

Causes of Code Switching by Low Level EFL Learners at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia: A Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract

This paper reports on the quantitative research carried out to explore the causes of Code Switching by Low Level EFL learners at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. Code switching is a frequently observed phenomenon in a bilingual or multilingual environment and language learners often turn to their native tongue in a foreign language classroom. Code switching has been observed in both teachers and students' discourse. Though code switching has not been much encouraged by the linguists but considered a favourable tool if language learners are failed to accommodate with the barriers of the target language. This paper employs questionnaire technique to collect the data regarding the issue through teachers' perspective. The sample consists of 29 participants; all of them are highly qualified EFL teachers at Jazan University from multilingual backgrounds and diverse nationalities. The results demonstrate that students switch code on account of multiple reasons including learning and social factors. Nevertheless, code switching facilitates learners when they lack lexical or syntactical knowledge, The English Language Centre of Jazan University needs to devise a strategy to minimise it to the least possible level.

Keywords

Sociolinguistics, Code Switching, L1

Received: June 13, 2016 / Accepted: July 20, 2016 / Published online: August 16, 2016

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1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Code switching is generally defined as the phenomenon wherein a bi- or multilingual speaker shifts from one language to another in the course of a conversation. There are conflicting viewpoints on the issue of code switching and it's been much debatable subject among researchers. EFL students in Saudi Arabia are much weaker because they haven't studied English right from the beginning of their academic studies as a second language. They find English language challenging to learn, and, as a result, they make overuse of code switching that not only slows their learning process but also proves to be ineffective in the long run.

1.2. The Background Situation

In discussing Code Switching as a topic of Sociolinguistics, Trudgill in explaining the reasons behind CS said, "Speakers switch to manipulate or influence or define the situation as they wish, and to convey nuances of meaning and personal intention" (Sert 1). For instance, second language learners, especially at a low level, mix two languages (in speaking) to show their belonging to a certain social status or nation.

Furthermore, previous studies showed that Code Switching was used for language learning purposes, especially when learning Second Language (L2). Ahmad and Jusoff said that Code Switching helps to simplify the classroom explanation as the teachers do not have to spend so much time trying to illustrate to the learners or searching for the easiest words to

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clarify any misunderstanding that might appear (49).

1.3. The Aim of the Study

Based on the above mentioned information, this study seeks to investigate the causes of Code Switching and their effects upon English language learners at Jazan University in Saudi Arabia. This research aims to dig out the causes and suggest favorable solutions, if possible, to make learning an effective process. Various studies have been conducted by researchers in order to find out the causes and countless reasons have been discovered depending on the culture, gender, age and ethnic group of the learners. We may categorize these reasons under two bigger umbrellas i.e. "social reasons" and "learning reasons." The objective of this research is to find out the learning and social reasons of code switching by the low level EFL learners at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia.

2. Literature Review

The previous research defined code switching differently in terms of its usage. Gal defined Code Switching as "a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations" (as cited in Nava and Goswami 504). Also, Gysels stated that Code Switching is used either to fill a language /theoretical gap, or for other several communicative reasons (Hegde et al 23). According to Skiba, Code Switching is the communicative conversation between two languages or codes among persons who contribute to those exact ciphers. In this conversation, a number of social and linguistic reasons lead the way CS establishes itself. In natural conversations between two bilinguals, CS includes 84% single word switches, ten percent phrase switches, and six percent clause switching (Moghdam et al 2220).

Ferguson said that there are three positions for Code Switching in the classroom: "Strict separation of languages; concurrent but systematized and controlled use of the two languages; acceptance of Code Switching and awareness-raising through teacher education" (as cited in Chenq 1278). Poplack said that the Code Switching is considered a part of the speaker's tools that he/she uses to connect what is familiar with what is new or unaware. In fact, it is the speaker's handling of linguistic signals that become common in spoken and written language. Nova and Goswami stated that language tool could assist the speakers' transition positively into language stability once the necessary words and language construction have been understood (504-505).

On the other hand, the previous research introduced different categories of Code Switching. Lipski said that there are two kinds of CS. The first one is called Mechanical- Switching

(Code Mixing). It happens when the speaker cannot remember an expression, but can recall it in a different language. The second one is known as Code- Changing. It is notable by fluent intrasentential changes and changing focus from one language to another. Moghdam et al. cited Olmedo-Williams in stating that there are nine categories of CS from her study of language mixing in classroom settings. These categories include emphasis, sociolinguistic play, clarification, accommodation, lexicalization, attracting attention, regulating behavior, and miscellaneous switches (2220).

