

Code-switching as a Technique in Teaching Literature in a Secondary School ESL Classroom

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Introduction

With all the overtures of a segregated South Africa, prior to the demise of apartheid in 1994, bilingualism was officially understood in terms of English and Afrikaans only. 1994 witnessed a linguistic transformation, unveiling a pluralistic, multiethnic and multilingual society. South Africa is now recognized as a truly multilingual country, heralding eleven official languages. Nine African languages, isiNdebele, sePedi, seSotho, siSwati, siTsonga, seTswana, tshiVenda, isiXhosa and isiZulu were added to the two already existing official languages, English and Afrikaans. Yet English continues to reign at the helm of the political, social, economic and educational arenas as the language of opportunity and power.

Persons that were educationally and linguistically disadvantaged, as a result of South Africa's apartheid regime, perceived English as the golden gate of opportunity which was reserved for a select few. English however, is no longer the language for only the elite or a select group. It is a language for every individual albeit laced with one's native language (NL). The Language-in-Education Policy Document in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, clearly documents that:

In terms of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the government, and thus the Department of Education, recognizes that our cultural diversity is a valuable national asset and hence is

tasked, amongst other things, to promote multilingualism, the development of the official languages.

Hence the department adopts the position that bilingualism, that is, the home language of the learner and an additional language (English, in the case of African language speakers) in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) is a normal orientation of the learning process. Previously, English language users maintained that the use of the learner's NL had no place in the English Second Language (ESL) classroom. However there is empirical evidence to show that restricting the use of one's NL does not necessarily improve second language learning (Elridge 1996:303). It is therefore the duty and moral obligation of every educator to ensure that s/he provides the opportunity and means for every learner to use his/her NL in the classroom. This, in turn, would facilitate the learning of English as a second language (L2). The authors of this article support the view that prohibiting the learners' NL within the context of ESL instruction inhibits meaningful insight of literary works and impedes second language acquisition (SLA) itself.

This article demonstrates that one of the avenues to acquiring L2 proficiency is through the use of code-switching (CS), the alternate use of two (or more) languages in a given speech situation (McClure 1981; Myers-Scotton 1993). The issue of how we treat language alternation in the classroom is of critical methodological importance irrespective of the area of language learning (speaking, reading, listening or writing) being targeted in a given classroom situation. More specifically, this article focuses on the alternate use or switching between English and isiZulu as a technique in teaching English literature in the ESL classroom. It demonstrates that CS can be used as a strategy in fulfilling a variety of goals of literature teaching. These include, among others, understanding the complexities of characters and relationships between characters; determining major themes; promoting emotional, social and moral values among learners; developing the learners' ability to think critically and creatively; inciting learners to make value judgments and drawing learners' attention to discourse styles in the various genres.

Theoretical Background

Code-switching, the phenomenon which occurs widely in bilingual

communities including Port Shepstone in KwaZulu-Natal, the region in which this research is based) presumably existed as early as the seventeenth century (Bickerton 1981). In its most general sense, CS is the alternating use of two or more linguistic varieties (languages, dialects of the same language, registers of the same language) at the word, phrase or clause, or sentence level in the course of a discourse (Hoffmann 1991:110; Kamwangamalu 1992:173). Earlier studies of language contact (e.g. Weinreich 1953) considered CS as corrupt linguistic behaviour. CS was certainly not perceived as a characteristic feature of the linguistic behaviour of an ideal bilingual. Weinreich (1953:73) characterized the ideal bilingual as an individual who 'switches from one language to the other according to appropriate changes in the speech situation (interlocutors, topic etc.) but not in an unchanged speech situation and certainly not within a single sentence'. The following examples (1-4) illustrate the various levels at which CS may occur in a given context. These are drawn from the text *The Suit* by Can Themba, one of the literary texts studied by the pupil-participants of this research and also from recordings of lessons on *The Suit*.

