Codeswitching and borrowing in Freshman CSK

asKUIS

Codeswitching and borrowing in Freshman CSK

Lara Promnitz-Hayashi
Yuko Sugiyama

Abstract

Japanese students are 'School bilinguals', whereby they have undergone formal language learning at school. Most of them have studied English for six years in Junior and Senior High School and some may even have been introduced to English in Elementary school or even as early as kindergarten. Unfortunately, as is the problem with School Bilingualism, students did not have much opportunity to practice the target language outside of the classroom environment. This situation changes when students begin their tertiary education at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) as they are expected to abide by an 'English Only' rule not only in the classroom but also in other areas of the campus, such as the Self Access Learning Centre (SALC) or when they come across teachers. Some linguists such as Mackey (1962) and Weinreich (1953) believe that language is not an abstract entity but a tool employed for taking part in acts of communication. In the KUIS classroom environment communication is expected to be in English but many students appear to have difficulties at times and as a result code-switching and linguistic borrowing occurs. Myers-Scotton and Ury (1977) define code-switching as the "use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction" while Grosjean (2001) defines it as "a complete shift to the other language for a word, a phrase or a sentence". Grosjean also defines borrowing as a "morpheme, word or short expression taken from the less activated language and adapted morphosyntactically (and sometimes phonologically)" and both of these strategies can be seen in Freshman CSK classes.

Introduction

In the language classroom teachers will have at some point experienced situations where students alternate between the language of instruction (L2) and their mother tongue (L1). Many researchers coin this phenomena codeswitching (hereafter CS). Myers-Scotton and Ury (1977) define codeswitching as "the use of two or additional linguistic varieties within a conversation", Grosjean (2001) defines it as "a complete shift to the other language for a word, a phrase or a sentence", Nilep (2006) recognizes it as an "alternation in the form of communication that signals a context in which the linguistic contribution can be understood", Gardner-Chloros (2009) describes it as the use of several languages or dialects in the same conversation or sentence and Addendorff (in Van der Meij & Zhao, 2010) defines codeswitching as a "communicative resource which enables teachers and students to accomplish a considerable range of social and educational objectives". There has been much written about the terminology such as codeswitching, code-change, codemixing and borrowing and it is important to differentiate between the terms. Codeswitching and code-change are the alternation of languages between sentences, codemixing is the alternation of two languages within a sentence whereas borrowing pertains to the introduction of lexical items from one language to another. For the purpose of this research the term codeswitching refers to any alternation between languages at any time in the classroom.

Research on CS became popular in the 1970's and 1980's, however those studies were mostly carried out in bilingual and multilingual education settings in the United States, Canada, South East Asia, South America, Europe and Africa. Much

of the research at that time focused on communicative functions of CS, especially in teacher-led talk. However, the 1990's saw a shift in research focus from teacher-led to teacher-learner interaction. It was not until the past decade that studies were more frequently carried out in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings. There has been much debate over the use of CS with many linguists claiming that bilingual speakers codeswitch due to lack of proficiency in one language. Dailey-O'Cain and Lebscher (2009) argue that as a result of decades of bilingual interaction research it is apparent that "codeswitching is a characteristic feature of bilinguals' talk rather than a sign of deficiency in one language or the other" (p. 132) and that codeswitching is in fact normal in bilingual linguistic behaviour. Fotos (2001) further argues that alternating language in the same utterance can have dual functionality, promoting second language acquisition through "negotiation of meaning and focus on form, and fostering the students' sense of their bilingual identity" (p.330). Bullock and Toribio (2009) also argue that research has shown that CS does not "provide a breakdown in communication, but reflects the skillful manipulation of two language systems for various communicative functions" (p.4) and that CS is not "indicative of the bilingual's inability to separate his languages or a lack of proficiency. Rather it is an additional communication resource available to bilinguals" (p8).

Bullock and Toribio (2009) state that codeswitching may occur from single words to chunks of discourse and it can occur among bilinguals of differing proficiency and may not necessarily be consistent. It can take place for a number of reasons such as, fillers, ethnic identity and discursive aims. They further argue that CS is not a random mixing of languages and that research has shown that CS does not

"provide a breakdown in communication, but reflects the skillful manipulation of two language systems for various communicative functions" (p.4). Therefore, CS is often a conscious choice by the speaker.

