

STUDENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS CODE-SWITCHING AND FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CODE-SWITCHING IN A KAZAKHSTANI EMI UNIVERSITY

*Seidin A.¹, Mambetalina D.A.², Bahytzhanova G.B.³, Mussagali G.⁴

*¹lecturer, Astana IT University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan,

² Research assistant, Nazarbayev University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan,

^{3,4} MA in Multilingual Education, Nazarbayev University, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

*¹e-mail: ariya.seidin@astanait.edu.kz

²e-mail: dana.mambetalina@nu.edu.kz

³e-mail: gulnar.bakytzhanova@alumni.nu.edu.kz

⁴e-mail: gulzhainamussagali@gmail.com

Abstract. As part of Kazakhstan's trilingual policy, many higher institutions within the country have introduced English as a medium of instruction creating multilingual educational environments where code-switching from English to Kazakh or Russian can be widely practiced. Although code-switching naturally occurs during the initial stages of language learning as a strategy for compensating the missing knowledge, it might also be present during the later stages of language development. This study employed an interview-based qualitative method to explore three graduate students' attitudes towards code-switching practices in a Kazakhstani EMI university and identify the underlying factors that influence the students with a high level of second and third language proficiency code-switch. The study used purposeful convenient sampling to recruit the participants and obtained the data through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The set of context-dependent factors suggested by Wodak, Krzyżanowski, and Forchtner was employed as an analytical framework to explore the factors that influence the students' code-switching. The data analyses showed that despite seeing code-switching as an undesirable practice that should be avoided in formal contexts, the participants acknowledge that it might fulfill a set of functions within a classroom, such as facilitating group discussions and brainstorming, building relationships between peers, helping to overcome the linguistic differences between languages, and enhancing conversation flow. The factors that influenced the participants' code-switching practices included code-switching to accommodate their teachers' and peers' language, mark their identity, and experiment and play with the languages in their linguistic repertoire. The findings of the study add to the theories that suggest code-switching can increase student engagement in learning and can be the representation of language learners' developing multicompetence.

Keywords: language play, foreign language acquisition, language education, EMI, code-switching, language attitude, multilingualism, multicompetence

Basic Provisions

Currently, Kazakhstan is implementing the trilingual language policy by promoting Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as the global language [1]. As part of the policy, English has been introduced as a medium of instruction in some Kazakhstani educational institutions creating multilingual educational environments where code-switching or "alternation between different uses of language in a communicating situation" [2, p.3] became commonplace.

Introduction

The literature on code-switching suggests that there is a need to study both teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes towards the phenomenon as it directly affects the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, the current study aimed to explore the language attitudes towards code-switching and the factors that influence code-switching in a Kazakhstani university that uses English as a medium of instruction (EMI) by answering the following research questions: 1. What are the attitudes toward code-switching in the EMI classroom of the students with advanced English proficiency? 2. What might influence the students with an advanced English proficiency to code-switch in an EMI university? In the context of this study, language attitudes are defined as "evaluative reactions to different language varieties" [3].

Students' attitudes towards code-switching

Code-switching is "the act of inserting words, phrases, or even longer stretches of one language into the other" [4, p.72]. The research on code-switching in EMI within the classroom environment consistently shows that code-switching is usually described as an advantage necessary for language acquisition from both teachers' and students' perspectives [5]. According to Sampson, the attempt to ban code-switching in a class can be detrimental to language acquisition and learning processes since code-switching serves important communicative functions such as reiterating concepts, discussing concerns about different procedures, and forming relationships within groups, and floor holding [5]. Likewise, Alenezi demonstrated that students might view code-switching as a resource that helps them learn the target language and comprehend the material better [6]. However, Ospanova's study about students' attitudes towards code-switching in the Kazakhstani context found that students may hold quite negative perceptions and attitudes towards code-switching in EMI, believing that it hinders the language learning process [7]. Interestingly, the study participants would still code-switch, explaining it with their inadequate English proficiency and anxiety about making a mistake in front of teachers and peers by speaking only in English. Thus, it can be said that attitudes towards using other languages in EMI vary according to the context and factors that influence code-switching practices [7].

