



CODE SWITCHING BY TEACHERS IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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This study investigates the use of mother tongue (L1) by teachers in the English as a second language (ESL) classrooms, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. It seeks to find the purpose of L1, the amount of L1 in lower and higher proficiency classes and teachers' attitude towards the use of it as a pedagogical tool to facilitate target language (TL) acquisition. The study revealed that students' L1 is used for pedagogical, administrative and interactional purposes in the ESL classroom and that instructors teaching in lower proficiency levels used the L1 in significant quantities as a strategy to accommodate students' low language proficiency and also as a strategy to create a less threatening classroom environment. In higher proficiency levels it was used mostly for interaction. In general, the majority demonstrated a favorable disposition towards the use of L1 since they believed it facilitates language acquisition by making the input more comprehensible and also by lowering the students' affective filter. Based on the findings, it is posited that the students' L1 might be a useful strategy that enhance TL acquisition. The study recommends that teachers should be educated on the potential of L1 and how it should be utilized to maximize language acquisition.

Keywords: Code Switching, Purpose of L1, Strategy, Language acquisition, Target language (TL).

Introduction

English, in Sri Lanka has "a visible presence" (Karunaratne, 2009, p. xvii) in society as it is the language learnt by many Sri Lankans as their second language (L2) (Udagama, 1999). It is also considered a *lingua franca* among the speakers of the two official languages, Sinhala and Tamil (Brann, 1985, as cited in Karunaratne, 2009). Though English is considered a second language, it has always occupied a unique position in the country since it "is typically the language of choice in contemporary governmental policies and practices" (McArthur, 2002, p.329). Confirming this, Thiru Kandiah (2010) too claims that English is widely used in most of the important spheres of society.

In Sri Lanka, current information is primarily available in English. Due to this, much importance is attributed to the teaching of English at elementary, secondary and tertiary levels. Although in most government schools students study either in Sinhala or Tamil, English is offered as a language to be learned. In certain urban schools, it is used as the medium of instruction to teach the curriculum. Despite English being taught at school, the proficiency level of students varies from region to region, school to school and from person to person depending on the language spoken in the students' home, the age at which the learner was exposed to

English, socio-economic variables and the opportunities available for them to acquire the language (Karuanratne, 2009).

Having recognized the importance of English, the University of Colombo (UoC) offers proficiency courses in the English language that aim at improving students' language skills which, in turn, help them perform their academic activities well.

The current study focuses on the Faculty of Arts of the UoC where the medium of instruction is Sinhala / Tamil. Unlike undergraduates in other faculties where the medium of instruction is English, exposure the Arts Faculty undergraduates receive to English is mainly through their teachers in the ESL classroom. Many linguistically underprivileged students learn the basics of the English language for the first time in the proficiency courses offered by the university. Due to this, much dependency on the teachers is visible specially in the lower proficiency ESL classrooms. Under these circumstances, teacher talk and how teachers modify input to maximize comprehension are of crucial importance in the context of the Faculty of Arts ESL classrooms.

Teachers use a number of strategies to modify input to optimize uptake in the ESL classrooms. Among these strategies, codeswitching (CS) to the learner's L1, according to observations, is a widely occurring phenomenon. CS is defined as the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation (Milroy & Muysken, 1995) and "by definition is only available to bilingual teachers" (Macaro, 2005, p.63). Although this area has been researched extensively using a variety of approaches in other parts of the world, not much research has been focused on CS in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, it has been felt important to investigate the purpose served by CS in the university ESL classrooms. Besides, a qualitative and quantitative analyses of the functions of CS would also enable teachers to make informed decisions about whether they should or should not incorporate CS to their language teaching pedagogy.

Thus, the present study aims at finding out answers to the following questions with a view to exploring the possibility of using CS as a strategy to facilitate L2 acquisition.

1. For what purposes do teachers codeswitch to the learners' L1 in the ESL classroom?
2. Do teachers in low proficiency classes codeswitch to the learners' L1 more often than teachers teaching in higher proficiency classes?
3. What are the attitudes of teachers towards the use of CS in the ESL classroom?

Literature Review

Definition of Key Terms

Codeswitching. Code Mixing and Borrowing.

The process of using different codes (languages, language varieties) in speech is identified as Codeswitching. It gained recognition with Haugen (1956) who refers to it as the alternate use of two languages in speech. Expressing a similar view, Gumperz (1982) defines conversational CS as "the juxtaposition of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems within the same speech exchange" (p.59). According to his observations, the alternation takes the form of two subsequent sentences where the speaker employs a second language either to reiterate his /her message or to reply to someone else's statement. In the same

vein, Poplack (1980) and Milroy and Muysken (1995) too define CS as “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent” (p.581) and as “alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation” (p.7) respectively.

Although, according to Milroy and Muysken (1995) and Milroy and Gordon (2003), CS is an umbrella term that subsumes different forms of bilingual behavior, it has been differentiated from code mixing (CM) and borrowing by some researchers. According to Muysken (2000) CM refers to instances where lexical items and grammatical features of two languages appear in one sentence. Kachru (1978) defines CM as “the use of one or more languages for consistent transfer of linguistic units from one language into another” (p.28). According to him, there is an ‘absorbed code’ and an ‘absorbing code’ and mixing can occur at both inter- and intra-sentential levels. Borrowing, on the other hand, is seen as a strategy adopted by interlocutors to enrich certain registers of a language. It involves importing features from other languages to one’s native language.

