CODESWITCHING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract: Codeswitching within foreign language classroom interaction is a frequent and central concern for both teachers and students. For teachers, it usually involves aiming to prevent students from using their first language; for students, it is mainly about the ways to use their mother tongue while still functioning and succeeding in the foreign language classroom. Levine (2011: 4) draws our attention towards the contradictory relationship between the existent aims of foreign language education – creating a target-language environment by using exclusively the target language within the classroom – and the poor educational system which offers only a low number of teaching hours where learners can get in contact with the target language.
The present paper offers an insight into English foreign language classroom interactions recorded in three different types of high schools in Târgu Mureș. The study analyses the presence of codeswitching phenomena and the purpose of the occurring codeswitching instances.

Keywords: EFL classroom, codeswitching, monolingual/bilingual school context

Introduction

Research on codeswitching in educational settings refers mostly to bilingual classes. The early studies were carried out in the United States in bilingual education programmes for linguistic minority children and focused almost exclusively on documenting the amount of time devoted to the use of the learners' L1 (usually Spanish) and to the use of English (see Ovando and Collier, 1985; Ramirez, 1980; Wong Fillmore and Valadez, 1986). These first studies on codeswitching in the educational context used a quantitative and functional coding analysis, where the focus was on the amount of L1 and L2 use in different classroom activities and the functional distribution of the L1 and L2 use. However, since the early 1980s, research on bilingual classroom processes has also been undertaken in other bilingual and multilingual settings such as Canada, South America, Europe, Africa and Asia (Martin-Jones, 1995). These studies are mainly interested in codeswitching between the student's mother tongue and the language used as a medium of instruction, and their aim is to reflect upon the effects of language policies upon education and identity issues.

For what regards third language acquisition, codeswitching is considered to be a salient feature of multilingual speech. Codeswitching is said to be the feature that best illustrates the difference between monolingual and multilingual speech production and reflects students' competences in two or more languages (Safont Jorda, 2005:36).

In my study I look at the phenomenon of codeswitching in the foreign language classroom environment. The present paper offers an insight into English foreign language classroom interactions recorded in three different types of high schools in Târgu Mureș. The

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study analyses the presence of codeswitching phenomena and the purpose of the occurring codeswitching instances.

Codeswitching in the foreign language classroom

The notion of codeswitching in the language classroom is identified in the United States' literature on bilingual classrooms, where the focus is actually on first language maintenance and preserving cultural identity rather than on second language acquisition (Edmondson, 2004). Furthermore, discussions in the literature concerning the medium of instruction do not refer to the foreign language classroom, but rather to the use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction in teaching school subjects in Canadian immersion programmes (e.g. Byram, 2000). The case of the foreign language classroom is clearly distinctive. Cook offers a simple but useful definition of codeswitching applicable for this context: "going from one language to the other in midspeech when both speakers know the same languages" (Cook, 1991: 63). This definition is roughly matched by that of Milroy and Muysken (1995: 7) as "the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation". Both definitions can be confusing and are disputed, as we can ask, for example, whether in the foreign language classroom the participating speakers in fact know the same languages, or what 'in the same conversation' means in the context of classroom teacher–student interaction. A more recent definition given by Lin (2008: 273) states that classroom codeswitching refers to "the alternating use of more than one linguistic code in the classroom by any of the classroom participants". Lin (2008) differentiates between code-mixing (intra-clausal/sentential) and codeswitching (inter-clausal/sentential). What regards the present paper, it will use the term codeswitching as an umbrella term for both intra- and inter-sentential language alternations.

Both positive and negative views of codeswitching in education have been expressed. Negative attitudes to codeswitching focus on repair strategies and emphasize the incomplete target-language knowledge of the learners. Adopting a sociolinguistic and ethnography of speech perspectives, Martin-Jones (1995, 2000) has carried out extensive research on classroom codeswitching and has demonstrated how widespread this phenomenon is and what a wide variety of purposes it can serve. It may, for example, reflect language practices outside the classroom; serve as an inclusive strategy where students are of varying language competences; serve to encourage students' acquisition of a second, third or additional language by ensuring that they understand at least part of what is said without difficulty; and have a purpose in pedagogic discourse structuring (Gardner-Chloros, 2009:159).