At the word level:

1. 'Some of the younger women shrieked delightedly to the driver, 'Fuduga! . . . Stir the pot!' as he swung his steering-wheel this way and that'. [Page 26, *The Suit*, Can Themba]

At the clause or phrase level:

2. He trusted his wife, ngenhliziyo yakhe yonke, with all of his heart. [... with all of his heart].

At the sentence level:

3. Wayemnika isidlo sasek'seni embhedeni. Which of you boys will do that hey? [He gave her breakfast in bed].

At a discourse level:

4. Matilda's lover jumped out through the window, wajomba ngetasitela bantwana, in his underpants. Imagine that eh! Ngaphandle kwezingubo zakhe. He left his suit behind [... through the window boys and girls, ... without his clothes ...].

This study is informed by Gumperz's (1982) interactional model, Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model and Kamwangamalu's (1998) code-in-between approach. According to Gumperz's (1982) interactional model, code choices comprise a contextualizing cue. This model posits that CS may be perceived as a contextualizing cue which helps speakers to signal and listeners to interpret communicative intent of speakers within a given situation or context (Gumperz 1982:131-2). As participants of this study who change roles as both speakers and listeners and who share a common linguistic repertoire i.e., the ability to speak both English and Zulu, they are able to signal and interpret the communicative intent of one other. CS as a contextualizing cue in the context of this study may therefore be perceived as a language resource that enables social and pedagogical functions to be fulfilled.

In her markedness model, Myers-Scotton (1993) assumes that CS is an index of social negotiations of rights and obligations existing between participants in a conversational exchange. In this study, the participants share norms for such features as status of participants, topic (aspect of the lesson) and setting (the classroom). In terms of this model, teacher and learner code-choices would fall within the markedness continuum of unmarked and marked choices. This study demonstrates that by engaging in CS as an unmarked choice (in Myers-Scotton's terms, an expected choice), the teacher is able to elicit responses from learners thus encouraging active participation and involvement in the lesson. It also provides an opportunity for learners to express themselves in their NL comfortably and confidently without anxiety of making mistakes in English.

With regard to Kamwangamalu's (1998) proposal of the 'code-in-between', code choices do not have to always be binary. English therefore may not be perceived as either a 'they-code' (i.e., outgroup language) or 'we-code' (i.e., ingroup language) as suggested by Gumperz (1982). Instead, it may be viewed as a 'code-in-between' that enables speakers to achieve specific goals. In the context of the study, it is evident that English is perceived as a 'code-in-between' that enables both teachers and pupils to fulfill various social and pedagogical goals.

Setting, Subjects and Data Collection

In gathering the data, two classes of Grade 10 learners at two schools, in

close proximity to each in the Port Shepstone region, were selected. These schools were chosen because the learners in both schools are isiZulu speakers who study English as a second language. In addition, both schools were ideal for this study in that the teacher of English in the one school is a L1 speaker of English and the teacher of English in the other school is a L1 speaker of isiZulu.

The experimental approach was adopted in this study. The control group was the class (39 pupils) that was taught by the English L1 speaker using English as the sole medium of instruction. The other class (55 pupils), taught by the isiZulu L1 speaker who was asked to make deliberate use of English-isiZulu CS in the classroom in which the matrix/dominant language is English, was the experimental group.

The lessons were taught over a period of seven weeks. They were tape-recorded and a professional isiZulu-English translator transcribed and translated the recordings. Teacher participants verified the accuracy of the transcriptions. At the end of the series of lessons, the learners wrote a total of three tests (one short story and an examination of two of the three poems studied) the results of which were analyzed to determine whether CS promotes scholastic achievement or not. The test questions were designed to reveal the learners' ability to (i) follow a sequence of events; (ii) read for meaning; (iii) display an understanding of characters, themes, messages, writer's intention, appreciation of diction and literary devices; and (iv) demonstrate an ability to make judgments. Learners' test scripts were marked by a 'neutral teacher' i.e. one who was neither an active participant of the research nor the authors of this article.