Sen also explores the use of Turkish in EFL in Turkey. Using pre-observation interview and classroom observations, he describes how teachers use L1 to focus on form. The findings of the study suggest that teachers use CS in order to try and ensure understanding. The study also asserts that teachers apply to CS as a last resort when the focus is on form. The teachers in the study believe that their explanations in L1 play a supportive role and consolidate what learners have learned in L2" (169-170).

Additionally, the linguistic issue of mixing two languages when speaking is considered a tool or a strategy to teach or learn the Second Language (L2). Lehti-Eklund studied and analyzed how Code Switching, as a local practice, is used in teaching and learning Swedish as a foreign language (FL). The context of the study was Swedish language as a foreign language in upper secondary schools in Finland (132). The author used video recordings of one lesson in second grade where the students have been studying Swedish for 5 years. The article focused especially on the performance of language choice in repair. Students tend to keep up a separation of work between FL used for institutional work and L1 as the language kept for interaction. The article discussed the conditions of learning repair practices in FL classroom. The results showed that the students keep up a division of work between FL used for institutional work and L1 as the language reserved for interaction, and the repairs can be somewhat done in the FL, as the students decontextualize parts of the FL texts in the making of meaning (Lehti-Eklund 148).

Furthermore, Moghadam et al focused on Code Switching as a medium of instruction. The attitude of students towards CS, the positive impacts of CS on understanding the target language, and the negative impacts of CS on students' learning abilities were investigated (2219). The data for this study were collected from four participants through audio recordings of a classroom observation and students' reflective journals. The findings suggested that the students used code switching because of lack of vocabulary knowledge, checking understanding and asking for explanation and socializing. On the other hand, the teacher code switched in order to clarify and translate into L1 whenever needed. Reflective journals

revealed using CS increases understanding of the target language and they showed that students had positive views towards the application of CS (2223).

Reyes examined the Code Switching forms in the speech of immigrant Spanish-speaking children. Seven and ten year old boys and girls from bilingual classrooms were each paired with a mutually selected friend, and their speech was collected in two settings: while the children waited for an expected science experiment and while they worked together to follow an instruction worksheet about hands-on magnetic resources (77). The gathered data was described in relation to children's language competence and preference. The study showed that Code Switching happened both within and across turns. The older children's switches were more common and were ordered for a wider diversity of functions than the younger children's. The results also supported the view that Code Switching is used as a strategy for social purpose, especially during topic shift (Reyes 89).

Counterarguments

Several studies present counterarguments about code switching. According to Polio and Duff (1994), "the students consequently miss useful opportunities to process communicative target language input, to practice new target language structures thoroughly in non-mechanical ways, and also to express and resolve comprehension problems in the target language" (p. 322). Second, code switching can also present problems to the social development of the learners because it can stifle their communication with people of other cultures whose language differs from their own. Code switching is a nonstandard variety appropriate for interaction with family and friends and in certain circumstances at school (Trudgill, 2000), but it cannot be a language to wider communication.

Third, while it is only natural for bilinguals to code switch, Jones (2000) argues that code-switching can be "pernicious" (p. 235) to language development. It prevents the learners from receiving input that can expose them to life-like situations of target language use.

Finally, critics view code switching as a way to compensate for diminished language proficiency. In a study by Chick (cited in McLellan & Chua-Wong, 2002, p. 13), the findings show that this mode is a comfortable excuse to hide the incompetent bilingual speaker's poor command of English and his inadequate mastery of the subject matter, and to make it appear that effective learning is taking place.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Methods & Instruments

Quantitative research has been conducted in order to get the

accurate results. To gather information, the researcher had an online survey carried out by the participants, through a SurveyMonkey.com.

The study focused on discovering learning and social factors for code switching by low level students of English at Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. The data was collected from a sample of 29 participants. The sample comprised varied categories of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, age and the nature of nationalities. They teach different skills of English language to the students of diverse disciplines like applied medical sciences, pharmacy, architecture, design, humanities, business administration, computer science, and engineering, at Jazan University.