Similarly, Cleghorn (1992) shows how teachers in science classes in Kenya convey ideas more effectively when they do not adhere to an English-only instruction policy. Merritt et al. (1992) list four major factors which account for codeswitching in the classroom: (a) official school policy, (b) cognitive concerns, (c) classroom management concerns, and (d) values and attitudes about the appropriate use of the languages in society at large. Codeswitching serves a number of important functions in differentiating between types of discourses and in allowing the teacher to fulfil different roles, from directing attention to including shyer members of the class (Gardner-Chloros, 2009:160).

Codeswitching has not been very extensively investigated in relation to foreign language learners, though Poulisse (1997), Dewaele (2001) and Poulisse and Bongaerts (1994) studied

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codeswitching in learners' language and tied it to language production issues. Lüdi (2003) also discusses whether L2 learners codeswitch. He points out that it is a well-known communicative strategy for non-native speakers to use their L1 (or another language) to get around communicative stumbling blocks, a phenomenon which he calls translinguistic wording – a strategy that balanced bilinguals also sometimes use. In practice it is not always easy to draw a line between such codeswitching born of necessity and more discourse-oriented codeswitching, which develops as soon as a higher level of fluency is achieved. A few studies have reported ambiguous attitudes in that language learners use codeswitching either because they are not able to speak the target language correctly or because they want to show off (e.g. Bentahila 1983:111).

Macaro (2014: 14) suggests that there are two types of classrooms in terms of codeswitching functions: (1) classrooms where codeswitching is merely used for language comparison or explanation of lexical and grammatical structures of the target language and (2) communicative classrooms, where codeswitching is used some communicative purpose, such as topic switch, socializing or expressing emotions. Macaro (2014: 20-21) also argues that examining codeswitching in foreign language classrooms is worth only if there is balanced information in L1 and L2, if the predominant language of the classroom interaction is the L2, if the pedagogical goal of the lesson is that of teaching target language communication and, finally, if focus on form is present only to aid the flow of communication.

For my purposes in this paper, the point at issue is that the use of two or more languages in the foreign language classroom is a special case of codeswitching and whether one wishes to accept or reject this term is a matter of terminological preference or theoretical stance. In the course of this paper I will speak about codeswitching accepting Edmondson's use of the term as "any use of more than one language in a discourse segment or sequence of discourse segments by one or more classroom participants, either turn-internally or turn-sequentially" (Edmondson, 2004: 157). Moreover, investigating multilingual classrooms, where classroom participants share at least three languages and thus codeswitching may occur in more combinations than L1 and L2, I believe that, contrary to Macaro's (2014) argument concerning the type of classrooms worth examining, it is worth studying all foreign language classrooms regardless of the scope of the lesson (teaching grammar vs. teaching communicative competence) since they may provide valuable data on current trends in foreign language teaching and on ways of adopting or neglecting a multilingual perspective in education.

Research questions

The study set out to investigate English foreign language classroom interaction and identify the languages used during the lessons. Moreover the paper analyses the purposes of codeswitching instances as reflected in the recorded classroom interactions. Thus, the paper tries to answer the following research questions:

a. What (non-target) languages are used during the English lessons observed?
b. What are the functions of these languages?
c. What are the differences among the schools visited concerning their English classroom interaction?

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The research context

The research includes the investigation of three high-schools in Târgu Mureș. Târgu Mureș is a municipality from the Central Transylvanian region with a population of 134,290, of which 42.8% are of Hungarian ethnicity (National Institute of Statistics, 2012: 14). Târgu Mureș has several high schools including grammar schools and vocational schools specializing in different areas of study (economics, engineering, chemical engineering, agriculture etc.). I chose three schools from this locality, two grammar schools (or theoretical high school) and one vocational school specializing in transportation technology, telecommunications and electrical engineering. The three schools were chosen on the basis of convenience sampling, i.e. their willingness to cooperate.