The subject content comprised two short stories and three poems. The two short stories were *The Suit* by Can Themba and *Kid Playboy* by Casey Motsisi, both from *To Kill A Man's Pride and other Stories from Southern Africa*, a compilation that is edited by Norman Hodge. The poems under study were *Promise* by Mafika Pascal Gwala, *Follower* by Seamus Heaney and *Out, Out* by Robert Frost. *Kid Playboy* deals with a philandering young man whose wedding is being covered by a reporter, the narrator of the story. The story focuses on Kid Playboy (who is responsible for the suicide of the narrator's ex-girlfriend) and the wedding present he receives (i.e. his baby from an ex-girlfriend) while the marriage ceremony is being conducted. The thrust of the story *The Suit* is the unusual punishment a cuckolded

husband, Philemon, metes to his wife, Matilda: she is to treat the suit of her lover as a guest in their home. This punishment leads to her eventual suicide. The poem *Promise* concerns the breaking of the promise between lovers, the fault of whom which is left to speculation. *Follower* concerns the cyclic nature of man i.e. when the father is young and fit, his son is the follower, but with old age, the father becomes the follower. As for *Out, Out*, it deals with a young boy who loses, first, his arm, and then his life while sawing wood at work.

Our aim in this research was to respond to the following questions:

- (a) What are the specific functions of CS by learners and teachers?
- (b) Does CS facilitate the learning process and if so, how?
- (c) Does CS facilitate interpretation of meaning in the teaching of literature, enhance appreciation of intrinsic literary value and offer insights into 'life-lessons' via the texts?
- (d) Does CS promote scholastic achievement as measured by tests of literary works?

Functions of Code-switching

Analysis of data reveals that CS by the bilingual teachers and learners fulfills both social and pedagogical functions in the classroom viz., CS as reiterative, for explanation purposes, to provide new or content information, for elaboration, as an emblem for group solidarity, as a directive, as a phatic function, for class management and influencing learner behaviour, for quotation, as referential, as interjections, as a poetic function, for use of proverbs in another language and to display one's knowledge. However, it is not our intention to comment on each of these functions nor is it within the scope of this article to comment on every example of CS used by the participants. Instead, we present the pedagogical functions of CS as observed in the speech of the participants and comment on the more salient or obvious examples of CS.

CS as Reiterative

This function of 'bilingual echoing' (Gibbons 1987:80) is a repetition of an utterance, either literally or in modified form, in another code from that which has been used. Examples of CS used for reiterative purposes are:

Lesson on 'Follower'

5. Although he was a nuisance sometimes, he was loved. He was still young. **Nakuba esemcane ubanga isicefe ubusy uyasebenza iloku ibanga isicefe** [*Although he was a small child he was a nuisance when his father was busy working*].

Lesson on 'Out, out-'

6. He said please sister, please sister tell the doctor not to amputate my, or cut off, my hand. It is so painful no? **Kwakubuhlungu kakhulu** [*It is so painful*].

Group discussion

7. T Why?
P **Wezwela** [*She felt the pain*].
T **Wezwela** [*She felt the pain*]. Did she feel that this was real?

In (5), the teacher repeats the characteristics of the child, with some modification viz. 'when the father was busy working'. In (6), reiteration is used to emphasize the pain that the boy experiences. In (7), CS as reiterative serves a different purpose. By repeating his pupil's answer '**Wezwela**' [*she felt the pain*], the teacher fulfills two functions, both social and pedagogical. Firstly, by repeating the pupil's answer, the teacher acknowledges the pupil's NL, displaying that it has value in the classroom. At the same time, the teacher also achieves solidarity with the pupil. Thus he fulfills a social function. Secondly, the repetition serves as an affirmation of the pupil's answer, thus reinforcing the answer. In this way, the teacher fulfills a pedagogical function.

CS for Explanation Purposes

CS may be used to explain an idea, concept, or content information. For example:

Lesson on 'Promise'

8. Promise. **Kufikani?** [*What do you think?*] No one? **Bekufanele siblangane ngo 10 eSayidi isethembiso** [*If you were supposed to meet someone at ten in Port Shepstone, that is a promise*].

Lesson on 'Follower'

9. The furrow is the row **umsele owenzeka ngesikhathi ulima** [rows that are formed when you plough] (Teacher draws on board).

In (8), when the teacher does not receive a response to his question 'Kufikani?' [*What do you think?*], he resorts to CS to explain the concept 'promise' by providing an example. In (9), he switches to isiZulu while drawing on the board to provide an explanation for 'rows' and so ensures that pupils understand its meaning.

