

## Reasons for Teachers' Code-switching in EFL Classrooms

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### **Abstract:**

Bilingual or multilingual People tend to use two languages or more during the same conversation. This shift between the languages is known as code-switching (Wardhaugh, 2006). Egypt is an example of those countries where students may use their mother tongue (Arabic) while studying English as a foreign language. In Egypt, although teachers adhere to use English only inside the EFL classroom, some of them may use Arabic words or short sentences for different reasons. This code-switching from English into Arabic and vice versa may affect the students' acquisition of the English language. In this research, we are going to identify the reasons for code switching. Some teachers of English at high schools in Egypt filled up an online questionnaire and were interviewed as well. The results may help to identify the reasons behind code-switching made by these teachers in that community. Moreover, the study presented some ways suggested by the teachers to benefit from code-switching in the EFL classroom.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics – code switching – first language – bilinguals and foreign language teaching.

### **1. Statement of the problem**

Code- switching is defined as the shift between two languages or varieties in the same context. Code-switching can also be defined as using two or more languages alternatively in the same utterance or conversation (Grosjean, 1982; Milroy & Muysken, 1995; Wardhaugh, 2006). From a sociolinguistic perspective, code-switching is a debatable phenomenon. Although the instructions all over the EFL classes are to

use only English in the classroom, some teachers may resort to use the students' first language for some learning reasons. This research paper is going to investigate these learning reasons in order to guide EFL teachers to make use of L1 and, also not to overuse it in vain that will affect the progress of L2 acquisition negatively. There are different classifications to the reasons for the code-switching in the EFL classroom, but this study will adopt the classification of Mattsson & Burenhult (1999). They classified the reasons for code-switching into three types: (a) topic switch, (b) affective functions, and (c) repetitive functions. This study aims at investigating the reasons for code switching by English language teachers in the classroom in Jazan University in Saudi Arabia.

### **2. The Background Situation**

Some studies such as the study of (Anastassiou & Andreou, 2017; Qing, 2010) stated that using the first language while teaching the target language has some functions such as topic switch, affective functions and repetitive functions. They indicated that there are learning reasons and benefits behind using the mother tongue in the EFL classes. Cole (1998) said that teachers can benefit from their students' background information about L1 to increase their understanding of the new language.

### **3. The Aims of the Study**

This study is going to investigate the reasons for teachers' Code-switching in EFL classrooms. Some other studies were conducted on the same topic but from the students' perspective. This study is going to deal with the teachers' code switching and its

reasons. There are different studies that pointed out some learning reasons for code-switching inside the classroom but most of the results of every study differ according to the investigated community. As stated above, this study is going to investigate the reasons of teachers' code switching in EFL classes in Egypt. The results will guide the teachers to know how to make use of L1 effectively and in a way that will ease their teaching task (Malik, 1994; Yletyinen, 2004).

#### 4. The Questions of the Study

The study is going to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reasons for the teachers' Code-switching in an EFL classroom?
2. How can teachers benefit from L1 while teaching L2?

#### 5. Literature Review

Code-switching is now seen as a significant phenomenon in any bilingual or multilingual population. Multilingual or bilingual People frequently utilise two or more languages in the same speech. This transition or exchange of languages is referred to as code-switching. Egypt is a bilingual society since all pupils speak Arabic as their first language and English as a foreign language.

Many academics have defined code-switching. All definitions agree that code-switching is the use of two or more languages in the same context. Gardner-Chloros (2009) defined code-switching in another way. She defined code-switching as the process of switching from one language, dialect, or register to another.

Although both students and teachers are committed to using the target language in the EFL classroom, some of them fail to do so. That occurs for a variety of causes or to carry out specific functions. The reasons for using the student's first language when speaking the foreign language vary depending on the teacher (Borlongan, 2009).

Code-switching has been examined from various angles, including sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and grammatical techniques. We shall investigate code-switching from a sociolinguistic standpoint in our research. In addition, we will look at the functions of using L1 while using L2.

According to the findings of (Kasperczyk, 2005), teachers can effectively use code-switching throughout EFL curriculum activities. Furthermore, when teaching a new unit, the teacher might provide the meanings of the newly presented ideas in L1. Much research, such as (Tikunoff, 1985; Mattson & Burenhult, 1999), demonstrated that teachers may swap codes subconsciously. As a result, teachers may be unaware of the effects and outcomes of code-switching. As a result, teachers must understand the reasons for code change and, at the same time, they should be conscious when code-switching.

