FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE USE OF CODE-SWITCHING IN GENERAL CLASSES AT HUE UNIVERSITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT: Code-switching (hereafter CS), the case of switching between two languages during the course of a conversation, has long been researched in language education. A great numbers of studies by applied linguists have explored the reasons for, and the potential usages of code-switching in foreign language education over the past years. The present study aims to investigate and show the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers towards CS use in teaching General English for non-English major students. In particular, 45 EFL teachers who have been teaching English courses with pre-intermediate proficiency level at Hue University of Foreign Languages were involved in this study. A twenty-four item questionnaire was revised and distributed to 45 teachers. The findings reveals that teachers' perceptions are positive towards the use of code-switching in GE classes. Teachers believe that the use of code-switching could help them to tackle pedagogical and social issues in class.

KEY WORDS: code-switching; EFL; teachers' perception; teachers' belief; the first language (L1).

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1. Introduction

Code- switching is one of the key linguistic issues which have been addressed by researchers and specialists in the fields of teaching EFL over the past period. Code-switching occurs when the teacher or students change from one language to another during the course of instruction. The use of code-switching in EFL language classroom has been in pro and contras in recent years. Much research supports the use of CS in the classroom [Greggio & Gil, 2007; Widia, 2014; Sakaria & Priyana, 2018]. However, to what extent they support it are still not clearly defined [Macaro, 2001; Levine, 2003; Fhitri, 2017]. In the majority of English classrooms in Vietnam, both teachers and learners are Vietnamese and share the same L1, Vietnamese. It is undeniable that Vietnamese teachers in varying degrees use Vietnamese in English classrooms, and this practice much relates to code-switching (CS). It is also a phenomenon which has been noted for its pedagogical and social applications [Nguyen, 2012; Le, 2012]; but the questions whether the teacher realizes when, how and why they code-switch has not been clearly answered. Therefore, a study is needed to investigate to see to what extent teacher view their code-switching practices and beliefs about effective language use in teaching and learning process at tertiary level. At Hue University of Foreign Languages, EFL teachers teach General English to the students of different disciplines from universities belonging to Hue University. The students do not major in English but in medicine, economics, physical education, humanities. All non-English major students learn English as a compulsory course. Each General English class is arranged based on students' enrolment in the same or a different major and especially on students' level of English after the students take the placement test to determine their proficiency in English. The total time of the General English course is 30 periods per semester for A1 or A2 level and 45 periods per semester for B1 level. Similar to English-major students, non-English major students who are pursuing General English courses also learn English through activities to practice four language skills. The language of teaching is usually English. However, it is apparent that the non-English major students seldom use English outside the classroom. This means that most

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students (except English-majored ones), with one English class (each lasting 150 minutes) per week, do not have many opportunities to be exposed to and to use English. Almost all communication is via Vietnamese. As a result, many students are unable to comprehend English fully or speak the language fluently even after learning the language for a long time. Due to the fact that their students' low proficiency level in English, teachers' code-switching from English to Vietnamese is regarded as a way of enhancing students' comprehension of the lesson content and expressing opinions and communicating information [Nguyen, 2012; Le, 2011]. On the other hand, Fhitri (2017) argued that EFL teachers had better make students get used to CS, and it can decrease the willingness of the students to speak English. Sakaria and Priyana (2018) also pointed out that overuse of CS in EFL classroom may make students overly dependent**.** They stated that EFL teachers employ CS cautiously so that it can facilitate learning. Thus, although the use of CS can be beneficial for EFL classroom, cautions should be considered whether teachers use CS as a strategy to facilitate learning. With the aim of giving contribution to understanding about EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions towards CS use in GE classes, this research was done to answer the following question: *How do Vietnamese EFL teachers perceive the practice of code switching in their GE classes at Hue University of Foreign Languages?*.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of key term

According to Gumperz (1982) code-switching is: "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems" (p.59). Code-switching is "an individual's use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange" (Wooland, 2004, pp.73-74 cited in Nguyen, 2012). Ferguson (2003) defines the phenomenon of CS in the following words: *"The ability of bilinguals to alternate between the languages in their linguistic repertoire is generally referred to as code-switching"* (p.109). In this study, code-switching is considered as the alternative use between English and Vietnamese in General English teaching.