CS to Provide Content Information or New Information

CS can be used to provide information that is given in the text as well as providing additional information to enhance pupils' understanding of the text and build on pupils' knowledge. Consider the following example:

Lesson on 'Kid playboy'

10. It means that his trousers were not too well pressed. He **wasebona kufanele aye etendeni, ayobhuquza laphaya etendeni. Lakugwele khona utshani, akugwele khona nezidakwa, notshwala besizulu, nezinkamba.** [*He thought that he was supposed to be amongst those in a tent. It's where there are drunkards and African beer*].

In this extract, the teacher switches to isiZulu firstly, to provide content information i.e. the reporter should be amongst those in the tent (due to his 'unpressed trousers'); and secondly, to provide new information i.e., the quality of people who would be put into the tent and the kind of activities that would take place therein. In so doing, the pupils would now be able to differentiate between the guests who are housed in the hall where the actual wedding takes place and the guests who are put into the tent.

CS for Elaboration

CS can be used to expand on or embellish what has already been said in one code. Consider (11) and (12) below:

Lesson on 'Kid Playboy'

11. She did that because Kid Playboy went to another girl, **wamala, hhayi nokuthi wamala wavele wambaleka-nje** [*He broke up with her. He ran away from her.*] He didn't go to her for a month. **Wazihambela wathola enye intombazane** [*He got another girl*].

Lesson on 'Out, out-'

12. The hand was already cut off by the saw, not by the doctor, by the saw. **Libukhali lelisahha lakhona niwabhasobhe** [*This saw is very sharp, you must watch it*].

In (11), the teacher uses CS to elaborate on Kid Playboy's behaviour and attitude toward the girl spoken about. No new information is provided, but in switching to isiZulu the teacher builds on Kid Playboy's character. Also, it serves to ensure that pupils acquire a better understanding of his character. In the second instance (12), the teacher expands on the quality of the saw i.e. its sharpness, drawing attention to how dangerous it was.

CS for Classroom Management and Influencing Learner Behaviour

The data suggest that teachers use CS for management control as well as to elicit specific behavioural responses from pupils. These two aspects are closely linked as getting a pupil to behave in a desirable way often helps in managing the class (e.g., in terms of discipline). Consider the following examples:

Lesson on 'Kid Playboy'

13. [The class makes a noise]
Okay, okay, **asiqhubekeni** [..... *let's continue*].

Lesson on 'Kid Playboy'

14. Keep quite. **Thula. Oyedwa ngesikhathi.** [*Keep quiet, keep quiet, one at a time*].

Lesson on 'The suit'

15. What happened? What was the last straw for Matilda? The whole thing? **Wayengasakwazi ukubekezela yini imbangelo?** [*What was the reason that made her unable to tolerate this any more?*]

In (13) and (14), the teacher switches to isiZulu to maintain classroom discipline. In (15), in addition to elaborating on his preceding question by providing clues to the answer, the switch to isiZulu is meant to evoke a response from his pupils.

CS as a Phatic Function

CS may be accompanied by a variation in tone or pitch of voice to achieve specific effects as is evident in the examples below:

Lesson on 'Kid Playboy'

16. Keep quiet. **Thula! Oyedwa ngesikhathi** [*Keep quiet! One at a time!*]

Lesson on 'Kid Playboy'

17. [Teacher reads] '*After every burst.....the grass green.*'
Ngizobathengela ummeli uzobatshengisa kahle ukuthi mina nginjani [*I will have a lawyer that will show them who I am*].

In (16), the teacher addresses her class strongly, loudly and assertively to maintain order in class as the class has become very rowdy. In addition, by emphatically stating '**Oyedwa ngesikhathi**' [*One at a time*] she asserts her authority and achieves her desired effect. In the second extract, CS performs a phatic function for a different reason. By switching directly to isiZulu (after reading an extract) in a loud, angry voice of the character (the bride) the teacher effectively displays the bride's indignation at being humiliated. The tone employed effectively conveys the bride's feelings.

In addition to examining the functions of CS in the classroom, we also set out to investigate whether CS in the classroom contributes to scholastic achievement. A comparison of scores obtained from three tests administered to both the control and experimental groups revealed that there

was no significant difference in results between the two groups. We therefore conclude that the use of CS in the classroom does not necessarily contribute to scholastic achievement as measured by test scores.

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, we would like to return to the key research questions raised at the beginning of this study, in particular the following:

Can CS in the Classroom Effectively Enhance Learning and Scholastic Achievement?