Canagarajah (1995) states that, although the terms ‘switching’, ‘borrowing’ and ‘mixing’ have been used in sociolinguistics literature to distinguish between different types of code alteration, they can all function alike in rhetorical effect. Eastman (1992) too pronounces that “effects to distinguish CS, CM and borrowings are doomed” (p.1). Hence, the term CS, as suggested by Milroy and Muysken (1995), Canagarajah (1995) and Eastman (1992) can be used as an umbrella term that would cover CM, CS and borrowing.

Functions of Codeswitching

Verschueren (1999) in his linguistic adaptation theory proposes that interlocutors are required continuously to make conscious or unconscious linguistic choices when using language. Adaptability, according to Verschueren (1999), is the property of language which enables people to make negotiable linguistic choices from a range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs (p.61). Hence, this theory can be used to explain why people codeswitch in conversation.

Wardaugh (2006) discusses the factors that determine the choice of codes in any given situation. According to him, factors such as solidarity, accommodation to listeners, choice of topic and perceived social and cultural distance may exercise an influence on the choice of a particular code. Huagen (1972) states that switching may occur as a response to some kind of triggering such as change in the topic, a new addressee or a new domain that demands one language rather than another or the internal needs of the speaker himself/herself. In a similar vein, Gumperz (1982) discusses the discourse function of CS, elaborating how a speaker may manipulate the connotation of the *we-code* to create a conversational effect which would result in effective communication and interlingual unity. Malik (1994) in an empirical study on CS in India lists similar functions achieved by CS. According to her, people resort to CS due to habitual experience, semantic significance, changes in mood, lack of facility and register, to emphasize a point, to show identity with a group and to address a different audience.

Thus, in summary, it can be stated that the above findings are in line with Verschueren (1999)’s theory of linguistic adaptation theory.

CS by Teachers in Bilingual Classroom Settings

In ESL classrooms, the TL becomes both the goal and the means of acquisition. However, the existence of another language in the classroom i.e. learners’ and teachers’ L1 could significantly

influence the verbal behavior of both groups leading to situations in which codes are switched. CS, as stated by Macaro (2006), is available only to bilinguals and is a natural aspect of bilingual classroom interaction. Although teachers are generally expected to conduct an ESL /FL class using the TL, teachers invariably resort to L1 to tackle a number of classroom issues. Nzwanga (2000, as cited in Levine, 2003) too claims that “despite their effort to avoid it, both the teachers and the students appealed to CS for a number of reasons” (p. 345).

Illustrating this, Turnbull and Arnett (2002) identify three macro-functional categories of CS in the L2 classroom. According to them, teachers use the learners’ L1 for pedagogical purposes, to maintain social interaction with the students, and to manage the classroom. Supporting some of their functional categories, Polio and Duff (1994), in a study where they explored the teachers’ language in FL classrooms of six universities, also revealed the learners’ L1 (English) was used by teachers for classroom administrative / management purposes, to show solidarity or empathy, to aid comprehension, to offer a translation of a word or phrase and for grammar instruction.

Liu et al (2004) while reiterating what Turnbull and Arnett (2002) have stated, present two additional reasons for CS in the ESL classroom. They observed that teachers switch to L1 when their knowledge in the TL is inadequate to convey the intended message and as a time saving device. Causa (1996) too while echoing Turnbull about CS as a pedagogical tool in the classroom, notices that teachers switch languages to help learners compare and contrast the two linguistic systems.

Canagaraja (1995) who studied the functions of CS in the ESL classroom in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, identified a division of labor between the two languages, English (TL) and Tamil (L1). According to him, L1 was used to maintain personal interaction while the TL for pedagogical purposes. The functions Canagaraja identified were different from those listed out by Turnbull et al since his findings reveal that only the TL was used for pedagogical purposes in the Jaffna ESL classroom.

Thus, it is evident that CS serves a number of purposes in the ESL classroom.

Factors which Influence the Teachers’ Verbal Behavior in the Classroom

In the teacher-student interactive context of the ESL/FL classroom, a number of factors could influence the teachers’ decision to alter codes. The first research question of the present study too aims at investigating why teachers codeswitch to the learners’ L1 in the ESL classroom.

Ahmed (2009), discussing Malay / English CS in the Malaysian ESL classroom claims that teachers most often codeswitch to accommodate students’ low language proficiency. Jingxia (2009) in a study on the use of Chinese in EFL classrooms in the Gorges University of China and Liu et al (2004), on the use of Korean in the EFL classroom in secondary schools in Korea found similar evidence in their respective studies. Delineating this, Auer (1995) identifies this phenomenon as competence related CS. According to him, it is a switch made by bilingual speakers to adjust their languages depending on the participant’s language ability.

Adding on to this, Jingxia (2009) claims that sometimes a lexical gap resulting from a lack of semantic congruence between vocabulary in a L2 and its putative equivalence in the speaker’s L1 leads to instances of CS. In a situation like the switch is triggered purely by linguistic reasons.