Hoffman (1991) classified the reasons for code-switching into seven categories as the following: (a) Talking about a particular topic. Sometimes people offer their first choice to talk about an exciting topic in one language rather than in another language. When a speaker expresses his excitement or anger through a language that is not his everyday language, he feels free and more comfortable in using that particular language. (b) Quoting somebody else. Concerning this reason, Hoffman (1991, p.115) recommends that "sometimes people like to say of some well-known facts or quote a prominent expression". (c) Being emphatic about something. During a discussion, if someone wants to be emphatic about something, he will use a language that is not his native tongue. Hoffman (1991) describes this as deliberately or accidentally switching from a second language to a first language. (d) Interjection (Inserting sentence fillers or sentence connectors). Related to cause for interjection, Hoffman (1991) recommended that multilingual people may sometimes

create a sentence connector or interjection at the time of language switching and language mixing. This has intentionally or unintentionally happened between bilinguals. (e) Repetition used for clarification. This happens when a bilingual explains his/her speech by using both languages to help the listeners understand better. (f) Intention of clarifying the speech content for interlocutor. Hoffman (1991) suggested that “when a bilingual person talks to another bilingual, code mixing and code switching helps the smooth running of the content of the speech and makes the speech comprehensible to the listener”. (g) Expressing group identity. Code-switching is also used to state group identity (Hoffman, 1991).

The functions and reasons of CS have been studied by several researchers in a wide range of linguistics domains. John J Gumperz (1982) specifies six main functions of CS which are: “quotation, addressee specification, repetition, interjection, message qualification, and personification”. He indicates that one of the major reasons of CS is that the elements of the other language transfer the meaning of the intended idea more accurately.

Moreover, Crystal (1997) indicates that the speakers use CS for some reasons like “the deficiency, expressing solidarity, and conveying attitude”. On the other side, (Sert, 2005) proposes four functions of Cs, they are equivalence, floor holding, reiteration, and conflict control.

On one hand, Reyes (2004) discusses a variety of CS functions like imitation, a quotation, turn accommodation, question shift, emphasis, insistence, situation switch, clarification or persuasion, person specification, topic shift, and discourse marker. She states a major reason that speakers switch codes when they do not know the word in the target language.

On the other hand, in her study, Malik (1994) developed 10 reasons for code-switching. These functions are detailed and appropriate for activities inside the classroom. (a) Lack of Facility: This term refers to the students who code switch from English to Arabic because they can't find the equivalent word or vocabulary in English. (b) Lack of Register: Students code switch when they find that the message or the meaning will be more complete if they used an expression in their native language. (c) Mood of the Speaker: If the student isn't in a stable and good mood, he can't think for the suitable vocabulary that should be used in the target language (in our study is English). (d) To Emphasize a Point: The bilingual students may code switch to repeat the same meaning in two different languages (L1 + L2). (e) Habitual Experience: There are some discourse markers such as “you know,” “I mean” or “like” that are placed before or in the middle of a sentence can sometimes be used in the other language. In EFL classes some students may use Arabic words like these English words that are used daily. (f) Semantic Significance: Choy (2011) explains it as a “verbal strategy”. Crystal (1987) supports this by also saying that language alternation occurs when bilingual speakers want to convey their attitude or emotions to each other (as cited by Skiba, 1997). (g) To Show Identity with a Group: when a teacher code-switches in EFL classroom to achieve solidarity and communicate in friendly relations with the students. Code-switching, then, establishes an encouraging language environment in the classroom (Sert, 2005). Students may also code switch to show their culture, social class or maybe their tendencies or hobbies. (h) To address a different audience: We code switch if we want to welcome a newcomer inside the class or in an event. So, we may use the newcomer's native language to salute him. (i) Pragmatic Reasons: Speakers may code switch in order to call attention to the context

of a conversation (Malik, 1994). For example, inside an EFL classroom, students use English to talk about something, but they can use L1 to express their feelings or may be the names of some local things like local food. This happens to attract attention to the context of the conversation. (j) To Attract Attention: Students inside the classroom can use some L1 words to attract attention in general.

