

***STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ATTITUDE TOWARDS USING CODE-SWITCHING AS A
MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN THE COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES: AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY ****

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study which investigates students' language attitudes towards Arabic and English code switching as a medium of instruction during a science class of *Human Development for Occupational Therapy* at the Allied Health Science College in Kuwait University. It also explores the effects of such language attitudes on students' academic performance.

Both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (open ended questions) research approaches were used to collect data. The data collected was then analyzed to measure the differences in the students' language attitudes towards each of the languages being taught, and the effects of such attitude on learning a science subject at college level.

Key words: *Language attitude, code -switching, bilingualism.*

Introduction

The selection of the language of instruction is a vital decision for academic institutes and learners as well. Language educational policy for academic institutions in a centralized system of education is often imposed by a governing body, whether that is a ministry, educational board, or any other forms of governing organizations. Such decisions impacts learners' academic performance in all subjects including science subjects. Teachers and learners' alike are mainly affected by this selection, yet learners' opinions and believes rarely considered, and usually excluded from this vital decision.

In bilingual classrooms worldwide, using code switching is a frequent practice. Extensive research has been carried out on using code switching in the classroom as a contextualisation cue, as Martin-Jones (2000) pointed out that such contextualisation cue range from phonological, lexical and syntactic choices to different types of code switching and style shifting.

According to Amin (2009) Science education is carried out in the Arab region in the absence of research-based policies and recommended practices. Amin added that there are small body of research has considered code switching in relation to the learning and teaching science. This study is an investigation into the language attitude and preference among Kuwaiti students at the Allied Health Science College in Kuwait University toward code switching in classroom teaching, using Arabic/ English as a medium of instruction in one of the science subjects for the occupational therapy major. The investigation highlights the learners' language attitude, including their perceptions toward the effects that differing language attitudes can have on a learners' academic performance in the science subject. The medium of instruction currently adopted by Allied Health Science College in Kuwait University is the English language.

Literature review

Different definitions for code switching suggested by researchers, for example Gumperz's (1982, p. 59), defined code switching as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems." Myers-Scotton's (2006, p. 239) general definition of code switching is "the use of two languages varieties in the same conversation". A related concept to code switching is code mixing. Researches often differentiate between the two terms. One of the differences between the two terms is the way each of them is used as proposed by Muysken (2000) in that code switching is used for cases in which the two codes maintain their monolingual features, while code- mixing is used for cases where there is some convergence between the two languages. On the other hand, Myers-Scotton (1993) differentiates between the two terms, stating that code switching occurs when bilinguals alternate between two languages during one interaction with another bilingual person while code mixing is the use of words, affixes, phrases and clauses from more than one language within the same sentences. In this study occurrence of code switching is evident in the context of the science class between English and Arabic among Kuwaiti students and teachers, in which English is the common foreign language for the students and the teachers.

Code Switching functions for teachers and students

Code switching has a variety of functions which vary according to the topic, people involved in conversation and the context where the conversation is taken place. Baker (2006) have discussed the topic of code switching from a sociolinguistics perspective, in which he listed twelve main purposes of code switching, which are relevant to bilinguals talks in general. Some of these functions can be observed in classroom environment and in relevance to teachers and students interactions. According to Baker, code switching can be used to emphasize a particular point, to substitute a word in place of unknown word in the target

language, to express a concept that has no equivalent in the culture of the other language, to reinforce a request, to clarify a point, to express identity and communicate friendship, to ease tension and inject humour into a conversation, and in some bilingual situations, code switching occurs when certain topics are introduced.

In the substituting a word in another language, Man and Lu (2006) (cited in Baker, 2006) found that in Hong Kong schools both teachers' and students' major reason for code switching was that there was no direct translation of words between English and Cantonese, additionally, the same study of Man and Lu found that teachers in Hong Kong schools use code switching also to ease tension and inject humour in to conversations.