2.2. Functions of Teacher's code-switching

Teachers' CS has been reported to serve different functions for teachers. For EFL teachers, L1 was suggested to help them in explaining difficult concepts as well as grammar rules [Levine, 2003; Macaro, 2001; Sakaria & Priyana, 2018]. Sharing the same view, Macaro (2001) indicated that the switch between L1 and L2 could provide "useful reinforcement of structural, conceptual and sociolinguistic differences between the native and target language" (p.224). In another context, the studies done by Widia (2014) and Sakaria & Priyana (2018) on checking the EFL students' comprehension of the underlying concepts in either a listening or a reading text displayed that using L1 was even much quicker and more effective than other techniques.

In addition, Macaro (2001) reported other uses of L1 for various purposes in EFL classrooms, such as giving instructions for pair or group activities, dealing with students' misbehaviors, fostering relationship with students, making instructions clearer to students and coping with the lack of time in class. Ferguson (2003) pointed out that teachers could switch to L1 for isolated words or phrases in L2 with the goal to ensure the key information was conveyed to students or for rapport-building and interpersonal purposes with the view to bring a more comfortable learning environment to their students

In another context, Selamat (2014) studied CS on Malaysian ESL (English as Second Language) classroom. She found that teachers and students generally exhibited positive attitudes towards code-switching in the classroom and perceived its pedagogical merits as an effective teaching and learning resource. Canagarajah (1995) studied CS in ESL classroom in Jaffna. He summarized the categorization of CS in classroom into classroom management and content transmission. Apart from the functions of teachers' CS in English classroom as reported, there are three main functional

categories of CS in the classroom context, namely, CS for curriculum access, CS for classroom management and CS for interpersonal relation (Selamat, 2014).

These functions were also found in Cahyani et al. (2018). In particular, CS was used for different functions in communicative L2 classrooms, including comparison and clarification of L2 meanings, encouraging communication and student participation, enhancing classroom management and building rapport with students.

After reviewing the articles about the functions of teachers' code-switching and analyzing the suitability to the context of the current study, three functional categories of teachers' code-switching in the EFL classroom developed from Selemat (2014) were employed to examine about EFL teachers' perceptions towards the code-switching to Vietnamese in their classes. The three functional categories include CS for curriculum access, classroom management and interpersonal relation.

2.3. Teachers' perceptions towards the use of code-switching

By reviewing the related literature, studies on the attitudes and perception of teachers towards CS use in ESL or EFL classes revealed that teachers hold positive and negative perceptions towards the employment of CS in their classes.

Some researchers (Songxaba, et.al, 2017; Widia, 2014) agree that the code-switching to the learners' first language is useful in assisting teaching and learning process of English. Code switching can no longer be considered as errors interference, but as bilingual resources (Widia, 2014). In addition, it helps low proficiency students gaining better comprehensions especially when giving classroom procedures [Songxaba, et.al, 2017]. Code switching should not be considered as a sign of defect in the EFL classroom, yet, it is a careful strategy employed by the teachers [Cahyani, 2018; Songxaba, et. al., 2017]. Furthermore, the use of CS in the classroom may contribute to creating a more supportive language environment that enables teachers to build solidarity and intimate relations with students [Sakaria, et. al., 2018].

In contrast to the above controversies, some researchers (Greggio, 2007 and Widia, 20114) have argued that the usage of CS in EFL classroom has been regarded as negative and undesirable behavior where there is a failure in using the target language. Code-switching to L1 has also been considered as a sign of laziness of language [Levine, 2003; Sakaria & Priyana, 2018]. Ghobadi, et. al. (2015) also recommended that careful use of L1 in foreign language learning should be considered, so that the use of L1 can be beneficial to speed up the process of L2 learning. Up to now, the use of CS in EFL classroom has, therefore, been a subject of controversy. Also, little research has examined teachers' perspectives on this issue. Hopefully, the present study may provide information to EFL educators regarding the concept of code switching and how it is believed and perceived by EFL teachers in Hue University of Foreign Languages.

