

Code-Switching Used by Teachers for English Majors: a Sociolinguistic Analysis of Academic-Related Discourses in Chinese Universities

Jingyan Cui, Pengpeng Lu*

School of Foreign Studies, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an, China

*corresponding author: Pengpeng Lu

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Abstract: There is long research tradition analysing code-switching, although relatively little research focuses on academic-related discourses made by English Major teachers in Chinese universities. Addressing this gap, this paper analyses academic-related discourses on disciplinary studies and scientific researches made by English major teachers, to discover the peculiarity of code-switching in junior English classes Chinese universities, compared with that in other scenes. Focusing on classes where Chinese is predominant, and English is subordinate, the analysis provides evidences to prove that the types of code-switching in English class are mainly generated by motivations aimed at fulfilling its prospective functions in discourses. Also, associating current social attitudes on code-switching with a sociolinguistic insight, this paper suggests that code-switching should be used and treated properly. Finally, the paper points out its drawbacks on data collection and situation classification in the research process, followed by suggestions for future research.

1. Introduction

Through the study of the society and the background of the discourses between teachers and students in Chinese universities, the social causes of code switching can be revealed. Meanwhile, with the analysis of language use, the characteristics and development directions of code switching in the discourses between teachers and students are revealed, which is also the core point in the co-change theory of language and society in sociolinguistics.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Code-Switching as a Sociolinguistic Phenomenon

Code-switching is a distinct linguistic behaviour of bilingual speakers or foreign language learners as an important feature of their communicative competence [1]. Influenced by a tapestry of sociolinguistic variables and properties, Code-switching is closely related to and spawned from bilingual speech since this speech is always “socially embedded” [2]. Weinreich rightly observed that “when a language contact situation is examined in detail, the interrelation of socio-cultural conditions and linguistic phenomena is apparent”. [3]

2.2 Communication Accommodation Theory

The literature on the impact of accommodation theory on communication has suggested that accommodation is significantly concerned with the links between language, context, and identity [4]. But the influence of accommodation theory in the context of educational communication has not yet been fully studied. The cognitive and affective processes underlying individuals' convergence and divergence through code switching have found evidence of motivation. [5] With the regard of accommodation theory, the motivation and function of code switching can be deeply studied in this paper.

3. The Study

3.1 A. Methodology

In this paper, we have done a quantitative research with the method of corpus collection. For corpus collection, several academic courses for English major junior students, including American Literature, English Pragmatics, and Language Testing and Assessment were observed and recorded on voice. Among them code-switching in American Literature class is the most obvious and representative. Therefore, this paper's discussion focuses mainly on the transcript of one American Literature class. Then, the motivation and function of code-switching are summarized, and a conclusion is drawn.

3.2 Students with Intermediate Level of English

Since a fluent command of L1 and L2 is generally considered as a defining characteristic of speakers who engage in code-switching [1], the English major students studied in this paper all have passed the "Test for English Majors – Level 4" (TEM-4).

3.3 Academic-Related Discourse by Teachers for English Majors

The discourses in this paper refer to Chinese-dominant and English-subordinate conversations. This means the structure and main parts of discourses follow Chinese syntactic properties, while English segments are merged into these sentences.

4. Classification and Motivation Analysis of Code-Switching in Discourses

4.1 Switched Elements

The most common switched elements in sentences are notional words, especially proper nouns like names of places and people. In other words, phrases, morphemes, words are switched or are filled in blanks, because no perfect translation or correspondents in the required language can be found. According to statistics carried out by former researchers, the most common structure is (1) N + N: "migrant 劳动力" (migrant labor), (2) V + N: "象征一种 thought" (represent a kind of thought), and (3) A + N: "classic 作品" (classic works).

4.2 Code-Switching Motivations

4.2.1 Convergence.

According to Accommodation Theory [5], people will change their speaking style and discourse form to cooperate with different discourse objects. For example, here is a dialogue between a teacher (T) and a student (S). T: "上周你读了哪本书?" (Which book did you read last week?) S: "'愤怒的葡萄'." (The Grape of Wrath.) T: "Oh, *The Grape of Wrath*, written by John Steinbeck. That is a very special book." The teacher shows her appreciations to her students by repeating the book's name in English.