Factors that influence students' code-switching

Although code-switching naturally occurs during the initial stages of language learning, the research shows that it can also occur in the later stages of language development. Some commonly referred factors that influence code-switching in a language classroom are code-switching to mediate understanding among the peer group, construct meaning to understand others and yourself, include others or exclude others, and demonstrate knowledge despite the low target language proficiency [4]. The mentioned factors can be present during all stages of language development. If during initial stages, they happen to occur more subconsciously to compensate for missing knowledge; later, code-switching among more advanced students can be driven by more conscious and elaborate factors [4]. For instance, Garcia and Kano found that more experienced bilinguals use code-switching strategically to enhance and deepen their understanding of a subject and negotiate

meanings among their linguistic repertoire to overcome specific linguistic or discourse differences [8]. Wodak, Krzyzanowski, and Forchtner concluded that language choice and code-switching practices within a multilingual environment depend on many contextual factors. The ones identified by the authors are:

1. context-related factors that accommodate a specific topic being discussed, the language used by a previous speaker, and the level of politeness of their speech. In an EMI classroom, this can be code-switching to accommodate a more complicated topic or the language used by the teacher or peers.
2. genre-related factors that reflect the general discourse of a context;
3. language-ideology-related factors that depend upon the prestige of a language within society and people's attitudes towards the language;
4. power-related factors that include one's desire to win an argument or a debate or gain the floor. For instance, in a debate or class discussion, if students are knowledgeable about the topic but cannot formulate the desired thought in the target language, they may code-switch to prove their point of view;
5. personality or relationship-oriented factors related to a person's identity and serve as a self-representation of one's cultural and community belonging [9].

Since the EMI institutions are multilingual environments where students bring in their language backgrounds and language attitudes, this set of factors will be used as an analytical framework for analyzing underlying factors behind students' code-switching practices.

Methods

The study employed an interview-based qualitative method to “uncover and interpret the meanings” [10, p. 25] behind the participants' attitudes towards code-switching practices in a Kazakhstani EMI higher institution. The study used the purposeful convenient sampling strategy “to select a sample from which the most can be learned” [10, p. 9]. Thus, three second-year graduate students with an advanced English level proficiency that studied in one of the EMI higher institutions of Kazakhstan were recruited to participate in the study. Two of the participants were enrolled in the Master of Arts in Multilingual Education with IELTS 7 certificates; the third participant's IELTS overall score was 7.5. All three participants described themselves as proficient Russian, Kazakh, and English speakers. The data were collected with the help of one-on-one semi-structured interviews, as semi-structured interviews are more flexible and enable “the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” [10, p. 111]. The interview questions were adapted from Ospanova's study conducted in 2017 [7]. The interviews were conducted in English. Before the interview, the participants gave us consent to audiotape the interview. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and were conducted within the participants' university campus. The interview recordings were transcribed and

analyzed in comparison to the range of factors that might influence code-switching practices provided by Wodak, Krzyżanowski, and Forchtner's 2012 framework.

Results and discussion

The interviews were conducted in English, and all three participants provided their responses only in English without code-switching to Russian or Kazakh. Choosing to speak "pure" English during the interview might demonstrate the participants' wish to accommodate the interviewer's language and level of politeness, representing the con-text related factors as suggested by Wodak, Krzyżanowski, and Forchtner. This can also be the reflection of the "linguistic purism" ideology as suggested by Weber and Horner [11] since two of the participants stated that they advocate the "pure" usage of the target language in language teaching and learning. To be more specific, participant 1 stated: if you start the conversation in English, you have to finish it in English. Similarly, participant 2 commented: I generally prefer to avoid code-switching in order not to be identified as an incompetent English speaker by other people. Part of me thinks that you should stick to English if that's the language of the lesson since code-switching too much defies the whole purpose of having English as a medium of instruction. According to Weber and Horner, language ideology is a "cultural system of ideas and feelings, norms and values, which inform the way people think about language" [11, p. 16]. One of the five major pervasive language ideologies is the ideology of language purism, that differentiates "bad" language usage from "good" language usage [11].

However, the data analyses demonstrated that while advocating the pure usage of a language within formal settings, the participants acknowledge the benefits of code-switching, such as the role of code-switching in facilitating the conversation flow, overcoming linguistic differences, and building relationships between peers, as mentioned by Sampson [5], and regard code-switching as a natural phenomenon that occurs unconsciously during the informal conversation of multilingual individuals since code-switching requires less thought process (participant 2) and enables a person to deliver his or her messages exactly the way he or she thinks without filtering them (participant 3). In accordance with Garcia and Kano's findings, all three participants underlined the importance of code-switching in overcoming linguistic differences between languages [8], referring to the untranslatable words and concepts within the languages they speak. Furthermore, participant 2 highlighted the importance of being able to express one's thoughts freely and comfortably during class and suggested: It (code-switching) helps to check if you are on the same wavelength (with your group mates) so that there is no confusion.