2.4. Code-switching in Vietnam

In Vietnam, Le (2011) found that Vietnamese EFL teachers often switched to Vietnamese to clarify words, expressions, structures and rules of English as well as to make sure the learners understood his utterances. He added more explanation that he used English first and then translated the message into Vietnamese since he perceived that students with low English proficiency levels could understand grammar thoroughly with Vietnamese. Nguyen's (2012) study on the use of CS in tertiary context in Vietnam revealed that some contextual factors, including time limitation in class, students' English proficiency levels, cultural values, teacher evaluation systems, and teacher cognition can affect CS use. More recently, Grant and Nguyen (2017) found that Vietnamese EFL teachers used CS frequently for both pedagogical and affective reasons, such as students' low English proficiency levels, lesson content, students' attitudes and emotion, along with teachers' lack of awareness of CS. Therefore, it can be seen that very few studies on teachers' perception toward code-switching practice in the Vietnamese educational context have conducted, even though this practice commonly occurs in Vietnamese EFL settings. These studies mentioned

above here focused on studying the role or functions of code-switching in the classroom and finding out the code-switching patterns in terms of psychological and syntactic aspects of speech in the language classrooms. This research is hoped to be able to give contribution to understanding about EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions towards CS use in GE classes, which has not been dealt in previous studies in Vietnam.

3. Methodology

Based on the aims of the current research, descriptive qualitative was an appropriate design because descriptive qualitative research design was usually used to explore the participants' opinions, beliefs and/or thoughts. The modified version of Selamat's (2014) questionnaire was utilized for teachers as the main data of the current study. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part collected teachers' personal information. The second part measured the teachers' self-reported frequency in using code-switching to Vietnamese during EFL classroom interaction. It consisted of 14 items and for each item, the teachers had to choose between 1 (never) to 5 (every time). The third part of the questionnaire consisted of 10 items of five-point (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree) of teachers' beliefs in the practice of CS. Teachers were asked to tick one of the five boxes by each statement, as appropriate. The percentages of the result were then explained descriptively.

The participants of the research were 45 EFL teachers (40 females and 5 females) that were between 27 and 55 years old participated in the research. The teacher participants were all M.A. holders and graduated with a degree in TEFL. All had more than 3 years of English teaching experience while teaching General English at Hue University of Foreign Languages. The experience in teaching GE classes was important consideration in this research since with their experience, the researcher believed that the teachers could offer their professional opinions about their practice in the classroom, in this case, the use of code-switching

4. Result and discussion

The present study aimed at finding out how CS to Vietnamese perceived by EFL teachers in Hue University of Foreign Languages. Based on the result of the distributed questionnaire, it was found that the teachers' frequency in using CS during EFL classroom interaction was considered as positive. Table 1 presents the teachers' response in the frequency of using code-switching.

Table 1. *EF teachers' frequency in using code-switching to Vietnamese in General English class*

1. Code switching for curriculum access					
In class, I switch from English to the students' first language (Vietnamese):	**Never**	**Almost Never**	**Often**	**Most of time**	**Every time**
To explain meaning of new words and sentences	0%	0%	57.5%	40%	2.5%
To explain difficult concepts	0%	0%	45	50%	5%
To explain grammar explicitly	0%	0%	35%	62.5%	2.5%
To check for students' comprehension	0%	0%	55%	40 %	5%
To introduce unfamiliar materials/topics	0%	0%	45 %	52.5 %	2.5%
To explain the differences between Vietnamese and English	0%	0%	50%	45%	5%
To draw students' attention to the correct pronunciation of sounds in English	0%	0%	46.5%	48.5%	5%
2. Code switching for classroom management					

