English).

## Code-switching Studies in L2 Classrooms

CS studies in L2 classrooms have expanded primarily in three avenues. The one avenue is where researchers have promoted the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom. In this regard, Turnbull (2001) proposes that using the L1 in L2 classrooms is a useful teaching and learning strategy and should therefore be deliberately incorporated in L2 classrooms. The second avenue is one where researchers suggest that L1 use should be avoided. Polio and Duff (1994) argue that using the L2 as much as possible is critical and that the use of the

L1 is a waste of precious opportunities to practice the L2. In view of the third avenue of CS research in L2 classrooms viz. the use of both the L1 and L2 in the L2 classroom, Cook (2001) suggests that CS is a natural phenomenon and the concurrent use of L1 and L2 is inevitable in L2 classrooms.

Although there are many studies that suggest either avoiding or encouraging L1 use in L2 classrooms, this study does not aim to prescribe an 'ideal' foreign language environment. The purpose here is to describe the sequential environment where teachers and learners integrate CS into their interactional and pedagogical work in complex and constantly evolving ways. Thus, in this study, CS is understood from an emic perspective in which 'the viewpoint results from studying behaviour as from inside the system' (Pike 1967:37) rather than from an etic perspective viz. studying behaviour from outside of a particular system" (ibid). According to Markee (2000:44) conversational analysis (CA)-for-SLA helps to develop an emic perspective on how the participants display their understanding of the context they find themselves in.

An interesting tool used in an L2 classroom is scaffolding. The process that enables learners to move from their actual development level to their potential developmental level is referred to as 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner, and Ross 1976). My research considers CS as the strategy by which the teacher may provide access to English language learning/teaching (see Ferguson 2003). I interpret the teachers' code-switching patterns as a scaffolding technique (see Martin 1999 for similar conclusions). This suggests one possible way of promoting a convergence between CA, sociocultural and sociolinguistic theory (of which the notion of scaffolding is based on). In other words, the view that scaffolding occurs through the use of the linguistic strategy, CS within a given linguistic, pedagogic and social context (L2 classroom) and in relation to the institutional aim (to teach/learn L2) guides the theoretical development of this article.

## **Methodological Framework**

The data for this study was collected by means of classroom observations. This consisted of audio and visual recordings of lessons from six beginner level English classrooms. Transcripts of the lessons were examined according to the CA method of sequential analysis (Seedhouse 2004).

The research methodology I used in this paper is CA. Markee (2000:40) outlines four aims of CA. The first aim is to identify the structure of the conversation. CA reveals how participants align themselves to the underlying preferential structure of given conversation. Conversation analysts seek to demonstrate that conversation can not be conversation if universal interactional resources for making meaning such as turn-taking or repair does not exist. The second aim of CA is to identify the conversation's own autonomous context.

In order to demonstrate the existence of such universal interactional resources (e.g., turn-taking, repair, adjacency pairs, preference organisation), conversation analysts use prototypical examples which give discursive form to the phenomenon being analyzed. For instance, reading a turn as an invitation is contextually warranted by an invitation-relevant presequence, i.e. presence of an invitee and a following acceptance or rejection sequence. Thirdly, CA aims to establish the fact that there is no priory justification. Conversation analysts do not approach data with *a priori* hypotheses in mind. They believe that if no detail of conversation is disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant, then clearly, extremely fine-grained transcriptions will be required to capture the complexity of talk-in-interaction. Finally, the study of conversation requires naturally occurring data. Conversation analysts analyse naturally occurring data. They do not use laboratory settings to collect data. Thus, the need for naturally occurring data requires researchers to be extremely sensitive to the social context of data collection. These aims were carefully considered in the collection of the data as well as in the analysis.

In addition to the above, Seedhouse's (2004:228) summary of the three interactional properties that constitute part of the unique 'fingerprint' of L2 classroom interaction also guides this study. Firstly, language is both the vehicle and object of instruction. According to Seedhouse (ibid) this property 'springs rationally and inevitably from the core goal' which dictates that the L2 is the object, goal, and focus of instruction. Therefore, language has a unique dual role in the L2 classroom in that it is both the vehicle and object, both the process and product of the instruction. On the other hand, in other non-language subjects of study (e.g., history, engineering, etc.), language is only the vehicle of the teaching and learning.

