

Code-Switching and Second Language Acquisition: A narrative approach

التبديل اللغوي واكتساب اللغة الثانية: منهج سردي

إعداد

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Abstract

The current research is narrative dealing with the viewpoint of an Egyptian English language teacher on the employment of code-switching in second-language classrooms. It aims to discover how the teacher employed code-switching in her teaching process due to her experience with it as a student. How does an Egyptian English language teacher view and employ code-switching in her teaching in class, and how does this relate to her language-learning experiences at a language school? is the primary research question. This study is important because it adds to the continuing debate about employing code-switching in second-language classrooms by offering an experienced point of view of someone who has passed the experience of code-switching both as a teacher and as a student. From the perspective of an Egyptian English language teacher, the strategic use of code-switching is beneficial in the early stages at schools. The study conducted three interviews using a narrative inquiry methodology. The major finding is that too much reliance on code-switching can hinder language learning, especially in the late stages of learning.

Keywords: Code-switching, narrative approach, second language acquisition, English language learning, receptive and productive language skills.

المستخلص:

البحث الحالي عبارة عن بحث سردي في منهجه يتناول وجهة نظر مدرسة لغة إنجليزية مصرية حول التبديل اللغوي وفوائد استخدامه في فصول اللغة الثانية. تهدف الدراسة إلى اكتشاف كيف قامت المعلمة بتوظيف التبديل اللغوي في عملية التدريس داخل الفصل من خلال خبرتها كطالبة عن فوائد تطبيق التبديل اللغوي في الدراسة. كيف تتنظر معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية المصرية إلى التبديل اللغوي وتستخدمه في عملية التدريس، وكيف يرتبط ذلك بتجربتها كمتعلمة للغة ثانية (الإنجليزية) في مدرسة لغات؟ هو سؤال البحث الرئيسي الذي أجابت عنه الدراسة الحالية. هذه الدراسة مهمة لأنها تضيف إلى الجدل المستمر حول التبديل اللغوي في الفصول الدراسية للغة الثانية من خلال تقديم وجهة نظر معلمة ذات خبرة اجتازت تجربة التبديل اللغوي كمعلمة وكطالبة من قبل. ووفقا لوجهة نظر معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية المصرية، فإن الاستخدام الممنهج للتبديل اللغوي له فائدة عظيمة في اكتساب اللغة في المراحل المبكرة في المدارس. ولقد أجرت الباحثة الدراسة من خلال ثلاث مقابلات مع هذه المعلمة مستخدمة منهجية التحقيق السردية. والنتيجة الرئيسية للبحث هي أن الاعتماد المفرط على التبديل اللغوي يمكن أن يعوق تعلم اللغة، وخاصة في المراحل التالية في التعليم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التبديل اللغوي، المنهج السردية، اكتساب اللغة الثانية، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، مهارات اللغة المستقبلية والإنتاجية.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the study

Switching between two or more languages in the same discourse, or code-switching (CS), is common in multilingual environments like second-language classrooms (Woolard, 2005). Supporters of teaching just the target language in the classroom, such as Cook (2001) and Grim (2010), assert that doing that makes the language tangible and helps students build an internal language system. They maintain that the students should be exposed to as many target language linguistic functions as possible through code-switching.

On the other hand, the learner will unavoidably acquire the target language from his or her native language reference base is another point of view. Researchers like Moore (2001), Stern (1992) and Tang (2002) support the idea that there may be time for a cross-lingual strategy so that the learner can compare and contrast L1 and L2. According to Edstrom (2006: p. 37), "the possibilities of language teaching" have been severely constrained by the tradition of using L1 outside the English classroom.

The current study intends to build on the findings of Alnefaie and Gupta's (2024) research which investigated the importance of code-switching in the early stages of students learning English as a second language at the university. The researcher aims to address how a learner's personal experience can influence her code-switching behavior later as an instructor. Brown (2014) highlighted a learner's personality as a significant determinant in second language learning.