Chaudron (1988 in Duff & Polio, 1990) states that in typical foreign language classrooms, it is commonly believed that full competence in the target language is achieved when the teacher provides a target language-rich environment where instruction and drills are in the target language, as are disciplinary and management actions. The Department of Education and Science's policy in the United Kingdom states that "communicating virtually in the L2 is a sure sign of a good modern language course" (in Van der Meij & Zhao, 2010. p.396). This is the case in the ELI (English Language Institute) at KUIS as teachers and students alike are expected to abide by an English-only rule. Not all scholars agree with a Direct Method approach. Jørgensen (2005 in Van der Meij & Zhao, 2010) argued that there is not much point in abiding by the "pure language norm" (p. 396) because language users with access to different languages are likely to utilize the language they deem the most suitable depending on the situation. Blom and Gumperz (in Nilep, 2006) also argued that in some social events, determined by participants, the setting and the topic, certain linguistic forms may be more suitable than others. They define this type of shift as situational switching. This often occurs when ideas, phrases or words cannot be translated easily into the alternate language (Van der Meij & Zhao, 2010). Despite the fact that students are often asked to not use the L1 in the classroom, usage of the L1 is inevitable in cases such as student small talk or discussions on the L2 grammar and in most cases these types of conversations using the L1 occurs "without awareness and critical

reflections" (Levine, 2011, p.70). It was noticed that CS occurred in Freshman English courses for Chinese, Spanish and Korean majors (hereafter CSK) therefore it was felt that investigation into students' CS was called for in order to find out reasons for its use despite an English-only rule in the classroom.

Background to the research

Prior to 2005 CSK students were required to take one additional foreign language in their studies, with English being one available elective language. However, from 2005 changes in the curriculum resulted in the requirement of all CSK students to complete three years of English. Students have one 90-minute lesson per week with a native English speaker focusing on speaking and listening and one 90-minute lesson with a Japanese teacher focusing on reading and writing. CSK students have varying levels of English proficiency and as English is a compulsory subject students also have varying levels of motivation. It was noticed in some classes that quite a lot of codeswitching was taking place in the classroom and as a result this research was undertaken in order to find out when students were codeswitching and their reasons behind it in the hope that it will inform teachers in what situations students CS and how they can possibly encourage students to use the L2 in class.

Research methods

Data Collection/ The participants

The data samples were collected from two CSK Freshman English courses. One class, in this paper referred as Class A, was comprised of 24 students, 5 males and 19 females, of high intermediate proficiency. Among the 24 students, eight were

Chinese majors, seven were Spanish majors and nine were Korean majors. Six of the students had experience studying or living abroad (ranging from 1 month to several years) in an English speaking context. In addition, three students went to high schools that heavily focused on studying English and experienced similar classroom situations using the Direct Method.

The second class, Class B, comprised of 18 students, 4 males and 14 females and all were of high-beginner proficiency. In this class, eight students were Chinese majors, four were Spanish majors, and six were Korean majors and none of the students had lived or studied abroad in English countries. However, one student from China, two from Korea and one who had a Japanese and Mexican parent had moved to Japan either in primary school or junior high school which meant that English was in fact their L3 and their major language, L4.

In this study it was decided to record two types of group work: one "on-task" activity in which students were asked to complete specific activities while the other was an "off-task" activity where students were given more time and autonomy to accomplish a much larger task (i.e. presentation preparation) and therefore were not given specific activities within the task. In Class A the "on-task" activity was an activity where the students shared information after reading a website about a country and in Class B it was an activity whereby students were required to plan an around the world trip including itineraries. The "off-task" activity in both classes was preparation for a performance. In Class A this was preparation for a group skit and in Class B it was preparation for a presentation about a country of the group's choice.

An audio recorder was distributed to each group and interactions from each group were recorded. For this study, two group recordings for each activity were chosen randomly in Class A and also in Class B (n=22). Groups consisted of between two and four members. In class students were expected and encouraged to speak in English to both the teacher and classmates, but students were not penalized for speaking Japanese in class during the recordings.

Results & Discussion

L2 competence and codeswitching

As previous literature states (Skiba in Bista; Bista, 2010), one of the main reasons why learners decide to use their L1 is their incompetence of their L2. This phenomenon was seen to some degree in this current study. Occurrences of CS among students from Class B were more frequent than the students in Class A, especially during tasks that involved preparation for the presentation/skit, students in Class B used their L1 more than Class A students, who mostly spoke in English with only occasional use of the L1.