Delineating this further, Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) claim that CS is not always under the teacher’s control. Elaborating this, they point out, “translation after a student request is most significant as the learner, not the teacher, is the classroom participant motivating the use of

NL” (p. 423). On the contrary, Zentella (1981) and Liu et al (2004) claim that teacher variable do play an important role in the language used in the ESL classroom.

Another factor influencing teachers to switch codes according to Canagarajah (1995; 2003), Adendorff (1996), Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002), and Jingxia (2009) is the teachers’ desire to reduce the social distance between them and students. Canagarajah (1995) elaborating this claims that the Tamil teachers in his study use the L1 to ‘break the ice and establish rapport with students” (p.131).

Based on the above findings, it is clear that students’ low TL proficiency, certain linguistic factors, teachers’ desire to reduce the social distance between them and students are some of the key factors that influence the language choice of teachers.

Attitudes Towards the Use of CS in the Classroom

Research on the effectiveness of CS in the classroom reveals a diverse opinions. Hence, the third research question of the present study seeks to uncover the teachers’ attitudes to the use of learners’ L1 in the ESL classroom. Many researchers, even some proponents of TL exclusivity in the classroom acknowledge that CS is inevitable in the language classroom and that both teachers and learners appeal to CS for a number of reasons (Ellis, 1984; Polio & Duff, 1994). Levine (2003) also opines that the dogma of exclusive TL use can limit what can be achieved in the classroom. Cook (2001) holds a similar view since he too believes the TL exclusivity in the classroom sharply limits the possibilities of language teaching.

Those who promote the monolingual approach to language teaching believe that using the L1 in the classroom has a negative influence on the TL acquisition and that CS in the classroom should be avoided and discouraged. They put forward a number of arguments stating how the use of L1 can be detrimental to the TL learning process. They believe that classroom interaction done in the TL provides the most valuable experience for learners because of the limited exposure to sufficient comprehensible input from the natural environment they might get. Reiterating this, Duff and Polio (1990) point out the importance of both the quantity and quality of input L2 students receive inside the classroom since “little opportunity exists for exposure to the L2 outside the classroom” (p.154). According to those who favour this approach, a practice which could immerse the learner in the TL, providing them with the necessary input, can make language learning more meaningful and effective (Liu et al, 2004).

However, these researchers fail to explain how impractical it is to exclude CS which, according to Adendorff (1996), is a spontaneous behavioral activity. Moreover, they undermine the importance of L1 as a linguistic resource (Auerbach, 1993, Cook, 2001) and as an important tool for language learners (Macaro, 2006). In fact, Gumperz (1982) states that CS should not be viewed as a deficit to be stigmatized, but as an additional resource through which a wide range of social and rhetorical meanings are expressed.

The promoters of L1 inclusivity in the classroom provide both cognitive and sociolinguistic reasons to support their stance. De la Campa & Nassaji (2009) in a study on the use of L1 in two second year German conversation courses posit that “learners who have mastered their L1 are sophisticated, cognitive individuals, who invariably draw upon their L1 to make sense of the world, new concepts, and a new language” (p.743). Cummins (1980) expressing a similar view, asserts that the transfer of cognitive abilities across languages with a high level of L1 proficiency promotes the acquisition of L2 cognitive skills.

Guthrie (1984) too in a comparative study of two teachers (one bilingual, one monolingual) working with a group of Chinese elementary level learners found that “knowledge of students’

native language in the teacher is critically important” (p.10) since the students in the monolingual teacher’s class had difficulty comprehending the lessons.

Nation (2003) opines that the L1 should be viewed as a useful tool and like other tools, should be used where needed but should not be over-used. Furthermore, according to him, banning L1 from the classroom would be directly parallel to banning pictures or real objects in the L2 class. Expressing a similar view, Skinner (1985, as cited in Liu et al, 2004) asserts that ‘L2 only’ policy could inhibit the language acquisition process by retarding the growth of concept development. According to him, the exclusive use of L2 “obstructs the rapid connection of words with thoughts, and thereby it slows acquisition of meaning in L2” (Liu et al 2004, p.608). Anton and DiCamilla (1999) in a study that attempts to analyze the use of L1 in the collaborative interaction of adult learners too agree with this since they think when the teacher uses L1 in the classroom, learners also use it as a cognitive tool to help scaffold their learning.

Van Lier (1995) proposes that the use of L1 can provide more salient input to the learner since he believes that the quality of input is more important than the quantity of input. According to him, L1 can enhance the quality of input and thus, promote intake. Similarly, Rolin- Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) too assert that CS modifies input in such a way that it facilitates TL acquisition.

Contrary to the observation of a direct correlation between the teachers’ use of the TL and the students’ achievement of TL proficiency by Carroll (1975), Burstall (1968), Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen and Hargreaves (1974, as cited in Turnbull & Arnett, 2002), Macaro (2001, p. 544) claims that no study so far, to his knowledge “has been able to demonstrate a causal relationship between exclusion of the L1 and improved learning”. Harbord (1992) also claims that

[r]igidly eliminating or limiting the native language does not appear to guarantee better acquisition, nor does it foster the humanistic approach that recognizes learners’ identities as native speakers of a valuable language that is as much a part of them as their names. (p.351)

Confirming this, Shweers (1999), in a study on the use of MT by teachers in the Puerto Rican EFL classroom found that teachers in his study believed that students can identify better with a teacher who speaks to them using their MT. According to the findings of his study, by switching to MT, teachers are letting the students know that their MT is valued and respected. He further claims that the use of L1 is important in the English classroom due to “the politico-social-cultural implications of teaching a language that is basically imposed on them” (p.9).