The present research investigates Rania Mohab's experiences and viewpoints about code-switching as a teacher and a language learner at a language school. The results imply that code-switching, especially in the early phases of learning, is useful for students. It creates a friendly classroom environment. The study also highlights the significance of the motivation of a

language learner and his insistence on improving his language. Alnefaie and Gupta (2024) and Fennema-Bloom (2010) assert that code-switching has educational advantages, yet its application should be monitored to prevent excessive dependence on the native tongue. The current study is different from previous ones in that it investigates the importance of code-switching in the early phases for students learning English as a second language through a reflection of the live experience of an English instructor who experienced code-switching both as a student in a primary language school and as a teacher. Few studies investigated how the learner and teacher's views are similar and how a teacher's own experiences with code-switching as a student may influence the way of teaching in the classroom. Most of the earlier research has been on the perspectives of teachers or learners (Alrabh et al. 2015). The role of code-switching in second language acquisition at the school level is the subject of current research, which is close to Alnefaie and Gupta's (2024) research project but different because of the focus on language acquisition at the school level.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Despite being widely used, code-switching in second language (L2) learning is still controversial due to discussions about its possible advantages and disadvantages for language learning. Some scholars believe that code-switching during L2 classrooms enhances learning and offers a friendly environment for students to acquire language and express themselves easily (Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Others think that code-switching badly influences the productive language skills of students because of a lack of vocabulary to express themselves in L2 (Cook 2013). This study investigates the function of code-switching in teaching and learning second languages from the viewpoint of Rania Mohab, an English teacher from Egypt who studied and taught in a language school.

1.3. Research questions

The researcher applies a qualitative research approach called narrative inquiry concentrating on people's lived experiences as they are conveyed via narrating their experiences (Creswell, 2013). The research question to be addressed by the study is:

How does an Egyptian English language teacher view and employ code-switching in her teaching in class, and how does this relate to her language-learning experiences at a language school?

1.4. Significance of the study

The study is important because it adds to the ongoing discussions on the role of code-switching in second-language classrooms by offering a deep understanding from the viewpoint of someone who has dealt with it both as a teacher and as a student. While some scholars claim that code-switching can help in learning a second language (L2) by providing scaffolding and eliminating learning obstacles (Alnefaie & Gupta, 2024; Littlewood & Yu, 2011), others believe that learning a second language might be delayed because of decreasing exposure to the target language (Alrabah et al., 2015; Cook, 1991). By examining Rania's experiences as a teacher and as a student at a language school, the purpose of this research is to shed light on the function of code-switching in the learning and teaching of second languages.

2. Review of literature

The term "code-switching" (CS) describes the practice of switching between two or more languages throughout a single speech or discourse (Chimbuctane, 2013). In other words, "code-switching" is "the systematic, alternating use of two or more languages in a single utterance or conversational exchange" (Levine, 2011, p. 50). The frequent interchange of first language (L1) and second language (L2) in a variety of circumstances is a widespread occurrence in multilingual communities (Cook, 2001). An example is the Egyptian speech community.

Furthermore, bilinguals may use code-switching to show their language skills, be identified as members of a specific social class, or be used for honorific purposes. In an educational environment, code-switching is sometimes used to simplify or clarify concepts (Macaro, 2001). Several studies have examined using code-switching in second-language classes, with varying degrees of success. Code-switching can have a bad effect on students' input and output of the target language, according to Alrabah et al. (2015). Cook (2013) made a similar argument, calling for avoiding the learners' L1 and opposing all types of translation. Shariati (2019) supported this point of view.

However, several studies have emphasized the possible advantages of code-switching when learning a second language. Learners' motivations are a major element developed while acquiring a second language (de Bot, Verspoor, & Lowie, 2005). In narrative research, the use of code-switching in second-language acquisition is investigated by Alnefaie and Gupta (2024) from the perspective of a Saudi English language instructor. They emphasized the value of code-switching in English classes and warned from relying too heavily on it as this could impede language learning. Kharkhurin and Wei (2014) studied code-switching to investigate the potential effects of code-switching on creativity. The study concluded that an increase in innovative ability appeared to be related to code-switching brought on by a certain emotional state and a lack of specialized vocabulary in a target language.