Mattsson & Burenhult (1999) introduced new classification for the reasons for code-switching as follows: (a) topic switch, (b) affective functions, and (c) repetitive functions. This classification will be adopted as the theoretical framework in this research paper. (a)Topic Switch in which the teacher switches the codes or languages when he shifts from one topic to another. In addition, some topics are new to the students and have new concepts that may make the students misunderstand. Using L1 in that case helps the teacher to make it easy for the students to cope with progress of the lesson. (b)The affective functions: the teachers can use code-switching for affective functions such as expressing his emotions. This kind of functions is concerned with having supported educational environment where students learn a foreign language, but they receive feedback and motivative words in L1. So, teachers' concern is to create a good rapport with their students through code-switching. (c)The repetitive functions: in this situation, teachers repeat the instructions in L1 so as to clarify the meaning. In other words, the teachers repeat the same thing in the first language so that the students will receive the same information in two languages (the first language and the foreign language). Sert (2005) opposed that use of code-switching. He said that if that was a stable technique from the teacher to repeat the instructions in L1, it may lead to undesired outcomes as the students will ignore the target language and wait for the translation. Therefore, it

shouldn't be a concrete method that the teacher translates every instruction. The teacher should be conscious and differentiates the positions where he code-switches. Moreover, he can translate the instructions when they are presented for the first time. If the instructions or the concepts are repeated more than once, there shouldn't be any kind of translation.

## 6. Methodology:

### 6.1. Research Methods and Instruments:

A quantitative method was adopted in this study to get the most accurate results. A questionnaire was designed to find out the reasons for the teachers' code switching in EFL classes. The questionnaire was conducted online. It was designed using *google. Docs* and it was sent to the participants using WhatsApp and e-mails.

### 6.2. Participants:

A group of 21 teachers participated in filling in the online questionnaire. All the teachers are Arab teachers. They have the same mother tongue of the Egyptian students. Some high school teachers from different schools in Egypt participated in the questionnaire. All the participants were Egyptians and all of them are teachers of English, that means all the teachers are bilinguals and they have the same mother tongue of the students. All the participants are native Arabic speakers. They are bilinguals as they can speak both Arabic as a mother tongue and English as a foreign language. All of them are also staff members at the department of English. Their ages range from 32 to 54. It's a wide range of age.

### 6.3. Procedures of the Research:

The link of the online questionnaire was sent to the twenty-one teachers by

WhatsApp. The questionnaire consisted of 13 points; 4 personal information (age, nationality, specialism, and scientific degree). Then there are 8 multiple choice questions. They were designed to show the reasons for code-switching by the teacher if he does. Finally, there is one open ended question where the participant can express his opinion openly without limitations. Overall, the questionnaire was designed to prove if the adopted reasons for code-switching are true or not.

The first type of the reasons adopted as a theoretical framework is “Topic switch”. This first function has two questions in the questionnaire; questions 7 and 11. The second type of the functions is “the affective functions”. This second type has three questions in the questionnaire; questions 6, 9 and 10. The third type of the functions is “the repetitive functions”. This third type has three questions in the questionnaire; questions 5, 8 and 12. The last question (number 13) was designed to collect the

participants points of view, their practical performance of using Arabic inside their EFL classes. They also may give recommendations or limitations for such use. (See Appendix A).

## 7. The Results of the study:

In this part, the results of the electronic questionnaire are going to be presented. The results are quantitative that helped to give accurate illustration.

To analyze the data derived from the questionnaire, there will be no statistical analysis such as T-test or ANOVA because the research depends mainly on the frequency count. To explain, the responses of the teachers will be counted and then the percentages of each choice will be used to get the results.

### 7.1. Results related to the first four questions in the questionnaire:

As mentioned before, the first four questions were about the personal information about the participants to know their (age, nationality, scientific degree, and specialism).

**Table 2 distribution of Participants according to (Nationality, job, age and specialism)**

	Responses	Percentage %
Nationality	Egyptians	100% Arabic speakers (Bilinguals)
Qualification	Bachelor degree	14
	Masters	3
	PhD degree	4
Age	Minimum	32
	Maximum	54
Department	English department	100% bilinguals



From table (2), we can see that all the participants have the mother tongue of the students. Also, we can see that all of them are well educated as they are all among the faculty of the English department. In addition, they are all above the age of 32. That means they have a good experience in teaching English for high school students. All the previous information may lead to an almost accurate and trusted result.