In a previous study, Eldridge (1996) (cited in Sert, 2005) has listed four purposes in which student code switching as equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration and conflict control. Equivalence which is a strategy that bilingual used to find the equivalent of the unknown lexicon of the target language in the speakers' first language to overcome the deficiency in language competence in second language. The second purpose of code switching is for floor holding which is a technique used by bilingual students during conversing in the target language to fill in the stopgap with words in native language in order to maintain the fluency of the conversation. The third purpose of is reiteration, as it implies, it is emphasizing and reinforcing a message that has been transmitted firstly in the target language but then students rely on repeating the message in first language to convey to the teacher that the message is understood. The last function is conflict control, which is used to eliminate any misunderstanding when the accurate meaning of a word is not known in the communication.

Attitudes about Code Switching

Within the world of languages use, code-switching has often been perceived as being of lower status, a strategy used by weak language performers to compensate for language deficiency. This view of code-switching and bilingual talk in general is more normatively-based than research-based as pointed by Lin(1996) who added that such a view conveys little more than the speaker or writer's normative claims about what counts as standard or legitimate language.

An extensive body of literature studies reported that code switching in classrooms not only just normal but useful tool of learning. Cook (2001) referred to code switching in the classroom as a natural response in a bilingual situation. Furthermore, in the same study, Cook considered the ability to go from one language to another is highly desirable among learners. Moreover, in eliciting teachers reflections to their classroom teachings, Probyn (2010) noticed that most notable strategy that teachers used was code switching to achieve a number of communicative and metalinguistic ends. Cook's studies were mainly in the second language classroom context. Rollnick and Rutherford's (1996) study of science classrooms found the use of learners' main languages to be a powerful means for learners to explore their ideas. They argue that without the use of code switching, some students' alternate conceptions would remain unexposed. (Cited in Setati *et al* 2002). The recognition to switch codes goes beyond switching between languages; it also recognizes the value of using the vernacular which believes to allow students to draw on useful sense- making resources (Amin, 2009).

Researchers see using code switching in the classroom as a "legitimate strategy" (Cook, 2001, p.105) and no matter how it might be disruptive during a conversation to the listener, it still provide an opportunity for language development (Skiba, 1997). However, historically, strong stigmatic believes about code switching existed in many countries, which

made Ferguson (2003) to conclude that ideological and conceptual sources of suspicion all often attached to classroom code-switching, suggesting that deep rooted attitudes may not be easy to change.

Language education policies

Language educational policy can be defined as “mechanism used to create de facto language practices in educational institutes, especially in centralized educational system” (Shohamy, 2006 p.76). It is these policies, especially in a centralized system, that represent a language manipulation of the what kind of language or languages should be used as a medium of instruction and to what degree that usage is acceptable. In most cases, educational staff of a given institute work, according to Shohamy, as agents of implementing these policies without questioning its quality, appropriateness and relevance to the successful learning for learners. This notion of acceptance and implementing language policies without questioning its effectiveness and relatedness to students’ preference remind us again of Lin’s (1996) statement that the view of bilingual talk in general is more normatively-based than research-based. After presenting her findings which showed that code switching is an effective learning tool, Simon (2001, p.339) invited teachers and students to reconsider the role that code switching plays in the classroom interaction and to “break with the methodologically imposed code constraints in order to use code switching strategically to achieve their pedagogical aims.”

The language policy that is followed in some departments at Kuwait University stresses considering the usage of English as a language of teaching and learning. This is demonstrated for example in the language policy at the Allied Health Science College at Kuwait University (See University handbook, 2009). The importance of this study is that it shows the breakdown of the language policy desired by the school in one hand and learners’ preferences of medium of instruction in the other hand. Additionally, it explores the language

attitude and believes of some students in one science course that is taught at Kuwait University.

Research Methodology

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in an effort to obtain accurate outcomes and sufficient information from the respondents. In order to measure the students' language attitudes towards the language of teaching, a student questionnaire based on the students' experiences of studying Occupational Therapy was administered to the students. The final data were analyzed using percentages to measure the differences in the performance and attitudes of the participants, and the results were then reported.