Supporting all the above views, Cook’s (2001) multicompetence theory argues for the positive involvement of L1 in L2 learning process. According to this theory, L2 learners are multicompetent because their minds house two grammars. Due to this multicompetent state, L2 learners have a right to use their L1 in the L2 learning process.

When looking at all these studies, it is evident that those who promote the use of L1 in the classroom view students’ L1 as a resource rather than a hindrance. (Cook, 2001) Hence, it is evident that banning learner L1 in the classroom is not only impractical but also unwise since L1 has been recognized as an invaluable cognitive tool (Macaro, 2001), a strategy that enhances the quality of input (Van Lier, 1995) and an additional resource (Gumperz, 1982) in the TL classroom.

Proportion of CS and Second Language Acquisition

However, researchers endorsing both the above approaches (TL exclusivity and L1 inclusivity) leave certain theoretical questions unanswered. For instance, they fail to answer how much L1 or L2 should be utilized in the classroom if it is to benefit students. Moreover, these studies fail to explain what is meant by “maximum” in terms of “optimal” L1 and TL use (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Liu et al (2004) too state that research is scarce on how much L1 or L2 is appropriate in the classroom. Confirming this, Polio and Duff (1994) claim that only a small number of studies have so far quantified the teacher’s use of L1 and TL in the classroom.

According to Macaro (2001, p 537), “after a certain threshold of teacher L1 use, there is a rise in student L1 use with possible effects on learning”. For this reason, CS by teachers at will should be discouraged in the classroom. Macaro found that when CS was kept at a level below 10% by the French L2 student teachers in his study, there was no significant increase in the learners’ use of L1. Hence, it is important that the teachers make conscious decisions about CS if they were to use it as a teaching tool. As to advocate complete freedom to codeswitch at will may pose a number of problems, it is important to have a “framework that identifies when reference to the L1 can be a valuable tool” (Macaro, 2001, p.545).

Thus, it is important to determine how much L1 should be used in the classroom to arrive at a pedagogy of CS which bases itself on a theory of optimality. Hence, the second research question of this study focuses on finding out the amounts of L1 used in the university ESL classroom.

CS in Sri Lanka

According to Meyler (2004), who compiled a comprehensive dictionary of Sri Lankan English, many Sri Lankans can claim to be bilingual in English and Sinhala or Tamil. Being bilinguals, Sri Lankans tend to switch between languages quite often (Meyler, 2004; Wickramasinghe, Kumara & Dias, 2007). Agreeing with this, Senaratne (2009) who discusses CM between Sinhala and English and the structural analysis of the mixed language that has evolved as a result, also identifies the use of CM among Sri Lankan bilinguals as a common and a popular phenomenon.

Fernando (2003), analyzing the functions of CS in Sri Lanka, claims that switching between English and other Sri Lankan languages occur when interlocutors need to express a particularly Sri Lankan ethos. She makes this claim in a study on the vocabulary of Sri Lankan English. According to Fernando, CS demonstrates intimacy among speakers and creates a specifically Sri Lankan atmosphere. Senaratne (2009) also states that there is a clear functional difference for the two languages. For instance, English, being considered “powerful” is used for formal and practical purposes while Sinhala is used for more personal and cultural reasons (p.268). This corroborates Fernando’s (1977) observation that “English is reserved always for administrative, professional, intellectual and the socially more prestigious areas” (p.344).

Canagarajah (1995) too presents a similar function of CS in Sri Lankan society. In one of his studies, he illustrates how a Tamil L1 speaking job candidate who is not so proficient in English switches between English and Tamil strategically to “project a formidable image of himself” (P.78). Thus, it is evident that, in Sri Lanka, codes are switched depending on the topic and the situation.

Codeswitching in the in the ESL Classroom in Sri Lanka

Not many studies have been conducted on the use of CS in the Sri Lankan ESL classroom. However, Canagarajah's (1995) study on 24 secondary school teachers in Jaffna, Sri Lanka outlines a number of important issues on the use of L1 by teachers in the ESL classrooms. His research findings indicate some useful functions served by CS. For instance, he identifies macro and micro-functions of CS in the classroom. He observed that teachers appealed to CS primarily for classroom management purposes. For instance, teachers switch codes when starting the class, negotiate directions, manage discipline, encourage, compliment and admonish students. Additionally, students' L1 was also used to transmit the lesson content. For instance, reviewing the previous day's lesson, providing definitions, explaining complicated areas and negotiating cultural relevance was basically accomplished by switching to learners' L1.

According to his findings, English use in the classroom is identified as strictly pedagogical, formal and official whereas Tamil or Tamil mixed with English is used for extra-pedagogical purposes. Interestingly, the teachers, despite their use of a considerable amount of students' L1 in the classroom, viewed CS as something inappropriate. In fact, they had not been aware of the amount of L1 they used in the classroom until they were shown instances of their CS from recorded data. The ones who accepted the use of Tamil in the classroom too sounded apologetic about it citing the low English proficiency level of students or the linguistic demands of a particular lesson as a reason for its use.