When students in Class A used the L1, it was mostly used when they did not know how to say the expression in English. Class A, even in their "off-task" activity, understood that they were expected to speak in English and in most cases they did. Most CS were not more than a few utterances at one time and often at times when one student uttered something in Japanese the other group members still continued their conversations in English. For example, in the "off-task" activity, one group was discussing scenes from the Disney Pixar movie, *Toy Story*, and one student started to explain the character, Buzz Lightyear. She wanted to say Buzz

Lightyear's catch phrase "To infinity and beyond!" but because she did not know what it was in English she said the equivalent phrase in the Japanese translation "*Mugen no kanatahe sa- ikuzo!*" (Guggenheim & Lasseter, 1995). In this particular activity, since it involved film, many Japanese words used were proper nouns (such as "kuma no pu-san" instead of "Winnie the Pooh").

Skiba (in Bista, 2010) suggests that CS occurs due to an inability of expression and students codeswitch to enhance conversation flow and transfer meaning rather than result in interference in communication. This was seen to be happening especially in Class B where students would often switch to Japanese utterances when they were unsure of the English in order to continue the conversation and avoid long silences. It was also interesting to note that when students were unsure of vocabulary in English they would quickly use their L1 rather than explain what they wanted to say in English. For example, in the "on-task" activity in one conversation about activities they wanted to do in Cairo, one student said "I want to ride a *rakuda*". Her group members quickly translated it as 'camel' for her but it was interesting as rather than describing a camel or even drawing a picture, she chose to codeswitch quickly and this kept the conversation flowing and did not hinder understanding. It is important to note, however, that when students wanted to know translations of more difficult vocabulary the conversation changed. For example, in the poster presentation preparation lesson, one student wanted to know the meaning of the Japanese word naiyou (内容 = *content*) and she began by asking her group members "*Naiyou* in English?". Her partners then asked her in Japanese what she meant ("*dou iu imi?*") in which she proceeded to explain the context in Japanese and the entire conversation was conducted in Japanese until

the teacher moved near them, whereby they switched back to English. In many instances, when the teacher came closer to the group they would lower their voices to whisper in Japanese which shows that they were aware that they were expected to speak in English but were choosing to use their L1.

On-task vs. Off-task

Within each class, there were differences in the frequency and types of CS between the two types of tasks. The "on-task" activities required students to complete specific tasks and as a result the use of the L2 was more frequent for both classes. Since the activity for Class A was sharing information they found on a specific travel website, most groups in Class A used Japanese words to define vocabulary they found in the reading that they thought other members may not understand. For example, one student said "be careful of petty theft...this is *suri* in Japanese". Rather than explaining the word in English they decided that it would be more efficient to use the Japanese translation. This type of explanation of vocabulary occurred often in all groups. However, when students finished the task instructed by the teacher, students began to discuss topics that were irrelevant to the activity or theme of the class. This shift in topics gradually enabled students to CS into Japanese and one group eventually all switched into Japanese, until the teacher reminded them to use English.

Fillers

Fotos (2001) found in her study that Japanese students often used their L1 for fillers. This was also noticed to be true in both Class A and B. Students often used the word *eto* (um) or *nandake* mid sentence, especially when they were searching

for the correct English they wanted to say.

Clarification

In Class B students often CS when they were clarifying specific information or a group decision. For example, in the "on-task" activity students were required to collaborate and decide on four cities/countries they wanted to visit and prepare an itinerary to 'sell' to the class. The group members easily decided on four cities around the world but then could not decide on the itinerary order. The following conversation took place:

S1: Tokyo-Cairo-Rio de Janeiro-New York-Bangkok

S2: No. No. Tokyo-Cairo-Bangkok-New York-Rio de Janeiro

S3: Tokyo-New York-Rio de Janeiro-Cairo, next Bangkok is better.

S4: *eh?   Tokyo kara New York ni icchau. New York kara Rio de Janeiro ni itte*...........

[huh? Go from Tokyo to New York, right?. Go from New York to Rio de Janeiro.......]

As can be seen, student 4 codeswitched for clarification of the group's final decision. In actual fact this student codeswitched to her L2 as English was her L3.

Creating a community of speakers

Martin-Jones (1995) states that "participant-related switching is hearer-oriented: it takes account of the hearer's linguistic preferences or competences" and occurs because "classrooms are settings where conversational participants typically have differing language abilities and communicative repertoires" (p. 100). This was true

in Class B as the amount of CS that occurred was at times influenced by the proficiency levels of their group members. For example when a less proficient student was teamed with a more proficient student, less CS occurred within the task whereas if all members were of similar lower proficiency more CS was seen to occur. For example, one presentation group spent the first 5 minutes of the recording entirely in Japanese deciding what type of presentation they were going to do and how they could search and use the Google translate tool. Interestingly, all students in this group were of similar lower English proficiency. Although their conversation was conducted in Japanese they 'borrowed' English words such as *picture, print, poster* and *paper*.