4.2.2 Euphemism.

Compared with direct Chinese comments, the English equivalent words sound less intimidating. For example, when talking to a class of Chinese students, "off the track" is more indirect and euphemistic than directly pointing out the word "跑题", which is relatively harsher and stimulating.

4.2.3 Specificity

The English equivalent often has a "narrower" (or "broader") semantic coverage, for instance, when referring to a certain type of course, Chinese university students often say "lecture" rather than "讲座" or "课", because "lecture" and "讲座" have subtle semantic differences.

4.2.4 Principle of Economy

In terms of language use, Zipf points out that “short words in language are obviously more popular than long words.” [6] Code-switching happens when the English equivalent is more concise, e.g. “上次课我们主要介绍了几类目前比较大的英语测试的评价体系,比如 GRE 和 TOEFL.” (Last time we have introduces several popular English tests in the world now, such as Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).) In this case, the abbreviation of the term is more concise than the full name, without reducing any accuracy.

4.2.5 Emphasis

Some people use code-switching to emphasize. For example, in the American Literature class, when introducing the inner ideas of Steinbeck’s *The Grape of Wrath*, the teacher said: “那我们来看一下第 2 点,关于这本小说为什么被称为真正的 American book” (Now let us look at the second point, about why this novel is regarded as a real American book.) Through code switching, the teacher wants to emphasize the importance of “American book” and arouse the students’ attention.

4.3 Within-Subjects Comparison

Based on the recorded audio materials, numbers of sentences are counted and their types of motivations are identified, as is shown in Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1: Code-Switching Motivation Types

Motivation Type	Sentence Number
Convergence	12
Euphemism	9
Specificity	60
Economy	15
Emphasis	24
Total Sentences	120

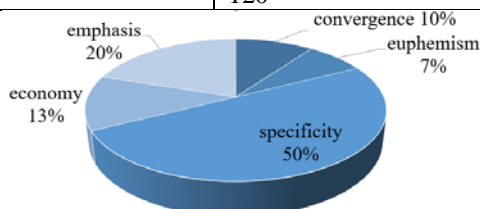


Figure 1 Percentile of Different Types of Motivations

From the pie chart, it is obvious to find that among all kinds of motivations taken in English classes, specificity is driven from most frequently, followed by emphasis. Then, economy and convergence are also popular motivations of code-switching in English major’s course. In contrast, teachers seldom aim at euphemism when using code-switching.

4.4 Peculiarity of English Major Classes

According to Krishna, there are mainly four factors of code-switching. (1) The speaker may need the term in another code. This happens frequently in our daily life when we cannot find a proper term in Chinese to express our feeling. (2) Some speakers may want to emphasize something by choosing a term in another code. (3) This may also happen when people want to hide the meaning from someone who is present. (4) Code-switching from L1 to L2 may be just for the purpose of showing off. [7]

Different from the traditional division of factors, based on analysis above, in English major classes factor (1) and (2) are the main reasons of code-switching, since the teachers and students do not have to hide the meaning and show off in front of their classmates. Moreover, the paper specifies the factor (1) and (2) into motivations mentioned above, which is more specific and comprehensive.

5. The Functions of Teachers' Code Switching

As the result shown in our previous corpus collection, code switching is a widely observed phenomenon used by teachers and serves its functions in Chinese teachers' academic-related discourses. On the analysis of communication accommodation theory, the mode of code-switching is regarded as a kind of specific language choice used to comply with the contextual factors and achieve specific communicative purpose. Thus, teachers can use code switching with social convention and psychological motivation to achieve their own teaching purposes in their classes. As the catalogue developed by Mattson and Burenhult, these functions are listed as topic-switching, affection, and repetition, and these three functions will be given an explanation in the following paragraphs. [8]

5.1 Topic Switching

In topic switch cases, teachers alter their language according to the topic. When teacher shift their language to the mother tongue of their students in dealing with another points, which will be easily taught and understood at that moment. In this way, teachers can quickly express their changed meaning which can reach the requirement of minimizing labour and maximizing gains. In the students' side, their attention can also be directed to the next topic, which is also suggested by Cole: "a teacher can exploit students' previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2." In our recording materials, teacher in American Literature may speak in students' native language to change her main topic, which can be clear and time saving for her efficient lecture.