The findings show that CS is a natural phenomenon that occurs mostly spontaneously among English-isiZulu bilingual educators and learners in the domain of the school. By fulfilling various specific functions, such as CS for reiteration, explanation, elaboration, influencing learner behaviour, providing content and/or new information, solidarity, and for directive and phatic purposes, teachers were able to enhance pupils' learning. By the strategic use of learners' NL, the bilingual teachers were able to enhance learners' vocabulary; enable learners to grasp difficult ideas and concepts; provide meaningful and significant extra or new information thus enhancing learners' overall knowledge; ensure understanding of plot, characters and themes of literary texts studied; exhort learners to think critically and creatively (which is one of major aims in the study of literature e.g., Reid 1982) and incite learners to make value judgments.

The findings demonstrate that the use of learners' NL, promotes learning; through the use of CS pupils are better able to understand the literary texts studied and are therefore better able to respond appropriately to test questions. In addition to enhancing learning, our findings reveal that CS during literature lessons serves to fulfill emotional, social and moral values. The use of CS helps promote learners' acquisition of moral awareness and a sense of values, and acquire empathetic understanding of others and themselves, which are also aims of literature teaching (e.g. Reid 1982). In so doing, learners are better equipped to deal with life's emotional and moral challenges, and are helped to become worthy persons. Hence, CS contributes to not only learning for academic success but also to learning for life at large.

Can the Learners' NLs be Effectively Employed to Promote ESL?

Our study shows that by employing learners' NL in the form of intersentential and intrasentential CS, ESL is promoted. By resorting to the use of learners' NL, teachers discuss vocabulary and phrases thus enhancing vocabulary in English. Also, when teachers use CS for reiterative purposes, repeating in isiZulu what has been said in English or vice versa, pupils acquire the grammatical rules of speaking and writing in English. In addition, in terms of Canale and Swain's (1979:4-6) model of communicative competence which focuses on the acquisition of not only grammatical competence but sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence as well, literature teaching is an excellent resource for the acquisition of these competences. Using CS in the teaching of literature thus becomes a powerful technique in promoting ESL.

Furthermore, the study clearly demonstrates that learners' NL has a legitimate and irreplaceable position in the teaching of literature irrespective of the proficiency levels of either the teacher or the learner. To deprive the learner of his/her NL in the classroom is to deprive him/her of the opportunity of acquiring his/her L2 proficiently. If indeed education is 'a mirror unto a people's social being' (Ngugi wa Thiongo 1986:223) and that literature is, among other things, an exploration of the self through characters, the language one employs, including CS, is inextricably woven in unfolding of values inherent in literature teaching. To deny a learner the opportunity to use his/her NL in the classroom is a negation of him/herself as a social being and more importantly as a unique, emerging individual.

To what Degree does CS Affect Learner-teacher and Learner-learner Interaction?

Our study shows that when teachers use CS they are better able to elicit responses from learners, and better able to elicit responses that go beyond monosyllabic responses than when they use English only. This however, does not mean that when teachers ask questions they must always resort to using learners' NL or using CS behaviour. Doing so will, in fact, impede the learning process and scholastic achievement as pupils will become dependent on teachers' use of the NL. They will know that the teacher is going to use their NL and learn not to attend to the English version of a

question. Also, if the teacher makes frequent use of the mother tongue, learners will become unfamiliar with questioning techniques they encounter in tests and examinations. Instead, the *strategic* use of CS, i.e. by using learners' NL only when it is evident that pupils fail to respond to a question that is posed in English only or using learners' NL as a springboard for sustained and animated discussion, will be beneficial.

In addition, learner-learner interaction is facilitated by employing the NL and was evident in recordings of group activities. The kind of animated talking that went on among the pupils serves as a contrast to the limited learner participation when the teacher was teaching. It is clear that using the NL allows pupils to express their thoughts and opinions without anxiety and with confidence. They feel secure in the knowledge that they are able to communicate exactly what they think and feel without fear of making mistakes should they use English only. However, the danger lies in overusing the mother tongue as pointed out by Atkinson (1987:246). Our research shows that learners use mostly English to interact with their teachers but mostly isiZulu to interact with each other during group activities. It appears that speaking with each other in the NL is a matter of course, even when they are quite capable of expressing themselves in English. This observation is evident in the fact that the report back to the class as a whole was carried out in English. In our view, the overuse of the NL in the ESL classroom defeats the purpose of effective CS and cheats learners of practising their English. Our findings therefore support Atkinson's (1987) view that CS can be effective as long as the matrix language is English.