While the notion of code-switching as a natural process was reiterated in all three participants' responses, participant 2 suggested that people might naturally start code-switching since, for multilingual or bilingual people, code-switching might require less cognitive effort than expressing their thoughts entirely in one language:

People code-switch not because they lack the knowledge; I am sure they know the right word. But it's sometimes very difficult to come up with the right word in an instant, especially when your memory fails you, whereas

when you code-switch, it does not require a deep thought process to think of a word.

The same idea was reflected in the response of participant 3 as she stated that:

I think the advantage of code-switching is that the person can deliver his or her messages exactly the way he or she thinks without filtering them. I mean, if you don't know the direct translation of a certain word in English and if you know that your peers know the word in the other language, you can say that.

This indicates the participant acknowledges that multilingual people's thought process might involve all the languages in their linguistic repertoire, thus, making it easier for them to produce their speeches using code-switching. In other words, for multilingual people, code-switching might be a more natural process rather than expressing their thoughts entirely in one language. The belief regarding code-switching as a natural phenomenon corresponds to the ideology of "striving for linguistic authenticity" [12] suggested by Lantto. In their study on Basque-Spanish bilinguals in the Basque context, Lantto reported that despite seeing code-switching as an undesirable practice, Basque-Spanish bilinguals regard it as the most authentic Basque register in informal conversations and code-switch in informal settings considering the pure standard usage of languages to be too formal for informal communication [12]. It can be speculated that the participants' preference for using code-switching in "non-academic" contexts might be out of these similar reasons, as mentioned by Lantto.

In general, the main factors that influenced the participants' code-switching practices were in line with con-text and genre-related factors indicated by Wodak, Krzyżanowski, and Forchtner. The extracts below show that all three participants code-switch in informal contexts to accommodate the language used by their peers and enhance the conversation flow, whereas pure English is most often used within formal contexts:

What happens is we use English for formal purposes: to talk to our professors, to give public speeches, and do some group presentations or when we write our written assignments, but we mix Kazakh and Russian with English while having some informal discussions with our group mates (participant 3); I can say that code-switching makes group works and intergroup communication more comfortable and makes conversation flow faster (participant 1); In my classes, I code-switch only during the quick informal brainstorming to emphasize some of my thoughts using Kazakh or Russian (participant 2).

One unanticipated finding was that foreign instructors and teachers also tend to code-switch to Kazakh or Russian to establish a rapport with their students. For instance, participant 2 mentioned:

Sometimes, international faculty members might use whatever word they know in Russian or Kazakh to connect with their audience, with us, to feel more comfortable. It sounds funnier than it sounds reassuring. They are just trying to build rapport, I guess.

In terms of personality or identity-related factors, a common view was that code-switching enables participants to express themselves “fully” and gives an opportunity to show their diverse identities; in other words, they embed their identities into their speech while speaking in a certain language. The following extracts yielded a strong relationship between the participants’ code-switching practices and identity expression, as they stated:

I speak Kazakh, Russian, and English, but in terms of my studies, I prefer using English. It’s the most comfortable language. I cannot speak any languages with my parents other than Kazakh. I don’t even use Russian with them. I don’t know why; it’s probably my mental setting having decided to do so. With my friends, it’s comfortable to speak Russian for me, and I code-switch depending on the topic. I use different languages with different groups of people, which means that my parents know me from one side, my friends know me from another side, and my professors know me from a completely different side. Code-switching allows me to demonstrate my identities in different languages” (participant 3); I don’t do it intentionally because it’s the way I speak. Since there are too many languages that I know and can use, sometimes I can’t express myself or who I am fully in one language, so I code-switch (participant 2).