Another critical property is the reflexive relationship between peda-

gogy and interaction. Seedhouse (2004:229) explains the reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction as 'the L2 classroom has its own interactional organisation which transforms the pedagogical focus (task-as-work plan) into interaction (task-in-process).' So, 'whoever is taking part in L2 classroom interaction and whatever the particular activity during which the interactants are speaking the L2, they are always displaying to one another their analyses of the current state of the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction, and acting on the basis of these analyses' (ibid). In my study, this property is illustrated through the analysis of the organisation of the learners' language choices upon teacher-initiated and teacher-induced CS.

The third property that Seedhouse (2004:230) espouses to is the fact that linguistic forms and patterns of interaction, which the learners produce in the L2, are subject to evaluation by the teacher in some way. In relation to this property, van Lier (1988:32) notes that 'everyone involved in language teaching and learning will readily agree that evaluation and feedback are central to the process and progress of language learning.' However, Seedhouse (2004: 230) highlights the fact that 'this property does not imply that all learner utterances in the L2 are followed by a direct and overt verbalised evaluation by the teacher.' An examination of the evaluation process is not within the scope of this study. However, in order to relate this property to my research setting, I suggest that it is possible for the teachers to avoid any explicit evaluation during observed conversation lessons altogether and to give learners an end-of-year grade or report on their oral performance.

My study follows Seedhouse's (2004:232) view that 'these three properties are universal, i.e., they apply to all L2 classroom interaction' and that these 'form the foundation of the rational architecture and of the unique institutional 'fingerprint' of the L2 classroom.' In this study, I find that learners strategically use CS to display alignment or misalignment with the teacher's pedagogical focus. This is an important finding because it provides a way of linking the organisation of L2 classroom interaction to institutional goals.

'Preference organisation' is another important methodological tool in this study. The definition of 'preference organisation', in CA terms, is 'the format for agreements, which is labelled as the 'preferred' action turn shape

and the disagreement format is called the 'dispreferred' action turn shape' (Pomerantz 1984:64). The rationale behind 'preference organisation' is that there are differences in the design of adjacency pairs (e.g., offers, which can be accepted or refused; assessments, which can be agreed with or disagreed with; and requests, which can be granted or denied) between their positive and negative alternatives. In this article, I shall define and exemplify how preference organisation, which is closely related to adjacency pair sequences, is organised in the observed ESL classrooms. In the L2 classroom context, the preference organisation of repair is linked to the teachers' pedagogical focus i.e., preferred learner responses orient to the pedagogical focus (Seedhouse 2004). In this study, I define repair in relation to CS preference, that is, when the teacher does not receive an answer to his/her L2 question, s/he repeats his/her question in the L1. There is a reflexive relationship between the pedagogical focus (in code-switched turns) and the organisation of repair. As the pedagogical focus varies, so does the organisation of repair. In other words, the preference organisation shows that a preferred response is affiliative, while a dispreferred response is disaffiliative (ibid).

## Data Analysis

A close inspection of the data reveals two recurring patterns of preference organisation in the learners' language choice upon the teacher-initiated and teacher-induced CS. Firstly, the teachers code-switch from the designated medium, English to Turkish to repair trouble when there is a delay in the learner's reply of more than one second. Secondly, the learners respond in English to align themselves with the teacher's pedagogical focus. The learners who respond in Turkish express their non-alignment the pedagogical focus and/or their need to invoke trouble or change alignment.

However, teacher-induced CS sequences are different from teacher-initiated CS sequences in terms of learners' preferred language choice (i.e., Turkish). The discussion follows in the following paragraphs with sample extracts taken from the same ESL classroom at the Modern Languages Department. There were eleven learners in the classroom. Extract 1 below is taken from a lesson that is a teacher-directed class discussion about New Year celebrations in Turkey. The pause time (in seconds) taken by the interlocutors are indicated in brackets.