On the contrary, Karunaratne (2003; 2009) in a study that discusses the pedagogical issues concerning the teaching of English in urban schools in Sri Lanka found that teachers and learners depend on the use of the learners' L1 to a great extent. According to her, the oral communicative objectives of lessons were not achieved due to this excessive dependency on the L1. She also observed that teachers differed in the extent to which L1 is used in the classroom. Some conducted the entire lesson using the L1 while others resort to the use of L1 only when they thought it was easier for both the teacher and the learner.

According to Karunaratne (2003, p 12; 2009, p.152), the use of the learner's L1 in the Sri Lankan ESL classroom fulfills two requirements. Firstly, teachers would switch to learner's L1 in any teaching situation that seemed too difficult for them to handle in English. Secondly, teachers used the learner's L1 to give grammar instructions, to explain instructions to classroom tasks, to express their disappointment regarding student actions such as forgetting their books, talking in class or not paying attention to the lesson. Karunaratne considers these as situations where the learner's L1 is used as a resource to TL comprehension as she finds the use of L1 provides an indispensable comfort zone for both teachers and students who have to teach and learn in a non-native language. Thus, this comfort zone helps in making the classroom more communicative by eliminating the disadvantage of not knowing English. In conclusion she states that the "use of Sinhala in the classroom seems to have become a 'second nature' for these teachers and students" (2003, p.14).

Perera (2001), in a study on the role of classroom interaction on second language acquisition in secondary schools in Sri Lanka, discusses why teachers use the L1 in the classroom and their attitude towards it. According to her observations, some teachers who communicated exclusively in the TL in the classroom had difficulty making themselves understood. Students in those classes looked confused and had to rely on each other to understand what the teacher was saying. Thus, in this situation, the exclusive use of TL did not seem to have facilitated language acquisition. Since, students were finding it difficult to understand what is being taught, they did not take part actively in the classroom discussions. However, the teachers who did use the

learners' L1 in the classroom were able to use it as a tool that enhanced interaction. For instance, the L1 was used as a 'scaffold' (Vygotsky, 1986) to help students to jointly construct the meaning. According to Perera (2001), the use of L1 provided students more opportunities to engage in L2 communication.

In the same vein as Karunaratne (2009), Perera too outlines her concerns about the unrestricted use of L1 in the classroom. She observes that on certain occasions the students would wait for the L1 translation without making an attempt to understand what is being said in the L2. Hence, according to Perera (2001), L1 sometimes, can become a 'crutch' rather than a 'scaffold'.

She believes that teachers should be educated on the use of L1 in the classroom since she feels that there is lack of knowledge among them regarding the use of L1 in the classroom. Some were quite uneasy and guilty about the amount of L1 they used since the use of it is contrary to the Communicative Language Teaching approach on which the lesson materials were based.

While Canagarajah (1995), Karunaratne (2003;2009) and Perera (2001) observed the use of L1 in secondary schools in Sri Lanka, Widyalanakara (2008) looked at the occurrence of CS in ESL tuition classes in the country. According to her, teaching English is a service commodity which is highly marketable in Sri Lanka and as a result, conducting ESL tuition classes has become a thriving business. In this context, the teacher / instructor becomes the service provider and the learner becomes the customer in which the former is expected to fulfill the needs of the latter. Widyalanakara (2008) found that the majority of the learners (86.6%) considered it is highly important for their teachers to use the L1 in the ESL classroom. According to her, learners believed the non-use of L1 is a feature of a dysfunctional classroom.

Aththanayake (2009) in a study investigating policies, practices and perspectives of undergraduate English language teaching in three Sri Lankan universities found that students' L1 is used in varying degrees in Sri Lankan universities. According to her study, in the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, 80% of the students have stated that their teachers use the L1 either "sometimes or rarely" in the ESL classroom while 7.5% has stated that the L1 is used "always" or "very often" in the classroom. Discussing the students' attitude to their teachers' use of the L1 in the classroom, she states that 77.5% of the students wanted their teachers to use the L1 in the classroom while another 20% opposed the use of it.

Aththanayake (2009) found that students want the L1 in the classroom due to four reasons. According to them, L1 enhances comprehension and retention of what is being taught, increases their level of confidence and improves rapport. The fourth reason, according to Aththanayake's (2009) findings, is of crucial importance. According to her, students want Sinhala (L1) in the classroom simply because it is their mother tongue. This confirms that there could be politico-socio-cultural implications of L1 in the ESL classroom. According to scholars who favour L1 in the ESL classroom, in a situation where students are forced to learn a language which is imposed on them, teachers should use the students' L1 to show that their L1 is respected and valued.

Obviously, there is a dearth of research where using L1 in the Sri Lankan ESL classrooms are concerned. Moreover, apart from Aththanayake's study (2009), the little research that has been done focuses mainly on secondary schools and private institutes. Thus, it is evident that there is a need to research this phenomenon in the Sri Lankan university context since the undergraduate population being young adults differs from that of school children in many respects. Thus, the present study aims to fill this void.

Research Methodology

The Research Design

The research employed both descriptive and exploratory methods to conduct the study. Descriptive research describes data and characteristics about the population or phenomenon being studied (Catane, 2002) while exploratory research is a type of research conducted for a problem that has not been clearly defined.