The power-related factors suggested by Wodak, Krzyżanowski, and Forchtner were not mentioned by the participants. However, the unexpected finding of the study was that the participants might code-switch to experiment or play with the languages in their linguistic repertoire, with participant 1 stating: I just like playing with and changing the word structures; sometimes when I speak English with my friends I can start in English and end the word using the Kazakh word endings, or I might change the root and form of Kazakh words to make them sound English. This is just for fun. A similar theme occurred in Participant 3’s responses, with her claiming: Some code-switch because it’s trendy and fun. For example, at our university, we use the word “чалить” instead of “to study,” which is originally a Turkish word for studying. According to Belz, language learners play with languages by creating hybrid language names and syntaxes, or, in other words, their “personalized languages” to mark their multicompetence [13]. By learning and speaking a new language, language learners reconceptualize how they understand themselves and the world and enter a new state of mind where they “interact with and relate to the world in a multiple and multicompetent fashion” [13, p.35].

Conclusion

The current study found that the participants have mixed attitudes towards code-switching: while viewing code-switching as an undesirable practice often associated with inadequate language proficiency, they also believe that students should be allowed to switch to their preferred language to convey their messages, acknowledging that, within a classroom setting, code-switching can facilitate group discussions and brainstorming, build relationships between peers, overcome the linguistic differences between languages and enhance conversation flow. A common view amongst the participants was that code-switching is a natural part of the

informal conversations between multilingual or bilingual people that share the same linguistic background since it requires less “thought process” and enables people to express their thoughts in their true forms without filtering or altering them. In general, the main factors that influence the participants’ code-switching practices within a classroom setting were consistent with Wodak, Krzyżanowski, and Forchtner’s con-text-related and personality-related factors. More specifically, the participants reported code-switching to accommodate their peers’ and teachers’ languages and code-switching to fully express who they are by demonstrating their diverse language identities. The unanticipated finding of the study suggests that the participants intentionally experiment and play with the languages in their linguistic repertoire and create their personalized languages to mark their multicompetence.

This study can fulfill the theory about student code-switching in EMI by throwing light on the student’s attitude and factors that cause its use in a Kazakhstani EMI university. This, in turn, can raise teachers’ and students’ awareness of code-switching practice in the classroom and help establish a suitable environment for students’ engagement in EMI settings where students can confidently express their opinions and code-switch to enhance their learning practices. Since code-switching is a social phenomenon, we recommend exploring more students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards code-switching to get a broader picture and understand code-switching practices within EMI higher institutions. In other words, future studies can focus on whether teachers show similar contradictions between stated attitudes and actual practices when it comes to code-switching practices.

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ТІЛ АЛМАСТЫРУҒА ДЕГЕН КӨЗҚАРАС ПЕН ҚАЗАҚСТАН УНИВЕРСИТЕТІНДЕГІ ТІЛ АЛМАСТЫРУҒА ӘСЕР ЕТЕТІН ФАКТОРЛАРДЫ АНЫҚТАУ

*Сейдін А.¹, Мәмбеталина Д.А.², Бақытжанова Г.Б.³, Мұсағали Г.М.⁴

*¹оқытушы, Астана ІТ университеті, Нұр-Сұлтан, Қазақстан
Республикасы,

²ғылыми қызметкер, Назарбаев Университеті, Нұр-Сұлтан, Қазақстан
Республикасы,

^{3,4} магистр, Назарбаев Университеті, Нұр-Сұлтан Қазақстан Республикасы

*¹e-mail: ariya.seidin@astanait.edu.kz

²e-mail: dana.mambetalina@nu.edu.kz

³e-mail: gulnar.bakytzhanova@alumni.nu.edu.kz

⁴e-mail: gulzhainamussagali@gmail.com

Аңдатпа. Үштілділік саясатының бір бөлігі ретінде Қазақстанда көптеген жоғары оқу орындары ағылшын тілінде оқытуды енгізіп, тіл (код) алмастыру құбылысы кеңінен орын алатын көптілді білім беру орталарының құрылуына үлес қосты. Сөйлеу барысында тіл алмастыру тіл үйренудің бастапқы кезеңдерінде табиғи түрде жетіспейтін білімді өтеу стратегиясы ретінде орын алғанымен, бұл тақырыпта жүргізілген зерттеулер аталмыш құбылыстың тілді меңгерудің соңғы жетілген кезеңдерінде де кездесуі мүмкін екендігін көрсетеді. Аталмыш зерттеу қазақстандық ағылшын тілінде білім беретін университеттегі тіл алмастыру құбылысына деген үш магистранттың көзқарасын зерттеу және екінші және үшінші тілді меңгеру деңгейі жоғары магистрант студенттердің тіл алмастыруына алып келетін негізгі факторларды анықтау мақсатында сұхбатқа негізделген сапалы әдісті пайдаланды. Зерттеуде студенттердің тіл алмастыруына әсер ететін факторлар Водак, Кржижковск және Форхтнер ұсынған мәнмәтінге тәуелді факторлар жиынтығына сүйене отырып талданды.