Participants

The study utilized a sample of students who are attending the Allied Health Science College in Kuwait University and who were majoring in occupational therapy. The sample contained 17 occupational therapy students who voluntarily participated in the study.

Data collection procedures

The researcher obtained approval from the instructor of the Human Development for Occupational Therapy major to distribute the questionnaire. The researcher also obtained verbal approval from the participants. The questionnaire was completed during the lecture of *Human Development for Occupational Therapy* in the college of Allied Health Sciences at Kuwait University. The questionnaire was administered to the students after a brief introductory talk in which the completion procedure was explained to the students.

Completion of the questionnaire was administered under the supervision of the respective lecturer. The complete survey is provided in Appendix (1).

Study design and instruments

Eighteen (18) items of an adapted questionnaire were developed for this study from the study titled *The effects of IsiZulu /English code switching as a medium of instruction on students' performance in and attitudes towards biology* (Olugbara, 2008) to measure students' attitudes towards code switching. The questionnaire consists of three different sections: A, B, C, which are described as follows;

A- Biographical information of the participants - made up of three items.

B- Students' views about the teaching language - consisting of thirteen items.

C- Open ended questions which demonstrated students' preferences for the language of instruction - consisting of two items.

The questionnaire comprised both structured (closed) and unstructured (open ended) questions. Students were requested to give their honest views in a 4--Likert scale. The scale was comprised as follows; **Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.**

Limitation of the study

The study was limited to one class of second year students in the Allied Health Science College in Kuwait University. The study was aimed at students who are enrolled in a science college where English is the medium of instruction. Another reason for choosing the college was because of its accessibility and the close ties that the researcher had with some members of the faculty where this research was to take place. This limits the degree to which the results of the study may be generalized to the target population.

Results

Biographical information

The students who participated in this study came from the Allied Health Science College at Kuwait University. A total number of 17 students participated in the study, comprising 14 females and 3 males.

The data concerning the language(s) of which the students had been taught in their previous schooling illustrated that 8 students had been taught in Arabic, 2 in English and 7 in a mixture of both Arabic and English. Nine (9) students indicated both Arabic and English as their languages of communication with their classmates and teacher, and 1 student indicated the use of Arabic with classmates and English with teachers. However 3 students indicated that English was their language of communication and 3 students indicated that Arabic was their language of communication with their classmates, teachers and staff; 1 student did not answer this question.

Section B elicited the students' views about the medium of instruction.

The students' views about the language of teaching were assessed using a Likert type scale consisting of 13 questions. On each question, students indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with the given statements related to language attitudes. Scores on each question ranges from 1 to 4, with lower values indicating more negative attitudes.

Attitudes toward using monolingual or code switching in teaching

NO.	Item description	SA (4)	AG (3)	DA (2)	SD (1)
1	Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the weakness of my Arabic	41%	35%		
2	Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the weakness of my English		58%		
4	Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the strengthens of my English			47%	41%

Table (1)

Table (1) displays the students' responses (which are converted into percentages for the purpose of this study) towards using one language or two languages in code switching as a medium of instruction and communication. From the table above it is clear that 41% of the participants strongly agreed that it was beneficial to them to be taught the course in one language. The next item / question indicates that 58% of participants agreed that it was desirable to code switch between Arabic and English during teaching. In addition, 53% of the participants agreed that code switching makes the course easy to understand, and 35% strongly agreed with this statement. In a higher percentage, 47% disagreed that having teachers code switch during lessons caused any confusion to them.

Code switching and its effects on L1 and L2

NO.	Item description	SA (4)	AG (3)	DA (2)	SD (1)
5	Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the weakness of my Arabic			29%	58%
6	Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the weakness of my English			29%	53%
7	Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the strengthens of my English	23%	47%		

Table (2)

In responding to the questions regarding whether code switching leads to the weakness in participants' Arabic, 58% strongly disagreed while almost 30 % disagreed. This is illustrated in table (2). The next item / question looked at whether or not code switching led to a weakness in English. The responses demonstrated that 53% strongly disagreed and 29 % disagreed. Yet, 47% of the participants agreed and 23% strongly agreed that teaching language by code switching strengthen their grasp of the English language.