The main focus of the study is a quantitative one. However, the aim of this is not to give a numerical analysis of how much L1 is used in the classroom, but to find out in what kind of situations and for what purposes teachers switched to the learners' L1 in the classroom. Hence, a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative data was collected during the years 2010 / 2011 using three main research instruments, viz. questionnaires, audio recordings, and interviews. Additionally, two classes, one level 1 and one level 3 were also observed.

The study began with the collecting of natural data. For instance, the researcher had informal discussions with the teachers to find out whether they codeswitch in the classroom. These preliminary discussions revealed the fact that in some class's teachers employ CS for a variety of purposes. Having established that, two of the second year classes, a level 1 and a level 3, were observed with a view to verifying what the teachers had stated in the preliminary discussions.

Next, a random sample of six teachers was audio recorded. The researcher was not present when the classes were being audio recorded. In addition to that, all 21 teachers involved in second year teaching filled out a questionnaire on their CS behavior in the classroom. Finally, five teachers teaching in the five proficiency levels were interviewed to explore more about their CS practices.

Questionnaire data were then analyzed using SPSS version 16. All audio recordings were transcribed and coded for instances of L1 use. Interview responses and the open ended question in the questionnaire along with the transcriptions were used to supplement and triangulate the questionnaire data.

The Research Instruments

Three research instruments viz. audio recordings of the classes, teacher interviews and non-participant observations were utilized to collect qualitative data. Questionnaires were the only quantitative data collecting instrument used in the research.

These research instruments were selected for the present study, since they have been widely used by other researchers such as Macaro (2001; 2006), Duff and Polio (1990), Polio and duff (1994), de la Campa and Nassaji (2009) and Lin (1988) in studies related to CS.

Quantitative Data Collection.

Quantitative research techniques, according to Mouton and Marais (1988) are unambiguous in meaning and can be operationalized in terms of measuring instruments. Thus, the present study employed a questionnaire to quantify the degree to which the L1 is used in the ESL classroom.

Taking this into account, the present study utilized a questionnaire to gather quantitative data. Nunan (1992) quoting Jaeger (1988), states that questionnaires are capable of providing a 'snapshot' of prevailing conditions at a single point in time. He further claims that they can be

utilized for gathering information on pre specified aspects of a particular phenomenon. Gas and Mackey (2007) also claim that a significant number of SL research utilizes questionnaires to collect data. The present study employed questionnaires in order to collect data since it too aimed at finding out the prevailing conditions during a particular period. Moreover, this questionnaire enabled the researcher to collect information even from respondents who were not very articulate.

The questionnaire aimed to find out why teachers code switch to the students' L1 in the classroom, to what extent they codeswitch to the L1 and what their attitude towards the use of CS in the classroom is.

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative research methodologies, according to Marshal and Rossman (2010) has become important modes of inquiry for the social sciences and applied sciences such as education, regional planning and social work. They further state that qualitative research is enacted in naturalistic settings and focuses on the context. No intervention is done at any stage.

Taking this into consideration, three types of qualitative data collection methods were used to supplement the findings from the questionnaire. They were classroom observations, audio recordings of teacher talk and interviews with teachers. In addition to these, there was a section in the questionnaire where the teachers could write their general beliefs on the use of L1 in the classroom.

This study first used observations to ascertain the connection between what is happening in the classroom and the theoretical assumptions made regarding the research questions as observation is the means by which researchers establish a connection between reality and their theoretical assumptions (Mouton & Marais, 1988) without relying on secondary sources. Despite the numerous ethical dilemmas involved, the use observation provides researchers the opportunity to gather information from naturally occurring social situations.

Next, the study utilized audio recordings to uncover the exact nature of the verbal behavior of the teachers According to research, audio recordings could provide valuable material in relation to teacher talk in the ESL classroom. Peräkylä (1997) states that tape recordings can provide highly detailed representations of social interactions. Swann (1993) too claims that transcripts of audio and video recordings provide readily accessible records of spoken language. He further says that they can be used to examine both qualitative and quantitative aspects of talk.

Finally, a structured open ended interview was used to gather further information regarding teacher attitudes. Goodwin (2007) defines a structured open ended interview as a method where a set pattern of questions are worked out prior to the interview and then asked in a precise order. According to him, this is perhaps the commonest method of generating qualitative data. Gass and Mackey (2007) too agreeing with this reiterate that it is a widely used method in socio linguistic research.

The Sample and the Sampling Procedure

In order to obtain a sample where there is a balance between the numbers of higher and lower level classes, teachers teaching second year undergraduates were chosen as the sample. There were 21 second year classes during the academic year 2010 / 2011. All the teachers in the sample were second language speakers of English who were proficient in their L1. Among the 21 teachers, there were 6 males and 15 females

Data analysis

To analyze the questionnaire data, descriptive statistics (SPSS software version 16) was used. The questionnaire focused on finding out to what degree the teachers used learners' L1 in the ESL classroom for the functions specified in it. It also investigated the extent to which teachers believe L1 facilitates L2 acquisition. Data were analyzed to find out the use of learners' L1 by teachers as an academic tool, for classroom management and administration and for social interaction

The three types of qualitative data collected for the present study were analyzed for instances of L1 use utilizing a coding systems which were used in the studies of Ian-Rolinziti and Brownlie (2002) and de la Campa and Nassaji (2009). Then, the number of instances in each class was counted in order to determine the proportion of L1. In addition, teacher attitudes which emerged from qualitative data towards the L1 use were also investigated and quantified.