Table 1. Gender wise Distribution of Sample.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	13	44.82 %
Female	16	55.17 %
Total	29	100

Table 1 illustrates that 13 out of 29 respondents are male i.e. 44.82% whereas 16 out of 29 respondents are females that dominate with 55.17%.

Table 2. Language wise Distribution of Sample.

Language (L1)	Frequency	Percentage
Arabic	12	41.37 %
Others	17	58.62 %
Total	29	100

Table 2 demonstrates that 12 respondents out of total 29 i.e. 41.37% are Arabic speaking. However 58.62% of the participants speak other languages such as, English, French, Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Bangla, Punjabi and Malayalam.

3.2. Profile of the Subjects

Sample (total 29 participants): 28 Teachers of English as a foreign language at Jazan University and 1 student of linguistics in USA.

Age group: 25-55 year old

Sex: both genders (13 males and 16 females)

Teaching Experience: Average 25 years

Educational status: Master or PhD in English, linguistics, TESL, Translation etc.

Financial background: mixed

Languages: They speak different languages, such as Arabic, English, French, Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Bangla, Punjabi and Malayalam

Ethnic group: Multiple ethnicities and nationalities from 10 countries i.e. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Syria, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Canada and Senegal

3.3. Procedure of the Research

The survey consists of eighteen questions (see Appendix A). Participants had to respond to the questions through choosing one of the multiple choice answers, such as strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree. The first five questions are designed to provide background information about the participants, such as gender, experience and languages etc. Questions 6-9 aimed at collecting data about the learning reasons behind code switching in the classroom. Question 11, 12 and 13 are designed to find information about the social reasons for code switching. The last five questions are created for the purpose of gathering data about the solutions and recommendations.

The last question is an open-ended one, so that participants can share their viewpoints. The whole questionnaire is designed in such a way to verify or justify whether the assumed reasons are true or not. The subjects are EFL teachers of Jazan University and could prove the best judge to identify the main causes of code switching by the learners.

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to investigate:

- 1-What are the learning reasons for code switching?
- 2-What are the social reasons for code switching?

4. Results

4.1. Presentation & Analysis of the Results

This section presents the results of the survey that has been done electronically through a questionnaire by SurveyMonkey.com. The quantitative method helped to find the results of each part of the survey easily.

4.1.1. Learning Reasons for Code Switching

i. Definition

Table 3. Code switching is to mix two languages when you speak.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	10	34.48%
b) Agree	16	55.17%
c) Strongly disagree	0	0%
d) Disagree	3	10.34%
Total	29	100%

It is commonly observed in a bilingual and multilingual setup that speakers may shift from one code to another. They can move from one language, dialect or style to another. Sociolinguists call this phenomenon as code switching when speakers mix two languages.

Table 3 shows that 34.48% respondents strongly agreed with code switching definition that code switching is to mix two

languages when we speak, such as mixing Arabic with English. However, 55.17% agreed, and 10.34% did not agree with the definition.

ii. To Increase Understanding

Table 4. Students use code switching in the classroom to increase understanding.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	10	34.48%
b) Agree	14	48.27%
c) Strongly disagree	2	6.89%
d) Disagree	3	10.34%
Total	29	100%

Code switching is used to facilitate learning and understanding. Sometimes students lack the knowledge of word or phrase they want to use in the target language. In such a situation they take help from their native tongue and find alternative word, expression or phrase to get their meaning and message across. They usually find the equivalent lexical word in the native tongue to clarify their motive. At the same time teachers switch code to make concepts clearer and give students the opportunity to enhance their understanding of the foreign language.

Table 4 indicates that majority of the participants i.e. 48.27% believed that the code switching is basically meant to increase the understanding of language use, for instance, providing examples with Arabic instead of English or by translating the words or sentences. 34.48% of the participants strongly agreed, whereas 10.34% disagreed, and 6.89% strongly disagreed with the notion.

iii. To Imitate Teachers or Ideal Students

Table 5. Students mix two languages when they speak because they want to imitate their teachers or ideal students.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	1	3.44%
b) Agree	11	37.93%
c) Strongly disagree	3	10.34%
d) Disagree	14	48.27%
Total	29	100%

It has been assumed as one of the causes of code switching that students may want to imitate their teachers or fellow students due to inspiration or liking.