- 1 ?T: okay .hh what is er (0.5) the best (0.5) New Year Evening for you?  
2 (0.5)  
3 what would be the best New Year for you?  
4 (1.5)  
5 *en iyi yılbaşı ne olurdu sizin için?*  
[tr: what would be the best New Year's Day for you?]  
6 (2.5)  
7 L1: er (0.5) birthday  
8 T: no no New Year  
9 (1.0)  
10 what would be the best New Year?  
11 (0.5)  
12 do you need the money to spend for the perfect New Year?

In the above sample extract, the teacher poses a question in L2 in line 1. After waiting for half a second, he repeats his question using different linguistic formatting in line 3. The teacher still gets no response in the one and half a second pause which follows (line 4), and he then code-switches to translate the question into Turkish in line 5. After a two and half a second pause, L1 takes the reply turn in line 7. The teacher repairs L1's reply in line 8.

On applying CA to this extract, I want to understand why the teacher code-switches to L1 after a lack of response and a lengthy pause and why the learner responds in L2 to the teacher's question in L1. In order to understand this, I need to refer to both sequential issues (preference organisation) and institutional issues (the organisation of L2 classroom interaction). As exemplified in the literature on CS in ordinary talk (Wei 2002), when a speaker in ordinary conversation does not obtain an immediate answer to his/her question (which would be the preferred option), the speaker will often repeat the question with modifications which are often simplifications. This is the sequential aspect. In the institutional L2 classroom setting, the teacher's question introduces a pedagogical focus, which in this case is that learners will produce an appropriate answer in the L2 to the question. For the institutional business to be carried out, it is essential that the learner understands the pedagogical focus. When the teacher does not obtain an

answer, the teacher modifies the linguistic forms in L2 to clarify the pedagogical focus. When this still does not produce the required response, the teacher code-switches in order to explain the pedagogical focus in the L1, which is easier for the learner to understand.

From this perspective, the CS further modifies and simplifies the linguistic forms. The CS represents one further move down the preference order. In the sample extract above and throughout the data, the learners produce a response after the teacher's CS. In order to determine whether this analysis is correct, we can employ the next-turn proof procedure and see how the learners analyse the CS. In both cases they respond by producing an answer in the L2, i.e., in orientation to the teacher's original question in the L2. By doing so, the learners display affiliation to the pedagogical focus, i.e., they recognise that the aim is for them to answer the question using the L2. They also thereby display their recognition that the aim of the teacher's turn in the L1 is to clarify the pedagogical focus for them. In the sample extract, the learner produces an answer in L2, but it is not precisely the answer targeted by the teacher's pedagogical focus and the teacher initiates repair in the hope of the learner producing a more appropriate answer in the L2. The analysis demonstrates the intertwinedness of language choice, sequence and pedagogical focus.

Extract 2 below also exemplifies the systematic use of preference organisation discussed above.

1 ?T: okay (.) hh on Tuesday night?

2 (0.5)

3 on New Year's night?

4 (1.0)

5 on Tuesday (.) last Tuesday?

6 (2.0)

7 *Salı günü?*

[tr: on Tuesday]

8 L4: (0.5)

9 er-

10 T: =*Yılbaşı gecesi?*

[tr: on New Year's Eve]

11 L4: I (2.0) study (0.5) English



The above extract is taken from a teacher-learner dialogue in which the teacher asks the learner what she did on New Year's Eve. In line 1, the teacher directs a question to Learner 4 in English but does not receive a reply after a pause of 0.5 seconds. Then, in line 3, the teacher asks the same question with a different linguistic formatting and waits for a slightly longer time (1.0 seconds) to receive a reply from the same learner. As the learner still does not answer, the teacher again asks the question with yet a different linguistic formatting in line 5. There then follows a pause of 2 seconds without reply. He then code-switches to Turkish in his repetition of the question in lines 7 and 10. This is consistent with the rest of the data, which reveal that the teacher code-switches into L1 to repeat a question after a pause of more than 1 second. The repetition of a question signals trouble in interaction that prevents the institutional business from proceeding. We can observe the pauses lengthening from (0.5) in line 2 to (1.0) in line 4 and (2.0) in line 6, following which the CS occurs.

Extract 3 further exemplifies the systematic use of preference organisation discussed above.