Code switching and its effects on the teacher's image among students

NO.	Item description	SA (4)	AG (3)	DA (2)	SD (1)
8	I respect instructor more when teaching in Arabic and English		64%		
9	I respect instructor more when teaching only in Arabic		29%	47%	
10	I respect instructor more when teaching only in English		41%		

Table (3)

The percentages above reflect the participants' responses to whether or not the student respects the instructor more when they are teaching in both Arabic and English. 64% of participants responded to say that they agreed this increased the respect they held for their teachers. But when teaching occurred in Arabic, 47% responded that this didn't increase the respect they held for their teachers, and almost 30 % agreed that it did.

Code switching and its effects on passing the exams

NO.	Item description	SA (4)	AG (3)	DA (2)	SD (1)
11	Teaching in Arabic increases my chances of passing the exams		35%	47%	
12	Teaching in English increases my chances of passing the exams		47%		
13	Teaching in Arabic/English increases my chances of passing the exams	64%			

Table (4)

In table (4) the focus of the questionnaire items was on the effect that code switching in two languages as a medium of instruction had on students' academic performance. 47% of the participants disagreed that teaching only in Arabic increases the chances of passing their

exams, but 35% agreed. The table also shows that 47% agreed that teaching in English would help them pass their exams. However, on the other hand, 64% strongly agreed and 29% agreed that teaching the course in both Arabic and English increased their chances of passing the course exams.

Section C sought students' responses from the Open-Ended questions. This section of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions. All the responses to these questions were gathered. The responses are interpreted and presented below. This section presents preferences, explanations of these preferences, and the comments, regarding language(s) of instruction.

Question 1: In which language(s) would you prefer the course to be taught?

There was a strong and evident agreement in the opinion expressed by students. The majority of students (14 out of 17 students) preferred Arabic/English code switching to the sole use of English language, which was preferred by only 3 students. This demonstrates a strong preference for the Arabic/English code switching as a medium of instruction. The following statements are some of the student's responses:

"it is better [to] use mainly English because this makes us understand future references about the subjects, however, difficult concepts should be explained in Arabic first then transcribed to English". Another comment was *"In my first two years I want English and Arabic but then I want only English".*

Question 2: Please explain why you prefer the language(s) in question1

The explanations were given by the respondents who expressed their preferences for the Arabic/English code switching instructional approach. This is substantiated by the following statement: *"because some information needs to be explained in Arabic for more understanding".* Another reason suggested by a student is *"...Arabic in [the] first year helps*

me to understand because I studied my high school in Arabic". Additionally "teaching in English and Arabic make us not [need] to use dictionaries ".

Two students did not express their opinions for this question, while 10 students express their preference for Arabic/English code switching. It can be inferred that Arabic/English code switching was regarded as a good medium for rendering Human Development in Occupational Therapy easy to understand. There was only 1 student who preferred the English language to be the medium of teaching and this student explained their preference of teaching in English as being *"because we work at hospitals the language we use is English so it is more important than Arabic"*. The student elaborated more on the reasons for preferring English only as *"it's better in English because in exams and essay questions we know the answers but we don't know how to write it in a way so the teacher understand what we mean"*. Besides, another student suggested that *"In exams I face difficulties in understanding some sentences that include difficult meaning"*. In their objections to the using of only English (as stated by the department and college language policy), one student expressed the following *"I try to improve my language and work hard but what can I do if all doors are closed and all studies have to be in English"*. Another student explained that the real challenge is not the language of instruction but the ability as a care giving professional to explain the terms that are learnt in English to their future patients who are native speakers of Arabic. This is another practical reason for favouring code switching in college lectures. *"I do not think English is a problem, but the main difficulty that we may face is when we try to apply our knowledge, which we have learned in English into real life practice"*. Interestingly this student's background schooling was in Arabic. Code switching was also preferred as a medium of teaching by a bilingual student who explains the reasons as *"...1. It helps me to*

reflect what I learned in my real environment. 2. Correlated with Arabic world as I can explain it [to the] general public in [a] language they understand.”