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents did not support this assumption. Out of total, 48.27%, of the respondents disagreed, whereas about 10.34% highly disagreed on the same. On the contrary, 37.93% agreed and 3.44% strongly agreed that students mix two languages because sometimes they like to imitate others.

iv. To Correct the Language Mistakes

Table 6. Students use code switching to correct linguistic mistakes, for example to clarify the confusion due to sounds like /p/ and /b/.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	7	24.13%
b) Agree	17	58.62%
c) Strongly disagree		0%
d) Disagree	5	17.24%
Total	29	100%

Code switching is used for emphasis and clarification. Sometimes the message is misunderstood, under such scenario, shifting to native tongue is considered the best resort. In Arabic /p/ sound is not pronounced and Arabs replace it with /b/ while speaking English. The messages are often misinterpreted due to different sounds and stress patterns. In such scenarios, code shifting becomes much favorable.

Table 6 indicates that most of the participants considered code switching as a way out to correct their linguistic mistakes. They agreed with this opinion by 58.62% whereas 24.13% strongly agreed. However, 17.24% of the members disagreed.

4.1.2. Social Reasons for Code Switching

i. To Show off the Linguistic Background.

Table 7. Students use code switching to show their linguistic background.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	3	10.34%
b) Agree	15	51.72%
c) Strongly disagree	5	17.24%
d) Disagree	6	20.68%
Total	29	100%

Students like to show their knowledge through using other languages as a way to reflect their social class. Speakers imply through code switching that they are very well educated and are proficient in two or more languages. In other words, they like to distinguish themselves among others, since using as many languages is also considered as a sign of education and prestige.

Table 7 shows that participants highly supported this belief. More than half i.e. 51.72% of the members agreed whereas 10.34% strongly agreed. Conversely, 20.68% disagreed and 17.24% strongly disagreed.

ii. To Belong to a Certain Social Status or Community

Table 8. Students like to code switch because they want to show that they belong to a certain social status or community, for instance, belong to a rich families.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	4	13.79%
b) Agree	10	34.48%
c) Strongly disagree	3	10.34%
d) Disagree	12	41.37%
Total	29	100%

People usually use language as a means to show group membership or shared ethnicity, also they show their affection and solidarity through speaking a particular code. They show their unity, belongingness and respect towards people of the same or different ethnic groups.

Table 8 presents that most of participants i.e. 41.34% did not agree with the statement and 10.34% strongly disagreed. On the other hand, the responses show that 34.48% agreed and 13.79% strongly agreed.

iii. To Belong to a Certain Ethnicity or Nationality

Table 9. Students use code switching to prove or feel that they belong to a certain ethnicity or nationality, for instance, speaking Arabic in the United States.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	3	10.34%
b) Agree	14	48.27%
c) Strongly disagree	3	10.34%
d) Disagree	9	31.03%
Total	29	100%

Students usually switch code to show their bilingual and bicultural identity and to differentiate them from other cultures, or to distinguish themselves from other social societies.

Table 9 illustrates that the participants supported this concept to a greater extent since 48.27% of the sample population agreed, whereas 10.34% strongly agreed, while 31.03% did not consider this factor as an important one by disagreeing to this, however, 10.34% strongly disagreed.

iv. To Follow the Modern Trend or Fashion in the Community.

Table 10. Students use code switching in order to follow the modern trend or fashion in the community, such as if the student mixes the Arabic with English languages when speaking, it will show that she/ he is a modern person.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
a) Strongly agree	4	13.79%
b) Agree	18	62.06%
c) Strongly disagree	2	6.89%
d) Disagree	5	17.24%
Total	29	100%

Students switch code as a fashion symbol. Usually this trend has been observed in females as they're naturally more conscious for style and vogue.

Table 10 demonstrates that 62.06% of the subjects agreed to this conception, whereas, 13.79% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 17.24% disagreed and 6.89% strongly disagreed to this perception.

4.2. Implications of the Results

It is evident through the results that low level EFL learners at Jazan University switch code for learning and social reasons.