- 1 ?T: yeah  
 2 (1.5)  
 3 okay, change  
 4 (0.5)  
 5 change  
 6 (0.5)  
 7 clockwise *saat yönüne*  
 [tr: clockwise]  
 8 (0.5)  
 9 =clockwise. ((T shows the direction with a hand movement) )  
 10 L8: =/ *saat yönü\*ne*.  
 [tr: clockwise]  
 11 L2: *ama saat yönüne göre böyle oluyor*  
 [tr: but the clockwise direction is this way]  
 12 L12: *böyle ters oluyor*  
 [tr: it is reverse if it is like that]  
 13?T: *benim saatime göre-*  
 [tr: according to my watch]

- 14 (1.0)  
15 doğru böyle oluyor  
[tr: that's right it is this direction]  
16 (.)  
17 hh anti-clockwise then (.) anti-clockwise

The above extract starts with the teacher's classroom instruction in which she instructs the learners to change partners in order to carry on the role-play activity. She wants them to move in a clockwise direction around the classroom. After giving instructions (lines 1-7), the teacher code-switches to Turkish to give the equivalent of the English word in line 7. The teacher's pedagogical focus at this point is procedural and is simply for the learners to move and change partner. The teacher repeats the English word in line 9. Both Learner 2 and Learner 12 initiate repair to correct the mismatch between the propositional meaning of the word 'clockwise' (in both L1 and L2 in line 7) and the direction of the teacher's hand movement in lines 11-12. In lines 10, 11, and 12, the learners are not aligned with the teacher's pedagogical focus (i.e., to move and change partners); rather they are engaged in repairing the teacher's code-switched turn (line 7). They therefore use L1, indicating their misalignment with T's pedagogical focus. In line 15, the teacher accepts the learners' initiation of repair and self-repairs the instruction in English in line 17.

As Seedhouse (2004) demonstrates, learners do not always affiliate themselves with the teacher's pedagogical focus, for a variety of reasons. Learners' language choice may display their degree of affiliation or lack of affiliation with the teacher's pedagogical focus.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that teachers strategically use CS as a scaffolding technique when learners show alignment with the teacher's pedagogical focus (e.g., when dealing with procedural trouble and classroom discipline, when expressing social identity, when giving L1 equivalents, when translating into L1, when dealing with lack of responses in the L2, when providing a prompt for L2 use, when

eliciting L1 translations, when giving feedback, when checking comprehension in the L2, when providing meta-language information, and when giving encouragement to participate) at that point in the interaction. These findings, which can only be uncovered by using CA methodology, fit neatly within the organisation of L2 classroom interaction.

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## Appendix: Transcription Conventions

The transcription symbols used here are common to conversation analytic research, and were a slightly adapted version of Jefferson's (Jefferson, G. 1984. On the organization of laughter in talk about troubles. In Atkinson, D. & Heritage, J. (ed.): *Structures of social action: studies in conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.).

T Teacher

L1 Identified learner

// the point at which a current speaker's utterance is overlapped by the talk of another, which appears on the next line attributed to another speaker.

- ? Arrows in the left margin pick out features of special interest (teacher-initiated code-switching)
  - = the second speaker followed the first speaker with no discernable silence between them, or was "latched" to it.
  - (0.5) Numbers in parentheses indicate silence, represented in tenths of a second. Silences may be marked either within an utterance or between utterances.
  - (.) A dot in parentheses indicates a "micropause," a silence hearable but not readily measurable; ordinarily less than 2/10 of a second.
  - ? A question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily a question
  - :: Colons are used to indicate the stretching of the sound just preceding them. The more colons, the longer the stretching.
  - A hyphen after a word or part of a word indicates a cut-off or self-interruption
- word Underlining is used to indicate some form of stress or emphasis, either by increased loudness or higher pitch.
- .hh Speaker in-breath
- (( )) Double parentheses are used to mark transcriber's description of events, rather than representations of them.
- evet [tr: yes] Turkish words are italicized, and are immediately followed by an English translation.
- go to Beymen Capitals are used only for proper nouns, not to indicate beginnings of sentences.
- °school° the talk between the two degree signs is markedly softer than the talk around it.