Зерттеу нәтижесі қатысушылар тіл алмастыру құбылысы ресми мәнмәтіндерге сай емес жағымсыз құбылыс деп санағанымен, оның топтық талқылаулар мен топтық миға шабуыл жаттығуларын тездету, сыныптастар арасында қарым-қатынас орнату, тілдер арасындағы лингвистикалық айырмашылықтарды түзету және сөйлеу ағымын жақсарту сияқты бірқатар функцияны орындайтынын растайтынын көрсетті. Оқытушы немесе сыныптастардың тіліне бейімделу, өзіндік бірегейлігін көрсету, өз тілдік репертуарындағы тілдермен тәжірибе жасап сынау сияқты факторлар қатысушылардың тіл алмастыруына әсер ететін үш негізгі фактор ретінде айқындалды. Зерттеу нәтижелері тіл алмастыру оқудағы студент белсенділігін арттыруға себепкер болып тіл үйренушінің дамып келе жатқан көп құзіреттілігінің көрінісі болып табылатынын алға салатын бірқатар теорияларды толықтырады.

Тірек сөздер: тілдік ойын, шет тілін меңгеру, тіл білімі, ЕМІ, тіл алмастыру, тіл қатынасы, көптілділік, көп құзыреттілік

ВЫЯВЛЕНИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ К ПЕРЕКЛЮЧЕНИЮ КОДОВ И ФАКТОРОВ, ВЛИЯЮЩИХ НА НЕГО, В КАЗАХСТАНСКОМ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

*Сейдин А.¹, Мәмбеталина Д.А.², Бақытжанова Г.Б.³, Мұсағали Г.М.⁴

¹преподаватель, Астана IT университет, Нур-Султан, Казахстан,

²научный ассистент, Назарбаев Университет, Нур-Султан, Казахстан,

^{3,4} магистр, Назарбаев Университет, Нур-Султан, Казахстан

¹e-mail: ariya.seidin@astanait.edu.kz

²e-mail: dana.mambetalina@nu.edu.kz

³e-mail: gulnar.bakytzhanova@alumni.nu.edu.kz

⁴e-mail: gulzhainamussagali@gmail.com

Аннотация. В рамках казахстанской политики трехязычия многие высшие учебные заведения страны ввели английский язык в качестве языка обучения, создав многоязычную образовательную среду, в которой можно практиковать переключение кодов с английского на казахский или русский. Несмотря на то, что переключение кодов происходит естественным образом на начальных этапах изучения языка в качестве стратегии компенсации недостающих знаний, оно также может присутствовать на более поздних этапах развития языковой компетенции. В данном исследовании был применен качественный метод, основанный на интервью, для изучения отношения трех студентов магистратуры к практикам переключения кодов в казахстанском университете с английским языком обучения и выявления основных факторов, влияющих на переключение кодов среди студентов с высоким уровнем владения вторым и третьим языком. В исследовании использовалась целенаправленная выборка для набора участников, а данные были получены посредством полуструктурированных индивидуальных интервью. Набор контекстно-зависимых факторов, предложенный Водаком, Кржижановском и Форхтнером, был использован в качестве аналитической основы для изучения факторов, влияющих на переключение кодов учащимися. Анализ данных показал, что, несмотря на то, что переключение кодов рассматривается как нежелательная практика, которую следует избегать в формальном контексте, участники признают, что оно может выполнять ряд функций, таких как: содействие групповым обсуждениям и мозговым штурмам, построение отношений между сверстниками, помощь в преодолении лингвистических различий между языками и поддержание разговора на плаву. Факторы, которые повлияли на практику переключения кодов участниками, включали переключение кодов для приспособления к языку учителей и сверстников, обозначения своей идентичности, а также для эксперимента и игры с языками в их лингвистическом репертуаре. Результаты исследования дополняют теории, предполагающие, что переключение кодов может повысить вовлеченность учащихся в процесс обучения и может быть отражением развивающейся мультикомпетентности изучающих язык.

Ключевые слова: языковая игра, овладение иностранным языком, языковое образование, ЕМІ, переключение кода, отношение к языку

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