Discussion

This is an exploratory study which is aimed at exploring the students' language attitude towards the language of teaching in a science class and the effects of such teaching on students' perceptions to their academic performance. Findings of the present study clearly indicate students' strong preference toward a specific medium of instruction that is Arabic/English code switching. The results show that students' positive language attitudes towards code switching have been consistently supported through all the data.

When comparing the students' language attitude towards using one language (either Arabic or English) in teaching to Arabic/English code switching teaching, the findings indicate a strong preference in using code switching than using one language as a medium of instruction. Although the majority of the students strongly agree that using one language is beneficial to them, they find it more desirable and believe that it makes the course easy to understand if code switching is utilised. In addition, the vast majority of the students dismissed any confusion that might result out of using code switching in teaching. It is of importance to note here that although students appreciate monolingual teaching to strengthen their linguistic competence in English, they perceive code switching as a means of strengthening their comprehension in the science subject, as indicated by one of the comments *“When [the] teacher teaches in English and explains in Arabic, [then] I can understand very easily and this improves my language.”* Similar comments came from most of the participants regardless of the language of their background schooling.

When examining in more detail the students' language attitude towards code switching, students stated that the code switching does not weaken the L1 (58% strongly agreed), while the responses to whether using code switching could weaken the L2 led to a

relatively high percentage of the participants strongly disagreeing - representing 53% of the participants, with 29% saying that they disagreed. However, by comparing the previous two items, one can see the students' perception of the code switching effects is not the same on L1 and L2. It appears that the code switching has more negative effect on L2 than L1. In supporting the previous items, students responded very positively to the effects of code switching on their English, with 47% agreeing and 23% strongly agreeing that code switching will have strengthened their grasp of this language. The findings of the previous items show a wide agreement among participants that code switching does not have a negative impact on L1 and L2, although a lesser number of participants think it might weaken the L2. On the other hand, there is a wide agreement among participants of the positive effects of code switching in strengthening the L2, which is a desirable effect amongst foreign students as expressed by one student: it "*makes us understand future references about the subjects; however difficult concepts should be explained in Arabic*". None of the students portrayed any concerns about the negative effects of code switching on L1, but there is always a reference to the positive effects of code switching on strengthening the L2.

Not only does the students' language attitude towards the language of teaching have a variety of effects on L1 and L2, but it also has an impact on students' attitudes toward the image of the instructor, in which 64% of the students agreed that they respect the instructor more who is using code switching in teaching, while only 29% agreed on respecting the instructor more when he/she is teaching only in Arabic. Moreover 47% disagreed in their response as to whether they respected the instructor more when he/she is only teaching in Arabic. The results are reflections of the student's attitude toward the role that language of teaching plays in symbolizing a positive or negative identity for the teachers. The teacher who is using code switching has a higher status amongst the students, which highlights how powerful code switching could be in redefining the quality of teaching and teachers.

In the effects of code switching on students' academic performance, students' responses to whether teaching the course in Arabic will increase the chances of passing the course exams were divided, with 35% agreeing and 47% disagreeing. However, 47% of the students agreed that teaching in English would increase their chances of passing exams. But when the teaching is delivered in Arabic/English code switching, the responses were the highest, in which 64% of the participants strongly agreed and almost 30% agreed that it had a positive impact on increasing their chances of passing their course exams. Therefore, the students' language attitude toward code switching in teaching has a great impact on their academic performances as it is seen as an influential teaching tool to facilitate learning and therefore helps increase student involvement. One of the students explained the effect of not having sufficient exposure to code switching had on his academic performance as "*because in exams and essay questions we know the answers but we don't know how to write it in a way so the teacher understand what we mean*", therefore, he suggested code switching should be adopted as a medium of instruction.