Gilead (2018) argues that the strategic use of code-switching reinforces the learning process between teachers working within a bilingual educational environment and language learners. Supporting the same point of view, Ghaderi, Moghaddam, and Ostovar-Namaghi (2024) investigated the reasons and methods that English language teachers employed code-switching in their classes. According to their research,

teachers used code-switching as a strategic technique to improve language teaching, enhance students' learning, and build positive relationships with students. Supporting the same point of view of the strategic use of code-switching in learning a second language was the conclusion of Alnefaie and Gupta's (2024) study. The significance of code-switching in increasing learners' progress throughout the initial stages of acquiring English as a second language was highlighted.

3. Method of investigation and analysis

This study offers a unique opportunity to comprehend how a teacher's approach to using code-switching in the classroom can be shaped by personal experiences and the applied teaching techniques, as is the case with Rania. According to Ghaderi et al. (2024), "teachers' motivations and strategies for code-switching are deeply rooted in their own experiences as language learners, and this connection warrants further investigation" (p. 18). To approach the issue of code-switching from a different angle, the current study investigates it from the viewpoint of a teacher who has also engaged in it while attending a language school. This study offers a rare chance to comprehend how a teacher's approach to using code-switching in the classroom may be influenced by relevant teaching techniques and personal experiences, like Rania's example. In addition, the study's narrative inquiry methodology enables a deeper investigation of the reasons behind code-switching, and its advantages, from the viewpoint of a person who has engaged in it both as a student and as a teacher.

4. Methodology and participants

4.1. Methodology

To answer the research question, "How does an Egyptian English language teacher view and employ code-switching in her teaching in class, and how does this relate to her language-

learning experiences at a language school?" a qualitative narrative methodology was used in this study. Following the framework proposed by Alnefaie and Gupta (2024) and Creswell (2013), the study deals with Rania's experiences of code-switching both as a student and as a teacher.

4.2. Participants

Rania, the participant, is an English language instructor from Egypt with more than ten years of experience. She studied English as a second language for twelve years or more at an Egyptian language school. In this narrative study, the narrow focus on Rania enables a detailed investigation of her experiences of code-switching in a second-language classroom in a language school. The study's focus on Rania's transition from student to teacher enables the researcher to capture the changes in her opinions concerning code-switching. These deep insights are essential for understanding the practice's expected results. By exploring Rania's experiences with code-switching, the study also highlights how unique individual differences play a role in second language acquisition.

4.3 Data collection and sampling

Purposive sampling was utilized to choose Rania for this study. Purposive sampling, according to Leedy et al. (2019), is the process of choosing people or items that can offer the most pertinent information regarding the subject under investigation. Rania, the participant, is an English language instructor from Egypt with more than ten years of teaching experience. Rania was a student in a language school for more than twelve years. Her marks at the primary stage were ranging from "99%-97%". After completing the secondary stage, she joined the English department at a faculty in Egypt. She was employed as an English teacher in a private school in Egypt. Remarkably, Rania stood out as one of the best students in her primary stage in school classes, exhibiting excellent second language fluency. Rania was a highly

experienced educator with over ten years of expertise. Rania, furthermore, employed code-switching as a teaching technique in her second language classes. Therefore, she made a significant contribution to this study.

4.4. Tools of analysis

This study investigates Rania's experiences with code-switching as a student and as a teacher using a qualitative narrative approach. It is a continuation of the work of Alnefaie and Gupta (2024) and Creswell (2013). Three in-person interviews covering various aspects of Rania's experiences with code-switching were done over one academic year. Every interview lasted roughly half an hour and was done in English. Every part of the three interviews had a different focus.

The subject of Rania's first interview was her experience studying English as a second language at the English language school at the early stages. In the second interview, she discussed her experience in the following years in her primary stage. In the third interview, she discussed her experience and general opinions about teaching and learning English, in addition to her observations on code-switching. The data was organized according to three major plots following Alnefaie and Gupta's (2024) framework for analysis.