Findings

For What Purposes Do Teachers Codeswitch to the Learners' L1 in the ESL Classroom?

The study revealed that the students' L1 is used by teachers in varying degrees in the university ESL classroom to realize a number of communicative goals. In line with Turnbull and Arnett (2002)'s findings, the current study also revealed that L1 is used for interactional, pedagogical and administrative purposes in the classroom. The variability in quantities depended on the language proficiency of the students and individual beliefs of the teachers. Nevertheless, a majority of the teachers demonstrated a positive attitude towards the use of L1 in the classroom.

The findings indicated that L1 in the classroom fulfills dual functions; a compensatory strategy in the face of low L2 comprehensibility of the students and also, as a strategy to create a positive affective classroom environment. Both these seemed to exercise a positive influence on the learners' L2 acquisition in two ways. Firstly they ensured the smooth flow of the classroom communication process notwithstanding the low L2 proficiency and secondly, by creating a supportive classroom environment which helps students lower their affective filter which acts as a barrier to L2 acquisition.

According to the study, teachers codeswitched the most for social interactional purposes. The use of L1 created a less tensed, learner friendly classroom environment. These findings confirm those of Lin (1988) who attempts to establish a relationship among the code choice, different role relationships and different levels of interaction negotiated by the teacher and of Polio and Duff (1994) who state that the teacher assumes the role of an empathetic peer by digressing from instructional sequence using L1 to index a stance of sympathy towards the students. As indicated by Lin, on a pedagogical level, the use of the L2 depicts the teacher as an English speaking 'teacher' whereas on a para-pedagogical level the teacher is portrayed as a 'bilingual helper' in the learning task while being a sympathetic advisor and a friend. The present study too found that teachers used L1 in the classroom to perform the para pedagogical tasks outlined by Lin to help create a learner friendly classroom climate.

In classroom interaction, the L1 was frequently used for pedagogical reasons as well. It was used to explain difficult concepts, compare the two language systems, for grammatical explanations, to define difficult vocabulary, to introduce new material and to discuss information unique to Sri Lankan culture. The findings of this study also confirm those of previous research on teacher reasons for using learner L1 in the TL classroom. For instance, the findings are

consistent with those of Polio and Duff (1994), Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) and Jingxia (2009), Sheweers (1999), Lin (1988), and de la Campa & Nassaji (2009) on the use of CS in the classroom.

In addition to this, teachers often codeswitched to L1 when dealing with administrative matters and seeking oral feedback to ascertain student comprehension which enabled the teachers to clarify ambiguous areas. However, switches to L1 where these activities are concerned were comparatively less. Specially, in the highest proficiency classes, the use of L1 for administrative purposes was either nonexistent or minimal.

Two other interesting findings emerged from the study. First, it was found that there were short bursts of CS episodes for no apparent reason even in classes where L1 use was minimal. This could be attributed to the teacher's identity as a bilingual as according to Senaratne (2009), CS is an extremely common practice among bilinguals. Bista (2010) too claims that most fluent CS occurs unconsciously, and speakers are often surprised when told that they have been switching codes. The other finding of the study is that there were instances in which switching to L1 was initiated by the student. There were occasions where students requested the teacher to explain an area of ambiguity in L1 and the teacher had to oblige. This conforms the findings of Rolin-Ianziti and Brownlie (2002) who claim that CS is sometimes initiated by the students.

Thus, it is evident that the majority of the teachers believe that switching to L1 while being inevitable is useful. It is used as a strategy to simplify their language to accommodate students' low language proficiency and to create a no threatening classroom climate. Although the teachers are in favor of L1, the quantity of it even in the lower proficiency levels remained between 20% and 40%. Hence, it is apparent that the quantity of TL even in lower proficiency level classes was kept above 60%. Thus, it can be stated, although the majority showed a pro-L1 attitude, they did *not* support the idea of teaching the TL mainly through L1.

The study also revealed matters regarding the awareness of teachers about their CS behavior. The majority of the teachers were conscious of their CS practices and this awareness was reflected in their classroom practices. Thus, it is obvious that language choices teachers make in the university classroom are based on conscious decisions. This ability to make conscious decisions can be attributed to their work experience since they stated that they were familiar with the areas students find difficult to understand. Macaro (2001) too claims that calculated L1 use of teachers exercises no detrimental effects on TL acquisition.

Considering the findings, it can be stated that teacher beliefs of the present study formed a contrast to the popular monolingual approach to language teaching since despite its popularity, exclusive use of TL was not reflected in the practices of the teachers. Thus, in conclusion it can be stated that the majority of the teachers viewed L1 as a positive mediator and a useful strategy which ensures the smooth flow of classroom interaction.

Do teachers in lower proficiency classes codeswitch to the learners' L1 more often than teachers teaching in higher proficiency classes?

According to the findings, it is evident that in the university classroom, the amount of L1 used is largely determined by the proficiency level of the students. Since teachers were well aware of this, instances of L1 use was relatively high in lower proficiency classes and minimal in the higher proficiency levels. However, even among teachers in the lower proficiency level classes, there was a small minority who did not use it in class. This was due to individual beliefs of teachers regarding the use of L1 to teach L2. However, there had been instances where teachers

in higher levels too felt that L1 needs to be used for the benefit of the less proficient students in their classes. But this was not practiced since less proficient students had not been in favour of their teachers singling them out to explain something using L1.