### 7.2. Results related to the fifth question in the questionnaire:

***“How many languages do you use in the classroom?”***

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic in his teaching or not. Second, there are three choices: Arabic only, English only or both

Arabic and English. The results show that 16 teachers out of 21 chose “both Arabic and English” and only 5 teachers chose “English only”. From this we can notice that about 76.2% code switch in their EFL classes. According to sert, (2005), using L1 in the EFL classes is an inevitable matter. Therefore, it should be exploited positively. These used Arabic words can be from “the topic switch functions” if it is used to introduce new concepts. It also can be “repetitive function” if it is a translation of a previous English word. From that question we just wanted to know if the teacher for or against code switching, then to know the reason for his code switching if he does. (See table 3).

**Table 3 distribution of Participants according to the language used in teaching in the classroom**

	Responses	Percentage
Arabic only	0	0%
English only	5	23.8%
Both Arabic and English	16	76.2%

### 7.3. Results related to the sixth question in the questionnaire:

***“Do you feel the need to use some Arabic words when teaching English in the classroom?”***

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic for the purpose of “affective function”. From the answers you can find the percentage of the attitude towards that. The choices are: Strongly disagree, disagree, Neutral, agree and strongly agree. The participants who agreed to use some Arabic words in their teaching English language were

the most percentage (33.3%). The second level were those who were neutral (23.8%). The third level were those who strongly agreed. On the other hand, those participants who disagreed and strongly disagreed were fewer (19% + 4.8%). From all these percentages, the result is positive towards code switching using some Arabic words to help the students understand. This use of Arabic words can help the teacher to facilitate the lesson and build a rapport with his students to create a positive learning environment. (See table 4)

**Table 4 distribution of Participants according to their responses to the 6<sup>th</sup> question**

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly disagree	1	4.8%
disagree	4	19%
Neutral	5	23.8%
Agree	7	33.3%
Strongly agree	4	19%

**7.4. Results related to the seventh question in the questionnaire:**

**“Sometimes you need to use some Arabic words to facilitate the topic in English.?”**

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic language for the purpose of introducing a new topic (Topic switch). the choices are: Strongly disagree, disagree, Neutral, agree and strongly agree. All neutral,

agree and strongly agree have equal percentages (28.6%). The participants who strongly disagree and disagree were (4.8% + 9.5%) respectively. It is noticed that the negative attitude is the least percentage. From this result, we can see that most teachers code switch into Arabic for the purpose of “Topic switch”.

**Table 5 distribution of Participants according to their responses to the 7<sup>th</sup> question**

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly disagree	1	4.8%
disagree	2	9.5%
Neutral	6	28.6%
Agree	6	28.6%
Strongly agree	6	28.6%

**7.5. Results related to the eighth question in the questionnaire:**

**“How do you consider the teacher who uses both Arabic and English in an EFL classroom?”**

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic language for the purpose of “repetitive function”. the choices are a) He can't use English well to teach. b) He shouldn't use Arabic at all. c) He can use some Arabic words but not so many. d) He can use Arabic

as it is helpful. The most percentage was (57.1%) for those participants who can use some Arabic words but not so many. This is “repetitive function”. The negative attitudes towards code switching are zero%.

**Table 6 distribution of Participants according to their responses to the 8<sup>th</sup> question**

	Responses	Percentage
He can't use English well to teach.	0	0%
He shouldn't use Arabic at all.	0	0%
He can use some Arabic words but not so many.	12	57.1%
He can use Arabic as it is helpful.	9	42.9%

#### 7.6. Results related to the ninth question in the questionnaire:

**“Some teachers may use some Arabic words to give feedback to the students after answering a question.”**

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic language for the purpose of “affective

function”. The choices are: Strongly disagree, disagree, Neutral, agree and strongly agree. The participants who agreed are the most percentage (33.3%). That means the teachers may use Arabic words for the purpose of “affective function”.

**Table 7 distribution of Participants according to their responses to the 9<sup>th</sup> question**

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly disagree	3	14.3%
disagree	4	19%
Neutral	5	23.8%
Agree	7	33.3%
Strongly agree	2	9.5%

#### 7.7. Results related to the tenth question in the questionnaire:

**“Some teachers use some Arabic words to make the students feel familiar atmosphere with the teacher in the classroom.”**

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic language for the purpose of “affective function”. The choices are: Strongly disagree, disagree, Neutral, agree and strongly agree. The participants who code switch into



Arabic for the purpose of “affective function” to build a good atmosphere for the students in the classroom are the highest percentage (52.4%). There is a noticeable difference from the other

percentages. From this result, we can notice that using Arabic language for an affective function is used practically by some staff members.