It needs to be mentioned that in Transylvania[1] there are three types of schools: (a) *Hungarian schools* where there are exclusively Hungarian sections with minority language of instruction and where Romanian is only a school subject; (b) *Romanian schools* with instruction exclusively in the state language; and (c) what I call *'mixed-type' schools*, meaning one institution with two separate sections, one with Romanian language of instruction and one with Hungarian language of instruction. Mixed-type schools should be differentiated from bilingual schools since they do not involve the teaching of school subjects in two languages; rather they look like two monolingual schools in a shared building. Usually both sections have their own teaching staff, except when, for economic reasons, school subjects such as sports, arts or languages are taught by the same teacher in both sections. In these classes Romanian and Hungarian students are not mixed, one exception being the vocational schools where certain fields are taught only in Romanian, thus only a certain percentage of the students in a class are Hungarians (Dégi, 2012:653).

As it has been mentioned earlier, the research includes two grammar schools and a vocational school. According to the description above on the types of schools, for the present study I chose one Hungarian grammar school, one Romanian grammar school and a mixed-type vocational school. The research was carried out between 2009 and 2010, where one classroom was visited in each school.

The participants of this study are on the one hand, Hungarian-Romanian bilingual minority students and on the other hand, monolingual Romanian students, all in grade 12, in their last year of high school, with their age ranging from 18 to 19 and the English teachers of these classes. Data consists of transcribed audio recordings of the English classes attended in the three different classrooms in order to examine the actual use of the different languages in a multilingual classroom setting. In the present study I will analyse three English lessons. The classroom recordings are of app. 45-50 minutes long and were audio recorded using 2-3 digital recorders placed at different parts of the class. Classroom observations are accompanied also by field-notes used for describing information that will not be able to understand from the audio-

[1] The three types of schools refer only to education in the Romanian-Hungarian relation, as there are also a few schools with other minority language education, such as German, Serbian and Ukrainian.

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recording (e.g. what material does the teacher use, are children raising their hands before speaking etc.).

Results and discussion

Data collection took place in three different schools (Hungarian monolingual grammar school, Romanian monolingual grammar school and a mixed-type vocational school) in Târgu Mureș as discussed in the previous section. The results presented within the present paper refer to three classes in the above mentioned schools and their English teachers. The classroom audio-recordings were analysed both quantitatively – counting the number of codeswitching occasions – and qualitatively, analysing the interactions and identifying the functions of the occurring codeswitches (i.e. greetings, meaning clarification, eliciting, metalinguistic comment, task instruction, evaluations, telling off, etc.). Classroom language use patterns were traced in each setting, to examine patterns and functions of codeswitching by teachers and students, and to document the extent and nature of metalinguistic commentary, especially any contrastive discussion (i.e. comparing features of any of the languages available).

As regards English classes in the Hungarian monolingual grammar school, classroom language use is dominated by the almost exclusive use of the target language. English lessons were of a communicative nature as the aim of these lessons was to prepare students for their English oral exam at the end of the semester (e.g. discussion about the role of luck versus hard work in one's life). From the point of view of teacher talk, there are no instances of codeswitching on the part of the teacher during any of the classes observed. Concerning student talk, it is mostly characterized by target language use, except for one instance in which the teacher cannot turn off the heating and asks students if they know what might be wrong. One of the students offers an explanation in Hungarian triggering the following reaction on the part of the teacher:

(1)
<Something is wrong with the tap and the teacher asks why she cannot turn it off>
T: but I've been using it FOR YEARS
S: igen, de elzárták, amikor lefertőtlenítették az osztályt
T: Can't you speak English?
S: No
T: NO? <laughter> So it is very very hot in here so some disinfectant has been used on it and is not working

Extract 1 above shows one of the very few instances of codeswitching initiated by students. It refers to an informal, off-task discussion between a teacher and her students, while the students try to explain to the teacher why she might have difficulties turning off the heating in the classroom. Though, the discussion is not related to task, the teacher does not allow the use of non-target languages during the English classroom. First, she reacts with a question asking if the students cannot speak English, then she repeats the student's Hungarian explanation using English. The teacher's reaction of '*Can't you speak English?'* shows not only her preferences of

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monolingual language use during the EFL class but also her authority regarding EFL classroom language use.