Thus, it is clear that in the ESL class, students' language proficiency as well as other affective factors related to both teachers and students determines the amount of L1 used.

What is the attitude of teachers towards the use of L1 in the ESL classroom?

In the context of Sri Lanka, where English has always been put on a pedestal, the use of L1 in the classroom can make a significant impact on the students' attitude to learning English. This issue has a unique historical background and cannot be viewed in isolation. In Sri Lanka, those who have a good knowledge of English are considered privileged and others, deprived. Hence, those who are not proficient in the language have a tendency to look at the ones who are masters of the language with mixed emotions. English teachers are often considered to be members of the above mentioned privileged class. Due to this, a language teacher's greatest challenge is to permeate this invisible barrier and reach out to the students. One strategy, according to the findings, is to use L1 in the class.

The data of this study suggest that a majority of university teachers have a favorable attitude to the use of L1 as it help students in a variety of ways. For instance, they believe it can be used as an academic tool and also as a comprehensible medium to convey other useful information. At the same time, they believe L1 can be used to reduce anxiety in the classroom that in turn may make the TL acquisition task less tedious and more accessible.

However, it should be noted here that there was a small percentage of teachers who were vague about the relationship between L1 and L2 acquisition although they did use L1 in the classroom. Similarly, there was another small percentage that rarely used L1 as a strategy. Thus, it is worth investigating whether the latter group observes a link between the exclusive use of L2 and L2 acquisition since Macaro (2001) claims that no causal relationship has been so far found between the exclusion of L1 and improved TL acquisition.

Pedagogical Implications

Findings of the current study, apart from shedding light on what is happening in the university ESL classroom, have a number of implications for teacher education.

Since teachers believe that the use of L1 has a positive influence on the learners' L2 intake, it seems that L1 can be recommended as an academic tool in the low proficiency ESL classroom. It not only makes the input more comprehensible but also minimizes communication breakdowns while making the classroom atmosphere less threatening. In intermediate level classes, L1 is advised to be used as an alternative strategy when all other techniques to modify input fail as students in intermediate levels have the ability to understand other strategies such as simplified TL input. In higher proficiency classes, where academic purposes are concerned, L1 can be avoided altogether.

In relation to administrative information and classroom management, L1 can be used to reiterate information conveyed in lower proficiency classes. However, there is no need to resort to the use of L1 to convey such information to students of higher proficiency levels.

At the same time, L1 can also be employed as a strategy that would help in the creation of a supportive classroom climate which is conducive to TL acquisition. In lower levels, this can be

used more often than in higher levels. In higher proficiency levels, according to the findings of the current research, L1 needs to be carefully utilized even to perform this function. If students are discontented about their teacher using L1, it is advised to minimize / discontinue its use.

Among the respondents, there were a few who, despite using L1 in the classroom, indicated a certain level of uncertainty in respect of the use of it as a tool in TL acquisition. Hence, awareness raising among teachers on the use L1 is crucial. As Castellotti and Moore (1997) and Macaro (2001) point out, teacher CS should be deliberate if it is to benefit students. Freeman (cited in Polio and Duff, 1994) argues that teachers, before applying knowledge and skills they have learnt, must first of all become aware of their practices. Hence, teachers should be trained to be more conscious of their classroom verbal behavior and to make deliberate choices where pedagogical strategies are concerned. Thus, it is crucial that teachers are trained to reflect on their classroom behavior and to have a pre-planned schedule indicating strategies they use to modify input. For instance, the extent to which and for what purposes L1 should be used has to be pre-determined. Teachers also need to be aware of the possible lack of actual learning that greater L1 use can entail.

In other words, in order to utilize L1 as a tool, it is important that principles be established for the use of it in the classroom. Raheem and Ratwatta (2000, cited in Medawattegedara and Devendra, 2004, p.89) too believe that “we need to create consensus on what we should teach and why”. Thus, it would be advisable if teachers could establish common ground rules for using L1. For instance, Macaro (2001) proposes that research is needed to establish parameters of L1/L2 use as a framework for teachers in training to bring them to an optimal balance of resources. Atkinson (1993) discusses how to achieve this balance of L1 in the classroom without depriving learners of valuable L2 input. This balance can be achieved by allocating the use of L1 according to carefully four considered factors: (1) the students’ previous experience, (2) the students’ level, (3) the stage of the course, and (4) the stage of the individual lesson. In light of this, it is recommended that ESL teachers take these into consideration when using L1 in their language teaching pedagogy.

Directions for Future Research

One of the most obvious delimitations of this study is the absence of data pertaining to learner attitudes. Hence, it is important that future research concentrate on the attitudes of students regarding the use of L1 in the classroom. By doing so, the use or non-use of L1 in the ESL classroom can be justified.

Secondly, an empirical comparative study can be carried out to uncover similarities and differences between CS practices of teachers teaching students in two different academic years. This can be considered crucial since the same teacher’s CS practices can differ according to the academic year in which he / she teaches. For instance, it is worth investigating whether a teacher teaching in the same / different proficiency level in two different academic years changes his / her CS behavior according to the dynamics of each class.

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