Implications

The findings of the study have implications for (a) language-in-education policy and (b) ESL teachers and teaching methodology.

Language-in-education Policy

In 1995, in her discussion of the implications of CS for curriculum planning, Gila (1995:42) states: 'Curriculum planners need to recognize the occurrence of CS as a reality in classroom teaching and further accord it an official status.' It is clear that the Language-in-Education Policy document in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 as well as the report from the

Centre for Education Policy Development (1994) (which specifically states that CS during group discussions, workshops, practicals, seminars and lectures should be acknowledged as a normal feature of teaching and learning) accords CS official status.

The question that arises is: Is the policy of inclusion of CS in teaching and learning being implemented by the schools? If not, why not? Our research findings lead us to suggest that principals, teachers and the school governing bodies are either ignorant of the language policy, are pretending ignorance, or simply choose to ignore it. The implications for these role players are twofold: (a) for the role players to become, as Adendorff (1993) suggests, engaged in consciousness raising; and (b) to initiate a change in attitudes among role players toward CS.

If principals, teachers and governing bodies are indeed ignorant of the language policy act, then there is urgent need for the language policy act to be brought to their attention. Language advisors and other language policy authorities in the educational domain should as a matter of urgency, ensure that every school has a language policy committee in place. The task of this committee would be, among other things, to familiarize themselves and others at school, including learners and parents, with gazetted language policies. Previously held misconceptions about the use of learners' NL in classroom instruction should be clarified. CS should be recognized as a teaching strategy as 'language teaching is inextricably tied to language policy' (Savignon 1991:265) and needs to be included in the schools' language policy. This calls for a change in attitudes toward CS.

Implications for ESL Teachers and Teaching Methodology

The role of CS in the classroom also has specific implications for ESL teachers. Teachers across the curriculum, and even more pertinently, teachers of ESL need to experience a change in mind set regarding perceptions of CS in the classroom. Now, more than ever before, with the hype and urgency that teachers and learners have in pursuing English, teachers of ESL should realize that switching between codes is not a degenerative form of a language but a code that can be used effectively in the acquisition of the target language. Teachers of English should be made aware of how CS can be used to, for example, build on vocabulary; teach grammatical structure; ensure learners understand difficult concepts and

content information; and so on. It also needs to be stressed that in the language classroom, this does not mean that everything that is said in English must be repeated in Zulu and vice versa. Teachers also need to be informed of the dangers of overuse of the mother tongue by both themselves and their pupils.

The findings of this study have even more specific implications for the teacher of literature. Many literary texts of various genres, both imported and local, have evidence of the use of CS by characters. Both the short stories, 'The Suit' and 'Kid Playboy' are examples of texts that contain examples of the use of different lects and CS. Teachers should draw attention to how CS is used to provide information about setting and character, enhance meaning of the text, and more importantly, how CS is used as an effective communicative device. When learners see CS in use by poets and authors, they will see that CS is not something to be embarrassed about, but a code that can be used effectively. For pupils to feel this way, it is necessary that teachers themselves feel this way.

CS in the classroom also has implications for methodology viz. the issue of cultural methodology, CS during group work and peer group teaching. In conjunction with the various issues we have discussed concerning CS, CS in the classroom also raises the issue of a culturally-relevant methodology and should therefore occupy a crucial place in the curriculum. CS also has implications for group work in the classroom. While teachers can supervise and control learner talk in a one-to-one interaction in the classroom, this is not so easily done during group work, especially in large classes. Teachers should encourage learners to use their NL if they wish to or find the need to, but they must be informed that they are not to do so extensively.

Finally, as this study has revealed that there appears to be no significant correlation between CS and scholastic performance, it suggests a need for a longitudinal study to investigate whether CS enhances scholastic performance. In addition, in view of the influx of ESL speakers in English L1 classrooms, there is need for the investigation of the role of the NL of ESL speakers in multilingual English L1 classrooms.

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