

English in higher education: pragmatic factors of Kazakh-English code-switchingDamira Akynova¹, Aliya Aimoldina¹, Atirkul Agmanova¹,¹. Philology Department, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, 010008, Kazakhstan
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Abstract: The paper examines attitudes and some functions of Kazakh-English code-switching among foreign language learners engaged in Business English courses in the classroom and outside the classroom activities. To achieve these goals, quantitative and qualitative research methods such as observation, interviews with students have been used. The results demonstrate that attitudes toward the promotion of English in higher education are positive in general. However, there are still some concerns on its usefulness.

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1. Introduction

Code-switching as a language phenomenon has been investigated largely during the last decades. Defined as the use of two languages in the same speech event, it has attracted academic interest in the field of foreign language learning. Much debate has been focused on the attitudes towards code switching and functions of code switching in a foreign language classroom environment.

This paper investigates the attitudinal approach towards code-switching among learners of English. The aim of the study is to determine attitudes of students enrolled in the Business English course towards code-switching and define some functions of code-switching. The study is based on the observations, interviews conducted among students with different proficiency levels of English of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (Astana, Kazakhstan).

The present paper is organized as follows. The theoretical background summarizes the research on code switching in the foreign language classroom. The next part refers to the role and status of English in Kazakhstan's education. Methodology describes the participants, study design and methods used in the study. The following part describes the results obtained from observation and interviews. The analysis of the results and further suggestions are presented in the Discussion and Conclusion part.

2. Theoretical background

There is no general agreement on a clear-cut definition of code-switching among scholars. Being a complex phenomenon, it is discussed in every subfield of language disciplines (Nilep, 2006). It is regarded as a feature of bilingual communication, and ease and structural diversity of the sequence of elements of different languages without breaking the

rules of the matrix language indicates a fairly high level of proficiency in two languages. Code-switching is defined as a "systematic alternating use of two languages or language varieties within a single conversation" (Li, 2000).

Code-switching has been a subject of interest in the language classroom environment recently. The researches have been conducted in a bilingual setting where English has been used as a second language. The research on code switching in second language acquisition and learning, especially English, have been conducted by many scholars (Li Wei, 2000; Martin-Jones, 1995; Cook, 1991; Macaro, 2001; Üstünel and Seedhouse, 2005; and others). The early studies were conducted mostly in the USA where the linguists looked at the amount of two languages (particularly, English and Spanish) used in classrooms (Martin-Jones 1995). Many studies have been devoted to the use of the mother tongue (L1) in foreign language classrooms. The proponents of intralanguage teaching strategy (target language only) believe that the exclusive use of the target language (L2) as a medium of instruction leads to a better acquisition of it (Ellis, 1984; Chaudron, 1988; Lightbown, 2001). According to them, the use of only the target language creates an authentic environment, and any switching to the mother tongue negatively impacts on the process of second language acquisition. Many researchers believe that code-switching leads to "semilingualism" – a lack of an individual's language competence in any of the following areas:

- the active vocabulary;
- linguistic correctness;
- the degree of automatism;
- creation and the introduction of new words;
- mastery of cognitive, emotional, volitional functions of language;

- richness of meaning (Hansegård, 1968).

The advocates of crosslingual teaching strategy (using L1) consider that the use of the mother tongue is an important tool in foreign language learning (Cook, 2001; Auer, 1998; Gumperz, 1982; Li and Milroy, 1995; etc). According to Cook, excluding the native language in foreign language classrooms had considerably limited “the possibilities of language teaching” (2001). She argues that code-switching is a natural phenomenon in a setting where the people share two languages, therefore, it should be used in the classroom. According to Cook (2001), foreign language teachers should be aware of the following statements:

- Classroom is often a place of natural code-switching.
- There is nothing wrong or special about code-switching.
- There are certain principles of code-switching in the classroom.

Macaro states that there is no evidence in studies that the exclusion of the mother tongue facilitates the target language learning (2001).