5. Discussion and Findings

Rania divides her experience learning the English language into the early stages at the language school and the following years of the primary stage. Rania's description offers an insightful context within which to analyze her experiences with code-switching. These two themes, which encompass most of Rania's stages with code-switching, are the focus of the current investigation in this work. Rania's experiences as a student and as a teacher are reflected in the three primary topics of the findings, "The early years at school", "The last years in the primary stage", and "The teaching stage".

5.1. The early years at school: Use of Code-Switching

During her first years of education, Rania's experience as an English language student was characterized by little employment of code-switching. Her native Arabic language helped in certain cases. Rania insisted that learning a second language requires utilizing some words in her mother tongue. During her early years of studying English, Rania discovered that code-switching, which she could only learn at home, was a useful and essential technique for keeping up with her lessons.

Rania's remark is below: Code-switching is a fundamental skill that has helped me progress in my lessons. Without it, learning a second language would be difficult. Arabic was forbidden for English classes at school, but I used it at my house for help. My parents used it at home to help me follow my lessons.

Code-switching was not a pedagogical approach used by Rania's teachers at school. Her parents recognized her need to utilize her native language vocabulary to improve her comprehension of English. They used some Arabic words to clarify grammatical rules and explain vocabulary. During the successive years of study at school, Rania got accustomed to using English all the time. She can communicate fluently with her teachers and colleagues without fear of making mistakes.

She recalled the difficulties she had encountered in the early stages at school: I could not have succeeded in my first years, at school, without using Arabic; in fact, Arabic was essential during the first two years of my six-year primary study. I used Arabic code-switching with my family. A gradual decrease in using Arabic was noticed by the end of the first year at my primary school.

Rania's analysis of her past time at school shows how Arabic played a role in her academic achievement, especially in the first two years of her primary stage. "Arabic helped me memorize my English lessons perfectly", she openly

acknowledged. During this time, Arabic was "an essential thing" for her to understand her lessons and communicate with her class teachers. Rania said that the first years of her six-year primary stage were important for her progress in English. She was speaking in Arabic with her teachers, and they answered back in English. Therefore, her educational level developed, and she became more accustomed to starting English-English conversations, her reliance on Arabic progressively diminished.

When she recalled this period, she said, "My English language was weak, at the beginning." Teachers were not allowed to speak Arabic at school. The school policy was to communicate in English, all the time, and take students regularly to language labs to practice English. At that time, there was no internet access in classrooms. All language skills sessions were in English, and we rarely managed to follow all that was said.

She comments on this point: "It was hard for us to comprehend the teacher when he/she reads the textbook dialogues aloud because she generally had a British accent".

Even with extensive exposure to the English language, Rania recognized the need for code-switching in her early years. She claimed that "code-switching helped me to progress," highlighting the need to use Arabic to some extent to comprehend pedagogical material. She emphasized how Arabic, at home, made comprehension and task completion in the classroom easier. The case of Rania represents a positive image of code-switching that highlights its effectiveness as a teaching tool. Therefore, Rania believed that code-switching as a teaching strategy effectively engages her students in the classroom when applied.

Code-switching is a dynamic learning method, and Rania's experiences demonstrate this. Rania highlights the importance of code-switching in the early stages of language learning. She asserts the need to decrease code-switching as children progress and develop their second language.

5.2. The last years in the primary stage: Quitting code-switching and improving language skills

Rania knew the value of using English instead of Arabic in all her communication skills in the classroom. Rania consciously went back to her experience of reliance on code-switching and found that her usage of Arabic was a weakness. She tried to immerse herself in English with all possible means such as watching English films and Cartoon channels on the satellite.

Rania started to use Arabic less than before and felt that using English continuously improves her language proficiency. She comments: "During the last years of my primary stage, my dependence on the Arabic language decreased and I saw using it as a weakness". Being accustomed to the British accent of her teachers at school, Rania managed to follow English movies (not all the details) and English Cartoon films. She built her vocabulary repertoire from listening activities and practice. Her ability to comprehend English was demonstrated and improved, particularly after exposure to great portions of the English language.