Use of L3

Although it rarely occurred, some students used their L3 (in this case, their major language), and it was more frequent toward the end of the semester when students began to learn more vocabulary in the L3. The following is an example of CS in the L3 in Class A.

S1: Harry Potter is good I think.

C1: Yeah

S1: You Hermione and I'm Harry

C1&C2: (laughs)

S1: I think it sounds ok ok?

C3: Which scene? Which scene?

C2: But I saw one and two

C1: two is? Secret…

C3: *fangjian*?

C2: *fangjian* (laughs)

S1: *fangjian?* Is Chinese?

C1: yes

S1: No Chinese. In English please (laughs) I can't speak Chinese

In this group, student S1 is a Spanish major student while the other three were studying Chinese (Mandarin). While student C1 wanted to say "Chambers of Secrets" from the Harry Potter series, C3 uses the word "*fangjian*" which means "room" in Mandarin to replace "chambers" and it seemed that the CS into Mandarin created a sense of community among the Chinese majors. However, this interaction left S1 out of the group and as a result S1 reminded the members to use English (L2). It seems that the use of the L2 establishes a sense of community where all members are of equal standing.

In Class B, students CS in their respective L3 when they went off topic from the class activity or had finished the required tasks when they were with students from the same L3 major. In these instances they were discussing their homework or their L3 class. However if students were not discussing their language classes many used their L1. The more motivated students remained in the L2.

Conclusion

The results from this research show that CS occurs regardless of the students' L2 proficiency and is a result of a number of different factors, such as clarification, competence in the L2, sense of community and solidarity or fillers. It was noticed

in both classes that the nature of the task given to the students often influenced the amount of CS; the more autonomous the task, the more likelihood of CS occurring.

While the ideal language classroom is one in which the teacher and students are all collectively using the target language it can be difficult to enforce. Martin-Jones (1995) states that participant-related switching is most likely to be notably prominent in some contexts such as those where the medium of instruction is a foreign language. This can be very challenging for students especially when they have no exposure to the target language outside of the classroom. This is one hurdle that the less proficient students find difficult to overcome, especially when they are only exposed to English in two 90-minute lessons per week. Furthermore, English is a minor subject rather than the language of instruction across courses which can result in challenges for the teacher to maintain an English-only environment.

References

Bista, K. (2010). Factors of code-switching among bilingual English students in the university classroom: A survey. *English for Specific Purposes World, 9(29)*, 1-19.

Bullock, B. E. & Toribio, A.J. (2009). Themes in the study of codeswitching. In B. E. Bullock & A. J. Toribio (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of linguistic code switching.* (pp. 1-17). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dailey-O'Cain, J. & Lebscher, G. (2009). Teacher and student use of the first language in foreign language classroom interaction: Functions and application. In M. Turnbull & J. Dailey-O'Cain (Eds.), *First language use in second and foreign language learning,* (pp.131-144). Bristol, UK:

Multilingual Matters.

Duff, P.A. & Polio, C.G. (1990). How much foreign language is there in the foreign language classroom? *The Modern Language Journal, 74*(2), 154-166.

Fotos, S. (2001). Codeswitching by Japan's unrecognized bilinguals: Japanese University students' use of their native language as a learning strategy. In M.G. Noguchi and S. Fotos (Eds.), *Studies in Japanese bilingualism* (pp. 329-352.). Buffalo, N.Y: Multilingual Matters.

Gardner-Chloros, P. (2009). *Code-switching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grosjean, F. (2001). The bilingual's language modes. In J. L. Nichol (Ed.), *One mind, two languages: bilingual language processing* (pp. 1-22). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Guggenheim, R. (Producer), & Lasseter, J. (Director). (1995). *Toy story* [Motion picture]. United States: Walt Disney Pictures.

Levine, G. S. (2011). *Code choice in the language classroom*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Mackey, W. F. (1962). The description of bilingualism. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics, 7*, 51-85

Martin-Jones, M. (1995). Code-switching in the classroom. In L. Milroy and P. Muysken (Eds.), *One speaker, two languages: cross-disciplinary perspectives on code-switching* (pp. 90-111). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Myers-Scotton, C., & Ury, W. (1977). Bilingual Strategies: The Social Functions of Codeswitching. *Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 13, 5-20

Nilep, C. (2006). "Code switching" in sociocultural linguistics. *Colorado Research in Linguistics, 19*, 1-22.

Van der Meij, H. & Zhao, X. (2010). Codeswitching in English courses in Chinese universities. *The Modern Language Journal, 94*(3), 396-412.

Weinrich, U. (1953). *Languages in contact.* The Hague: Mouton.