5.2 Affective Function: Solidarity

The phenomenon of teacher's code switching also carries affective functions that serve for expression of emotions. Recent years, due to the different positions and roles in the relationship between teachers and students, the psychological distance always exists in their communication. In this domain, teachers are the more powerful side, so when they have the desire to reduce the differences in behaviour to stress solidarity, making use of code switching is a method for them.

5.3 Repetitive Function

Another function of code switching in teacher's academic discourse is the repetitive function. For the aim of clarity, teachers would like to use code switching to transfer the necessary information for their students. There are various reasons and necessities in this case, such as avoidance of student's distraction or emphasis of the conveyed facts. During the relatively long length of university class, students are going to be mind-wandering easily, so teacher of American Literature said, "we have just talked about this point" with the method of code switching. Another reason is that teacher can emphasis their teaching points through repeat the item with a Chinese equivalent expression.

5.4 Within-Subjects Comparison

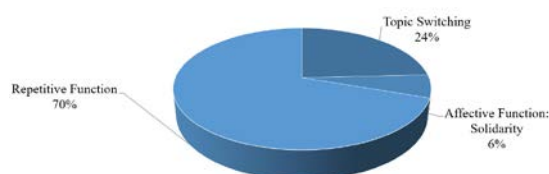


Figure 2: Realized Functions of Code-Switching

Among all functions realized by code-switching, repetitive function has the most percentile, which probably because one of the lecturers' teaching goals is to help students memorize key points. (Figure 2) Therefore, teachers use code-switching to reach a repetitive function. Besides repetitive function, code-switching also realizes its topic switching function and affective function.

6. Attitudes Towards Using and Treating Code-Switching

Based on the current social attitudes and the forming process of code-switching discourses, here are some advice on how to use and treat code-switching properly for bilingual people when talking academic topics with teachers or schoolmates.

6.1 Using Code-Switching That Meets the Reception Efficiency of the Listener

It is an accomplishment and ability to use the most comfortable language for each other. For example, university students can frequently use code-switching with same major schoolmates. However, when dealing with old professors or students from lower grades, students should pay attention to others' acceptance of the word. Even if the first reaction is in English, it should also be converted to Chinese in time. Even if the speaker encounters some difficult words, he can try to express them in Chinese, because it is a respectable manner for each other's mother tongue.

6.2 Code-Switching Only When Semantic Difference Occurs

Sometimes, in order to express the meaning accurately, code-switching can't be avoided. At this time, it is reasonable to switch from Chinese to English and better bring some explanation in Chinese. However, when there is no difference in other semantics, using code switching is unnecessary and, in most cases, annoying. For example, teachers and students need to speak more target language to construct their language ability.

6.3 Being More Inclusive for Code Switching

Everyone's personal experience is different, and the lexicon formed in the brain is also different. Some people think that cumbersome code-switching may seem natural to others. Code switching should not be judged with just one single principle. Thus, it is necessary to respect the diverse language environment and feel different context and cultural significance from code switching.

7. Reflections and Suggestions for Future Research

This paper classifies code switching from three criterions. Each criterion does not fully cover all kinds of code-switching. Therefore, each classification scheme can be evaluated from multiple perspectives for future studies. Finally, the most valuable classification criteria will be selected. Based on this standard, researchers may study the differences of code-switching preferences in English major classes and in other situations. Besides, due to the features of our study, taking a use of teachers' interviews will help us to improve the analysis. This helps further determine the research direction of code-switching, to provide more timely and targeted suggestions for university English class.

8. Conclusion

Throughout the paper, a literacy review of code-switching from a general view is made, followed by identification and classifications of academic-related discourses made by English major teachers in Chinese universities. Afterwards, motivations and functions of code switching in classes are discussed, together with a combination of existing researches. Based on sociolinguistic analysis above, associating with current social attitudes towards code-switching, the paper also gives suggestions for viewing and using code-switching in a proper way. Nonetheless, due to the limited number of studies synthesized in this paper, it is impossible to capture all the analytic points to do a systematic research. Therefore, for future research, investigations through continually exploring it with the method of field research is suggested.

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