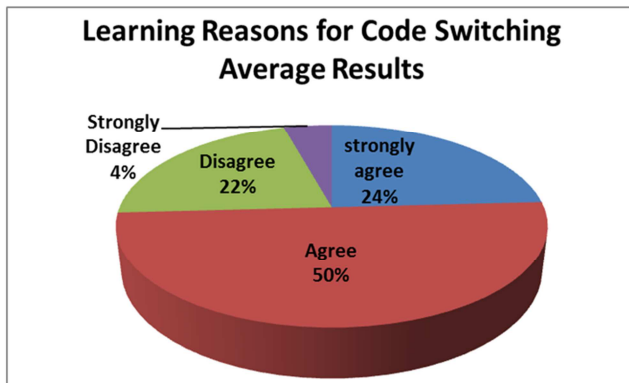


Fig. 1. Average Results of Learning Reasons for Code Switching.

Students usually switch code when they do not have the accurate word or proper expression; they try to find the equivalent lexical item in the target language, or to fill in the gap in the conversation. Sometimes students find it challenging to put the words in proper syntactic order. At such times, moving to the first language seems the only resort in order to get the message across. At many occasions code switching occurs for purely learning and teaching purposes. Teachers switch code to make lesson simpler and less intricate for the students and likewise learners move to native tongue to clarify their concepts and eradicate the mistakes. Often students find harder to understand because of different sounds and stress patterns of the target language, even though they understand the meaning. In such scenarios teachers and students switch code for better understanding and to remove confusions. Students and teachers switch code in order to make things more understandable and learning an easier process.

Figure 1 demonstrates the average calculated results after the survey about learning reasons for code switching. It shows that 50% of the sample population agreed that students code switch owing to learning issues, whereas 24% strongly agreed to the reasons mentioned. In contrast, 22% disagreed and only a minor number i.e. 4% strongly disagreed to the same.

Results demonstrate that code switching is also being used by the students for social reasons. It's a human nature to use certain language to show affiliation to a certain group. Likewise, students shift to other language to show their association/respect to a particular group or to establish themselves as member of some community. Code switching is influenced by situation and change in situation may lead to change in code. The results indicate other social factors for code switching, such as to show off the linguistic background. For instance, some learners code switch to prove their belonging to a certain nationality or to follow the modern language trend in their community. They also switch code as a symbol of status and prestige.

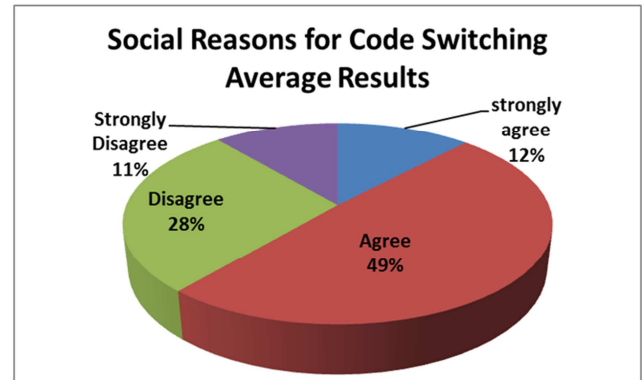


Fig. 2. Average Results of Social Reasons for Code Switching.

Figure 2 indicates the average results calculated after the survey through responses about the social reasons for code switching. It shows that 49% agreed and 12% strongly agreed. On the contrary, 28% disagreed and only 11% strongly disagreed.

Overall results demonstrate that participants recommended code switching as a strategy to help in improving the social and learning skills. Some respondents share their views through online survey. "Due to its role in increasing the social communication, especially for beginners, the controlled usage of code switching is recommended. Code-switching is a good educational tool, but it should be controlled." (Anonymous response to the online questionnaire). Another teacher said "Sometimes it is used because students have difficulties in understanding what is being explained. Thus, the need of using such a way is a necessity." Other participant also said, "Code switching has helped me to reach out to my students and explain the subject matter better."

5. Recommendations

1. Teachers should take into consideration the level of the students and focus which students need more attention. Teachers need to develop good rapport with the students, and focus according to the students' background knowledge.
2. Code switching in educational settings is usually considered unacceptable, however it should not be imposed on the learners to not to shift to native tongue as it may scare them away and reduce their confidence level and motivation to learn a foreign language. Eventually students would stop learning and this damage could never be compensated.
3. The EFL teachers of Jazan University should adopt teaching methodology based on learners' best interest. They should neither frighten the students by putting strict restrictions on code switching, nor make overuse of it, rather should choose intermediary approach to create less anxiety environment for learners and make learning a favourable and an enjoyable event.