To organize classroom tasks	0%	0%	57%	35.5%	7.5%
To maintain classroom discipline and structure of the lesson	0%	0%	50%	45%	5%
3. Code switching for interpersonal relations					
To provide praise/feedback/personal remarks about students' performance	0%	0%	52%	45.5%	2.5%
To encourage students' participation in classroom activities	0%	0%	51%	41.5%	7.5%
To build/strengthen interpersonal relationships between the teacher and the students	0%	0%	50.5%	42%	7.5%
To reduce students' anxiety in learning English	0%	0%	42%	50.5%	7.5%
To provide praise/feedback/personal remarks about students' performance	0%	0%	50%	47.5%	2.5%
To increase students' motivation and confidence in learning English	0%	0%	37%	55.5%	7.5%

As indicated in Table 1, it can be generalized that CS used by EFL teachers was common in some situations. In terms of curriculum access, about 47.07% of the respondents often used CS to Vietnamese, 48.4% used it in most of their teaching time, while only 3.57% applied it every time in their daily teaching. In the case of classroom management, 53.5% of the respondents often applied code-switching to Vietnamese, 40.25% applied it in most of their teaching practice and 6.25% applied it every time. Regarding to interpersonal relation, 40.08% often applied CS to Vietnamese, 47.08% applied it in most of their teaching activities and there were only 5.83% used it every time in the classroom. More notably, none of the respondents said that they never or almost never used CS to Vietnamese in their teaching practice.

As to EFL teachers' belief in the practice of using CS to Vietnamese, most of the EFL teachers also showed positive attitude towards the use CS during their EFL classroom interactions. The data on the Table 2 below shows the responses from the teachers.

Table 2. *Teachers' beliefs in using code switching in EFL classroom at Hue University of Foreign Languages*

1. **Positive views of the effects of code switching on the language learning process**					
As an EFL teacher, I believe that:	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Undecided**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Code-switching to Vietnamese will facilitate the language learning process in EFL classrooms	75%	25%	0%	0%	0%
Code switching to Vietnamese is an efficient, time-saving technique in EFL classroom	40%	60%	0%	0%	0%
2. Negative views of the effects of code switching on the language learning process					
The use of Vietnamese in EFL classroom will result in a	0%	30%	25%	45%	0%

decline in the standards of English					
The practice of code-switching to Vietnamese will increase GE students' reliance and dependency on the teacher	10%	65%	25%	0%	0%
3. Positive views of code switching in the EFL classroom					
Code-switching to Vietnamese should be included as an integral part of the EFL lesson	15%	75%	10%	0%	0%
4. Negative views of code switching in the EFL classroom					
There should be a strict separation between Vietnamese and English in EFL classroom	0%	0%	5%	70%	25%
Code-switching to Vietnamese should only be used as a last resort.	20%	55%	25%	0%	0%
English is best taught in English-only classrooms	10%	35%	25%	25%	5%
The ideal teacher of English is a native speaker	10%	20%	15%	20%	35%
The more English that is used, the better the results for the learners	70%	20%	0%	10%	0%

The results of the teachers' questionnaire in Table 2 showed that teachers' beliefs in using code switching in EFL classroom may be grouped into four categories, namely (1) positive views of the effects of code switching on the language learning process, (2) negative views of the effects of code switching on the language learning process, (3) positive views of code switching in the EFL classroom, (4) negative views of code switching in the EFL classroom. Below is a more detailed explanation

In particular, in terms of positive views of the effects of code switching**,** the result displays that all the teachers (100% of respondents) agreed that CS will facilitate the language learning process and is an efficient, time-saving technique.

As shown in Table 2, with respect to negative views of the effects of code switching on the language learning process, the opinions to "the practice of CS will increase the students' reliance and dependency on the teacher", about 75% of the teachers showed agreements (65% agree and 10% strongly agree) and 25% are undecided. Moreover, the opinions to "the use of Vietnamese in EFL classroom will result in a decline in the standards of English", only 30% of the teachers expressed agreement (30% agree and 0% strongly agree), while 45% show disagreement and 25% are undecided.