**Table 8 distribution of Participants according to their responses to the 10<sup>th</sup> question**

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	9.5%
disagree	4	19%
Neutral	4	19%
Agree	11	52.4%
Strongly agree	0	0%

**7.8. Results related to the eleventh question in the questionnaire:**

**“Teachers may repeat the same meaning of English words in Arabic to ensure clarity.”**

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic language for the purpose of “repetitive function”. The

choices are: Strongly disagree, disagree, Neutral, agree and strongly agree. The highest percentage was “agree choice” by 42.9%. That means the faculty staff who repeat the meaning in Arabic are the most. Therefore, the repetitive function of code switching is used mostly

**Table 9 distribution of Participants according to their responses to the 11<sup>th</sup> question**

	Responses	Percentage
Strongly disagree	1	4.8%
disagree	7	33.3%
Neutral	2	9.5%
Agree	9	42.9%
Strongly agree	2	9.5%

**7.9. Results related to the twelfth question in the questionnaire:**

**“What do you think about using some Arabic words while teaching English in an EFL classroom?”**

From that question, it will be clear if the participant uses Arabic language for any purpose. It is an open-ended question. All the participants had full freedom to

write their opinion about the topic. Here are their anonymous responses to that question.

1. It is not a bad idea as long as it helps in the process of teaching. However, the teacher has to decrease the number of words he uses so that his students don't get used to communicating in Arabic.
2. We can use our mother tongue but in a very limit way to e.g, to save time and sometimes to make the instructions clear.
3. If it is necessary for facilitating, it is welcome.
4. Arabic words are useful. Teachers need to learn how to use it in class in a way that doesn't harm the learning of the English Language.
5. I think it is needed in some cases, based on students' knowledge of the language.
6. In many cases it saves time and effort, but teachers shouldn't make it a habit. It is recommended to use some Arabic when the need arises.
7. I think the use of your mother tongue language can be really helpful in learning new language.
8. Helpful
9. I don't prefer to use Arabic words in EFL Classes.
10. I think it depends on the academic level of the students, difficulty of the content especially If you are teaching English for specific purposes.
11. The teacher's job is to engage his students in real life situation and help them to learn English. He should motivate them to think in their target language not on their mother tongue.
12. I think it's better to use simple words and sentences that all students can

understand instead of using Arabic in order to make them familiar with the language and create channels of communication and understanding

13. It is good.
14. It important because a lot of Arab students don't know English very well. Therefore, using one Arabic word may facilitate the topic.
15. V. Useful
16. You can use some Arabic words but under control. I mean that the teacher can use Arabic for a specific purpose and not excessively.
17. Using some Arabic while teaching in the classroom will be helpful for the students.

From the above answers for the twelfth question, it is clear that most teachers use code switching for the purpose of (repetitive function, affective function or topic switch function). All the three reasons for code switching classified by Mattsson & Burenhult (1999) were used by all the teachers. The teachers recommended using the mother tongue under control. They also recommended being trained on how to make use of the L1 during teaching L2 in a way that doesn't harm the process of the English language acquisition.

#### **8. Recommendations:**

1. Using Arabic in an EFL class is allowed but under control so as not to spoil the foreign language acquisition process.
2. There are three reasons for code switching: repetitive function, affective function and topic switch function. These functions can be

adopted for more effective use of the mother tongue inside the classroom.

3. Teachers have to learn the advantages and disadvantages of code switching although it is well known that using only English language in the class is the instruction.
4. This research was conducted about the teachers' code-switching reasons. There can be more research on the students and for different approaches of code-switching.

#### 9. Conclusion:

Code switching is an educational phenomenon. It has to be studied and to be taken into consideration. This research paper adopted the theoretical framework of Mattsson & Burenhult (1999). The results revealed that all the

three reasons for code switching by teachers are applicable in these high schools in Egypt. Teachers or students codeswitch in the EFL class for a purpose. Codeswitching itself isn't harmful, but if it is not directed and controlled in the class, it may influence foreign language acquisition badly. Teachers have to be trained in how to make use of code switching in the EFL classes and when or how to stop it. Consequently, the students may get more benefit out of the teacher's explanations in the class. Finally, this topic is very crucial and it can't be generalized because each community has its own preferences and attitudes towards the strategies of teaching in the class.

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