4. Teachers should try their best to employ techniques to accommodate the students with language barriers and different skills' levels by using only the target language, for instance, they can make use of facial gestures or use pictures to describe the meanings.

5. The meanings of the words should be described in context instead of directly translating them in the native tongue. For example they can use story telling or dialogues etc. Teachers should also use simpler language to get the meaning across.

6. During speaking, teachers may articulate the sounds clearly to eradicate any confusion or speak at a slower rate. In Arabic there is no /p/ and /v/ sounds and Arabs replace it with other sounds. Teachers should keep these differences in mind.

7. Most importantly, teachers should deliver the lesson in a humble way and shouldn't hurt any student' self-esteem while teaching English language, due to their lack of knowledge of the target language. Teachers should try to create a relaxed environment for the students and make learning a fun.

6. Conclusion

Code switching is a linguistic feature and this research shows that low level EFL learners at Jazan university code switch due to many learning and social reasons. Code switching appears to be a common practice of bilingual or multilingual environment; it may have developed as a result of the speakers' conventions or due to specific objectives. Classroom code switching is quite a common practice. Numerous studies have attempted to find and explain the underlying reasons why bilingual learners code-switch in the classroom.

Moreover, it supported the study of Reyes who suggested that L2 learners used code switching for social purposes in terms of increasing the interaction and communication, especially during the topic shift.

It is also concluded through the research that the use of code-switching definitely impacts language use among bilinguals in both positive and negative ways, however, the research validates that general conception that prevails among the target population is that switching code from one language to another, such as Arabic and English, is a favourable learning tool, as well as helps developing social status, and does not necessarily place adverse effects on the learners' capabilities as long as they make the least possible use of it.

Appendix-A

Survey Questions

1. Are you male or female?
2. Are you a teacher or a student at Jazan University?
3. What is your mother tongue?
4. How many languages do you speak? What are they?
5. How many years have you been teaching English language?
6. Code switching is to mix two languages when you speak, such as mixing Arabic with English.
7. Students use code switching in the classroom to increase understanding, such as giving examples with Arabic instead of English.
8. Students mix two languages when they speak because they want to imitate their teachers or ideal students.
9. Students use code switching to correct linguistic mistakes, for example to clarify the confusion due to sounds like /p/ and /b/.
10. Students use code switching to show their linguistic background.
11. Students like to code switch because they want to show that they belong to a certain social status or community, for instance, belong to a rich families.
12. Students use code switching to prove that they belong to a certain ethnicity or nationality, for instance, speaking Arabic in United States.
13. Students use code switching in order to follow the modern trend or fashion in the community, for e.g. student mix Arabic and English languages when speaking to show that she/ he is a modern person.
14. As an EFL instructor, I recommend to use code switching in the classroom because it increases the understanding of the students.
15. Using code switching in the classroom shows poor teaching methods used by instructors in the classroom.
16. Using code switching will make students confused when speaking in public, as it will not deliver their messages to the audience.
17. I recommend using code switching in teaching speaking at Jazan University.
18. Please let me know about any solutions or suggestions in terms of using code switching in teaching speaking skills at Jazan University.

Anonymous Responses to Question 18 through Online Survey

1. "Code Switching should be used as a learning facilitator particularly at the basic levels. However, the overuse may make the students more aware of the learning process and

such thing will open the door for the negative transfer and the systematic learning development.”

2. “Using vernacular with the teacher or in the class, may lead to Mother Tongue Interference and in turn affect their ability to think in English while communicating.”

3. “Considering code switching for different levels and for long time period could be an obstacle in developing the linguistic skills of L2 learners. “It should be kept in mind that in long term, when the students experience interaction with the native speakers of the target language; code switching may be a barrier which prevents mutual intelligibility. Accordingly, the teacher has a vital role for preventing its long-term damages on foreign language learning process.”

4. “The low time of exposure of practicing the target language may lead to use code switching. Using mother tongue while teaching English is necessary sometimes because many of the students are not exposed to the English language like other Asian countries. They hear English only for only one hour or two hour classroom.”

5. “Lack of vocabulary of the target language is considered a reason that leads to code switching.”

Most of students are not aware of some vocabulary in English. Therefore, we can use mother tongue sometimes if the students are not able to understand the word in English.”

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