Regarding to negative views of code switching in the EFL classroom, responses to the statement of "there should be a strict separation between Vietnamese and English in EFL classroom", indicate that 70% of the participants disagreed and 25% strongly disagreed with it, whereas only 5% who are undecided. In responding to the statement "the Code-switching to Vietnamese should only be used

as a last resort", a high percentage of the participants (75%) agreed (55% agree and 20% strongly disagree) with it and 25% of teachers are undecided on this statement. Responses to the statement "English is best taught in English-only classrooms" show that teachers have mixed opinions about the inclusion of the L1 in EFL classroom. Forty-five percent of the respondents believe that the only the target language should be used in the classroom. However, some respondents think that there should be a place for the students' first language in the EFL classroom with 25% stating that they disagree and 5% stating that they strongly disagree that English is best taught in English-only classrooms. The remaining 10% are undecided on this statement. Moreover, as shown in Table 2, it is found that 55% of the teachers disagreed over the belief that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker while 30% of them perceive native speaker teachers to be superior to non-native speaker teachers. To the last statement, whereas 90% of the participants agreed, compared to 10% disagreed.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

This study focuses on the EFL teacher's perceptions towards the use of CS in General English classroom in Hue University of Foreign Language, as perceived by the participants of 45 EFL teachers. The results revealed that all the EFL teachers had positive attitudes towards switching to Vietnamese. They also believed that CS was efficient and able to facilitate them in EFL classroom teaching and learning process. In particular, the study's findings reported some benefits of CS similar to the results of studies mentioned in the literature review such as facilitating students' comprehension, saving time, motivating students, and accommodating EFL students, specially when the students are considered low to middle level. Regarding to the functions of using CS, in line with previous studies, switching to Vietnamese was reported to be used for some pedagogical functions. More specifically, teachers used CS for constructing and transmitting knowledge such as introducing new vocabulary and new language expressions, explaining grammar points, and explaining lesson content. CS used by the teachers in this research also functioned as a tool to manage class. The teachers used CS when giving instructions and repeating questions. The use for CS was meant to facilitate students understanding in the classroom. The last function was for maintaining interpersonal relation between teachers and students through humor to maintain a close and friendly atmosphere for the students. From the aforementioned findings of the current study, it can be confirmed that CS to L1 is encouraged to be used since it can promote students' learning. However, the recommendations from this study are that precautions should be taken when using L1 in the EFL classroom so that it may not overtake the target language. More importantly, the teachers in EFL classroom should know about the advantage and disadvantages of code switching so that they can use the right way in teaching English in EFL classroom in order to get the best result of the student's English competence.

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Nhận thức của giáo viên về việc sử dụng chuyển ngữ tại các lớp tiếng Anh ở Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ Huế

Tóm tắt: Chuyển ngữ, được hiểu là chuyển đổi hai ngôn ngữ trong quá trình hội thoại, đã được nghiên cứu trong lĩnh vực giáo dục ngôn ngữ nhiều năm. Nhiều năm qua, các nhà ngôn ngữ học ứng dụng đã nghiên cứu để tìm lí do của việc sử dụng chuyển ngữ và phát hiện cách sử dụng chuyển ngữ một cách tối ưu trong lĩnh vực giáo dục ngoại ngữ. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là tìm hiểu quan điểm của giáo viên tiếng Anh đối với việc sử dụng chuyển ngữ trong các lớp tiếng Anh tổng quát dành cho sinh viên không chuyên ngữ. Cụ thể, 45 giáo viên hiện đang giảng dạy học phần Tiếng Anh cấp độ tiền trung cấp tại Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ Huế được mời tham gia nghiên cứu. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ bảng hỏi với 24 mục liên quan đến quan điểm của giáo viên đối với việc sử dụng chuyển ngữ trong giảng dạy. Kết quả cho thấy phần lớn giáo viên giữ quan điểm tích cực đối với việc sử dụng chuyển ngữ trong giảng dạy và họ tin rằng sử dụng chuyển ngữ giúp họ giải quyết được một số vấn đề sư phạm và xã hội xảy ra trong lớp học.

Từ khóa: chuyển ngữ; tiếng Anh với tư cách là ngoại ngữ (EFL); niềm tin của giáo viên; nhận thức của giáo viên; chuyển ngữ sang ngôn ngữ thứ nhất (L1).