In case of the Romanian monolingual grammar school classroom language use is also characterized by the extensive use of the target language. However, codeswitching in this class can be observed to be initiated by both the teacher and the students. The majority of Romanian, mother tongue, language use relates to discourse functions such as meaning clarification and meaning confirmation.

The topic of the lesson is sports (Born to win) and it focuses on discussing about sports. There is a long discussion about sports followed by a listening task about sportsmen and then the textbook is used for talking about pictures and solving exercises. Most codeswitches occur in the task solving part of the lesson, as there are some unknown sports related words that need to be clarified and checked. The teacher uses the target language most of the time, though she uses Romanian for clarifying meaning, giving task instructions and evaluating students' responses.

Students speak English to discuss the topic and they only switch to Romanian when they do not understand a word or task. However, the teacher in most cases anticipates and comes before the students in translating and explaining unknown items.

(2)

T: jumps, what kind of jumps, there are different jumps in/ different athletic events(.) in triple jump/ triple jump/ do you know this athletic event/ what does it imply

S: running on a track , the=

T: = you run, you do some ((???))

S: ((???))

T: Da, da, da triplu simplu/ triplu salt/triplu salt/ ați văzut/ ați auzit? Și după aceea tot se (.) măsoară toată pista asta și săritul și săritul efectiv/ și fugitul și săritul/ good/ what about his personal

Extract 2 above shows an example of teacher codeswitching. The teacher uses Romanian to explain the sport event 'triple jump'. Thus, specific, sport related words are explained and/or translated into Romanian by the teacher in order to help students to better understand the text.

It is worth mentioning that while in the case of the Hungarian monolingual school the teacher used exclusively English, the target language; in the Romanian monolingual school it was the teacher's discourse which contained the greatest number of codeswitching instances. 29 codeswitches were marked during the teacher's speech out of which 17 were coded as 'meaning related' (explanation, translation of unknown words, clarifying questions, meaning confirmation etc.) and the rest of the codeswitches were related to task instruction and evaluation of students' responses. Only 8 instances of codeswitch could be traced within students' discourse, most of which (6) were also related to meaning clarification.

Classroom interaction, however, is more varied in the case of the mixed type school. Analysing English classes recorded in the mixed type school with a Romanian teacher show variety not only in the languages used but also the functions and purposes for which these codeswitching phenomena are used. The teacher has a lot of trouble concerning discipline and an important number of codeswitching instances occur when the teacher scolds her students. The English lesson observed in the class of the Romanian mother tongue English teacher focused on learning how to write a "for and against" essay. At the beginning of the lesson they revise the

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simple present and present continuous tenses that they learnt during the previous lesson. Here the focus is on the accurate use of these two tenses.

(3)

S: An action in progress in the moment of the speech/

T: In the moment of speaking, da?/ I'm writing right now/ Bagi is speaking right now/ Sandor is talking to Szabi right now/ So Iza and Eniko are eating/ These are actions that take place right now/ okay?/ And they are (.) <laughter> okay so/ Sandor dragă ce ți-am spus când ai intrat în clasă/ pliscu' închis/ Toată ora/ Ne-am înțeles?/ Tu nu tre' să scoți absolut ABSOLUT nici o vorbă/ Nici un sunet/ Nici un mormăit/ NIMIC/ Ai priceput?/ (.) Da/ Până n-ai venit o fost liniște/

S: dar nu pot să fac așa/

T: Liniște!/ Poți să-nchizi și te rog muzica/ ((???)) în afară de foame așa-i? Okay/ What's the difference between present simple and present continuous?/

Extract 3 above shows an example of teacher's and students' metalinguistic discussion concerning the use of the Present Continuous tense in the target language. The teacher uses discourse markers such as *okay* and *bun* "good" (in Romanian) in both English and Romanian to signal boundaries between different pedagogical activities. The teacher can switch from one language to the other. As extract 3 shows, metalinguistic comments and example sentences are given in the target language, while disciplining and scolding students (affective responses) are in Romanian. After the teacher scolds the respective student using Romanian, she marks the end of her monologue saying *okay* and turns back to the metalinguistic discussion in English.