Rania continued her education till she joined the English department at the Faculty of Arts. Rania admits that most English teachers talked English with a British accent at school. As time passed, she got used to speaking with a British accent. This paved the way for her to make progress at the faculty. At the faculty stage, she had a high level of English comprehension. She improved a lot and could follow lectures easily. She started to enjoy attending lectures in the English department and felt the progress in her academic life. She believed that the best future career for her is to be a teacher since she can help students acquire the English language easily due to her childhood experience and the difficulties she overcame.

She commented, "I believe the suffering I have gone through while learning English in my early stages qualified me to teach students English correctly". Rania continued, "My weakness

of the English language lies in facing a lot of difficulties in the productive skills (speaking and writing) of the English language and few obstacles in the receptive skills (reading and listening). In fact, I am a supporter of the principle that learning a language includes immersion in that language with all its different skills.

During her late years at the primary stage, Rania purposefully reduced her usage of Arabic and code-switching to improve her language proficiency, refocusing her attention on engaging with immersive English-language stories and films. Rania's English skills reached a high level of fluency and understanding, by the end of the primary stage. Rania discusses her language improvement stage as follows:

Watching foreign films and reading short stories in English helped improve my language. I used to watch TV and visit the British Council Cultural Centre where I watched untranslated films, cartoons, and children's songs. Therefore, I was indulged in such an atmosphere which surely helped me progress in acquiring the English language.

Rania's reason for using these materials extended beyond simply entertainment. She displayed real interest in communicating fluently in English with the rest of her colleagues. Undoubtedly, the authentic English films that Rania watched let her learn a lot of the vocabulary related to everyday life and led to easy communication with others. The process was fun for her and a learning experience.

Rania's first method of accessing these English-language resources was through television, which offered her an easy way to get useful content. However, visiting the cultural centers was a turning point in her life. She became more indulged in acquiring English by watching appropriate material for her age. The internet was not available in the days when Rania was a primary student.

As for improving her receptive skills in the English language, Rania started to admire listening and reading exercises since she practiced what she had learned from real life, the cultural centre, and communication with colleagues.

The importance of immersive language learning opportunities, especially those that include consuming real media content, is highlighted by Rania's experience. Rania accelerated her language learning process by integrating her academic pursuits with her admiration for English-language entertainment means and developed a deeper understanding of the language and the culture involved.

5.3. The teaching stage: strategic use of code-switching for improving skills

Rania's job in her practical life as an instructor triggered careful attention to her teaching methods. Initially, she saw a widespread lack of enthusiasm among her students to communicate only in English. Recognizing the need for a practical process to encourage her students, Rania adopted code-switching as a technique, to a limited extent, for all students. While not all students responded immediately, most of them showed increased interest and participation. This result demonstrated her view of the importance of building a good communication and learning framework.

Rania comments: During my initial years of teaching, I used to code-switch a little, and most students did not show active class participation. English for them was a barrier to following me or expressing themselves. When I applied code-switching with the students, they became involved and participated. When students engaged in English learning through employing code-switching in classrooms, their skills improved.

Rania identified students' difficulties with speaking and writing proficiency and looked for techniques to improve their proficiency. She asked students to communicate in English, regardless of the numerous mistakes they might make. She asked them to follow the same approach in writing. This principle refers to her personal experience when she tried to speak and correct her mistakes by herself until she spoke English professionally.

Applying such a technique in classes gave her students the confidence to use the English language in their communication most of the time. Hence, code-switching has a role at first in supporting students in their trials to communicate in English and gradually they became self-confident and used English professionally.

Rania comments on her educational experience: I gently highlighted students' mistakes while communicating in English in classrooms. I urged them to speak and write without fear of making mistakes. I encouraged them to code-switch when stuck to continue the flow of conversation or writing. I told them to think in English and try to express themselves in it as much as they can. Step by step the students improved and got self-confidence. Going through the same experience when I was young, I was able to see what improved their skills and to use code-switching strategically in class. I can now predict which students think in English and follow my advice, and which students think in Arabic.

Rania began her teaching career by relying to some extent on Arabic in her classes through code-switching, which boosted student involvement and participation. Rania also emphasized the eager nature of the students to learn English fluently and communicate in English.