The anticipated preference of language used in teaching is monolingual teaching, since the majority of the participants had a monolingual teaching experience in their schooling, in which 8 students had only Arabic, two students had only English and seven students had bilingual (Arabic and English) schooling. However, 14 out of the 17 students strongly agreed in their preference of using code switching (CS) as a medium of instruction. This shows that the language of previous schooling does not affect the students' preference of the medium of instruction within higher study.

Implications for decision makers, teachers and researchers

The present study has several implications for language policy makers, classroom teachers, educators, and researchers.

Firstly, Science departments are only applying English as a language of teaching and learning, and this is demonstrated in the language policy held at the Allied Health Science College at Kuwait University (as per the 2009-2010 handbook). Whilst English is the medium of textbooks, assignments and examinations, in reality and from the researcher's observation, Arabic/ English code switching is the dominant medium of classroom communication. As a large difference exists between language policy and students' preference of medium of instruction, decision makers should revise their language policy in order to reach the desirable goal of learning, in which code switching could be included in the planning of syllabi.

Secondly, educators and teachers of science subjects at colleges where English is used as a foreign language might want to consider the students' language preferences and attitudes toward medium of instruction. Teachers should be encouraged to make adequate use of code switching in classrooms when explaining concepts to students so that the students will be able to actively participate in classroom lessons.

Thirdly, researchers can help identify the correct level of utilising code switching as a language of instruction to promote the discussion of newly raised issues related to the effective teaching language, which will eventually contribute to facilitating the advancement of classroom teaching and learning.

*This study was inspired by Olugbara's study "*The effects of IsiZulu/ English code switching as a medium of instruction on students' performance in and attitudes towards biology*" where I have adapted the questionnaire and modified it for the purpose of this research. The limitations of this article are however my own.

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Appendix (1)

Students' language attitude towards using code-switching as a medium of instruction in the College of Health Sciences: An exploratory study

Introduction

This questionnaire is designed to find out your honest views about the language of teaching at your current course; *Human Development in Occupation Therapy*. Please respond to all the questions below carefully and honestly. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and will only be used for the purpose of this study. Your answers will not prejudice you in any way.

Section A: Biographical information:

Please, answer the following questions.

1. What is your gender?

() Female.

() Male.

2. In what language(s) have you been mostly taught in your previous schooling?

() Arabic.

() English.

() English and Arabic.

3. What language(s) do you use in communicating with your classmates, teachers, and staff at the college?

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Section B: Learners honest views about the teaching language.

Please read each of the following statements very carefully and tick the answer which best describes your degree of agreement or disagreement.

The following abbreviations are used: **SA** - Strongly Agree; **AG** - Agree; **DA** Disagree; **SD** - Strongly Disagree.

SD (1)	DA (2)	AG (3)	SA (4)	Item description	No.
				Teaching the course only in one language is beneficial to me.	1.
				Teaching the course in Arabic and English is desirable to me.	2.
				Teaching the course in Arabic and English makes it easy for me to understand.	3.
				It confuses me when course instructor teaches in Arabic and English at the same class period.	4.
				Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the weakness of my Arabic.	5.
				Mixing of Arabic and English leads to the weakness of my English.	6.
				Mixing of Arabic and English strengthens my English.	7.
				I respect instructor more when teaching in Arabic and English.	8.
				I respect instructor more when teaching in Arabic.	9.
				I respect instructor more when teaching in English.	10.
				Teaching the course in Arabic increases my chances of passing the exams.	11.
				Teaching the course in English increases my chances of passing the exams.	12.
				Teaching the course in Arabic and English increases my chances of passing the exams.	13.

Section C: Please, answer the following questions.

1. Would you prefer the course to be taught in (choose one answer):

- a) English only
- b) Arabic only
- c) Both Arabic and English.

Please, explain your

answer?

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2. Any additional comments?

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Thank you for your cooperation

About the author

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