The teacher uses Romanian for eliciting example sentences from students and requires the translation of these sentences from English to Romanian. The teacher then gives a Romanian sentence which has to be translated into English. Thus, besides telling off students, the other two most frequent code switches are related to meaning making, clarification, student elicitation and task instruction.

Students' language use includes – beside English and Romanian – Hungarian and, at one instance, Italian as well. Hungarian language use is related to meaning check or meaning confirmation. When students use Hungarian they always address each other, as the teacher cannot speak Hungarian. The single instance of Italian language use occurred during clarifying the task instruction and marked the students' attitude of showing off, probably caused by my presence, and attracted a negative and cynical reaction on the part of the teacher:

(4)

T: Păi da, asta este idea/ Și atât trebuie să-mi scrieți/ V-am zis că nu-mi trebuie să copiați că doar nu v-am dat copiere/ (.) Un exercițiu asemănător am făcut când am făcut descrierea unui text și v-am dat manualele să citiți Paradise Tour/ Așa-i?/

S: Da/

T: Nah/

S: ((???)) capisci/

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T: Capisci/ Bravo/ Ești un geniu/
S: Știu

The EFL classroom in the mixed type school with a Romanian mother tongue English teacher presented a multilingual learning environment, where teacher talk and teacher-student interaction were marked by the alternating use of English and Romanian. Student off-task interaction is marked by the use of Hungarian, the students' mother tongue. As the example extracts 3 and 4 above show, the teacher uses the target language for metalinguistic discussion and providing examples regarding the tenses learnt, to introduce the topic of the new lesson and for task instruction. Within the same EFL lesson, the teacher uses Romanian in case of affective utterances such as disciplining (extract 3), expressing irony (extract 4) and warning students about the correct use of the Present Simple and Present Continuous tenses. Moreover, Romanian is used for meaning clarification in case of task instruction and elicitation.

Conclusion

The three classes from different high schools presented a variety of codeswitching patterns, ranging from a mostly monolingual language mode to a multilingual classroom interaction involving the use of three or four languages.

On the one end of the continuum there is extract 1, in which case the teacher tries to create an exclusive target language environment within the EFL classroom and by showing her authority over classroom language use she prohibits or at least stigmatizes the use of the students' first language. Similar teacher behaviour was discussed by several researchers (Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Levine, 2011) who argue against such a pedagogical practice. Their argument is based on the assumption that the language classroom is a multilingual environment and should be treated as such. Moreover, studies in third language acquisition point out that the different languages within the students' linguistic repertoire interact and they all contribute to the language learning process.

On the other end of the continuum there is the mixed-type school, with a variety of languages and codeswitching instances. The variety of linguistic resources presented in extracts 3 and 4 above are due to the specific learning context in which students and the teacher do not have the same mother tongue, but they do share a language that facilitates them in the EFL teaching and learning process. I believe that the use of Romanian language is present because that is the teacher's mother tongue, and it represents the single common non-target language shared by all classroom participants. The use of the students' mother tongue, although present in the classroom setting, is somewhat restricted to the students' off-task interaction because the Romanian mother tongue English teacher does not speak this language, and, thus, she cannot exploit this language for the benefit of the target language instruction.

Results of the present study have shown that non-target languages are mostly used for translation or explanation of unknown words, classroom management issues and grammar explanation. The use of non-target languages, however, is rather unsystematic, unplanned and does not serve the purpose of an integrated language teaching. As suggested by several researchers (e.g. Meissner, 2004; Boócz-Barna, 2010), it is necessary to adopt a multilingual approach in foreign language instruction so that language learners can fully exploit the potentials

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offered by typological similarities between the languages, an idea that is missing in the case of teachers adopting a strict monolingual linguistic behaviour during EFL teaching.

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