She comments: "At the beginning, the students did not feel comfortable when I started to speak English. Gradually, I began to code-switch, to some extent, when I saw the students not following or getting lost during the progress of the English class. As a teacher, I understand the need for code-switching for lower-level students, but I also encouraged students to push themselves and work hard to acquire English".

Rania gradually started to lessen her code-switching use in class and concentrated on using English in instructions and communication. The students responded positively to her behaviour and rarely used Arabic words in class. They felt self-confident and engaged in the learning process.

6. Findings

Referring to the research question: How does an Egyptian English language teacher view and employ code-switching in her teaching in class, and how does this relate to her language-learning experiences at a language school? Rania's story offers brilliant ideas regarding this question. In her early years of learning English at the primary stage, Rania believed that code-switching was useful for language learners. Rania sometimes used code-switching to communicate with her teachers at school when grammatical rules were explained, and the English language was utilized in class. This finding is in line with research by Stern (1992) and Tang (2002), who found that teachers used their native tongue to help students communicate and comprehend in classrooms.

While her primary school years went on, Rania started to feel the weakness of using code-switching. She no longer employed code-switching. Cook (2013) and Alrabah et al. (2015) discussed issues related to excessive first-language use, arguing that continual usage of code-switching can hinder the learning process since students are exposed to a small amount of second language. The current research supports this point of view and Cook (2013) and Alnefaie & Gupta's (2024) findings.

As a teacher, Rania first relied on code-switching in Arabic in her classes. Next, she discovered that code-switching proved little improvement in students' proficiency levels. The present study provides a more nuanced perspective than the findings of Alrabah et al. (2015), who discovered that code-switching could influence students' target language input and output. Concerning Rania's experiences, she asserts the role of strategic use of code-switching in improving language skills. This aligns with the findings of Edstrom (2006) and Moore (2013), who highlight the expected benefits of code-switching as a method of learning. Furthermore, as Brown (2014) believes, the personal experiences of a language learner emphasize the significance of students'

motivation for learning while studying a second language. Rania's experiences are, in fact, enlightening points of view to both teachers and students about the strategic role of code-switching and its benefits. The study also highlights how a learner's motivation influences her effectiveness in code-switching as a teaching strategy.

The results of this study contribute to the arguments on code-switching's status in second-language learning process. According to Rania's learning experiences, code-switching can be a useful strategy for language acquisition in its early stages. This finding is in line with the findings of Tang (2002), who found that teachers used their native tongue to foster communication and comprehension.

In contrast, Cook (1991, 2001) and Alrabah et al. (2015) support the viewpoint that regular code-switching can hinder the learning process, especially in the late stages of learning a second language. Rania offers a distinct viewpoint as a teacher by utilizing code-switching to increase student participation and engagement. She believes that code-switching can encourage students to develop their second language by following a certain plan set for organizing such uses. This finding aligns with the ideas expressed by Tang (2002) and Moore (2013), who emphasize the advantages of code-switching as a teaching technique.

Furthermore, as scholars like Brown (2014) have noted, Rania's experience highlights the significance of learner motivation for learning through code-switching during second language acquisition.

7. Conclusion

In summary, this narrative study sheds light on code-switching's significant role in second language acquisition. Code-switching can serve as a valuable scaffolding method throughout the initial phases of language acquisition, enhancing comprehension and eliminating obstacles, according to Rania's

personal experience. To become professional in the target language, learners should progressively reduce their reliance on code-switching in favor of immersion language experiences. The study also highlights how important learners' motivation is and how teachers can help students build their language skills by strategically using code-switching and other teaching strategies. Additionally, a thorough investigation of Rania's lived experiences was made possible by the narrative inquiry technique, which helped to clarify the relationship between language learning, code-switching, and learners' motivation.

8. Recommendation for further study:

Rania's experience of code-switching while studying a second language is the subject of the current study. More research should be undertaken to understand the role of code-switching in second language development and self-confidence for students, especially Arab ones. More studies can investigate the role of code-switching in languages other than English to highlight the role of code-switching in the learning process.

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