These researches have largely contributed to the study of code-switching in a foreign language classroom. However, there are not so many studies on the issue of Kazakh-English code-switching where these two languages are structurally different and belong to different language families. The functioning of English in Kazakhstan’s educational domain is characterised by its own peculiarities. One of its features is code switching. In Kazakhstan, similar studies were carried out in the area of Kazakh-Russian and Russian-Kazakh code switching. The number of studies on the issues of English-Kazakh and Kazakh-English code switching in the educational sphere is space, and therefore it is of special relevance and importance in Kazakhstan’s linguistic and educational space.

To demonstrate the impact of code-switching on foreign language learning and determine the attitudes towards this phenomenon we need look at the linguistic situation and the role of English in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The next part illustrates the role and place of English in the educational space of Kazakhstan.

3. Role of English in Kazakhstan’s education

Nowadays the English language is becoming the leading language of the modern world as a result of globalization and integration, dynamic migration processes and international contacts in all spheres of life. As well-known scholar David Crystal (2003) states, approximately one out of every four users of English is the native speaker of the language and the number of non-native speakers is growing steadily.

According to the Internet sources, speakers of English as a second language differentiates from 470 million people to one billion people which depends on the level of literacy and mastery of the language. Many researchers refer English as an international, world, universal language and use the term “English as a lingua franca” as a way of communication between non-native speakers of English. Due to these factors, world economy and culture are becoming interconnected and interdependent in political, social and technological aspects.

Kazakhstan’s linguistic landscape can be described as the unique lingual space where the representatives of more than 100 ethnic groups live in a multilingual society (Suleimenova, Shaimerdenova and Akanova, 2007). According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language is the state language of Kazakhstan. The Russian language has the status of the language of interethnic communication due to historical reasons of the Soviet Union period in Kazakhstan.

The globalization trends in the world, the expansion of international contacts, which have affected Kazakhstan’s political, economic and social spaces, have led to the dynamic development of the English language in the sociolinguistic space of Kazakhstan. Due to general tendencies that have happened in the world, significant changes have taken place in the educational space of Kazakhstan as well. Nowadays the proficiency in the English language is of high importance for the competitiveness of the young generation of Kazakhstan. This fact is reflected in policy documents where the main focus is given to the necessity for learning English. The project “Trinity of Languages” was introduced by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2007, where the English language has been designated as a condition for successful integration into the global economy. The Ministry of Culture and Information developed the State Program of Languages Development and Functioning in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 years where one of the key indicators is to increase the proportion of the English speaking population up to 10% by 2014, up to 1% by 2017, and up to 20% by 2020. It is expected that the proportion of the population who speaks three languages, i.e. Kazakh, Russian, and English, up to 10% by 2014, up to 12% by 2017, and up to 15% by 2020.

In 2004, an experiment on early study of English (starting from Grade 2) in 32 schools of the country was launched by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Their number has currently reached 165. Statistical data show that in 2007 the total number of English-medium schools was 2, in 2008 it was doubled, in

2009 its number reached 6 and in 2010 the quantity of schools was 7. The number of learners in English-medium schools was 418 in 2007, 883 in 2008, 1060 in 2009, and 1207 in 2010. The educational system in Kazakhstan has undergone significant changes in recent years. In the annual address to the people of Kazakhstan "Social-economic modernization – the main vector of the development of Kazakhstan" (dated January 27, 2012) President Nursultan Nazarbayev highlighted the development of multilingualism among future specialists which is the basis for mobility and competitiveness of the nation. Special departments for training multilingual specialists have been opened in 32 higher educational institutions since September 1, 2012 where 5,5 thousand people are studying now.

Nowadays the English language has become one of the leading languages in the educational space of Kazakhstan and this trend will undoubtedly continue in the future.

4. Methodology

The research was carried out at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. The university is situated in the capital of the country – Astana. L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University is one of the main universities of Kazakhstan. The study was carried out as follows: First, observations were made in order to define the frequency of using code-switching in the classroom and outside the classroom in the university as well as their interaction was analyzed; and secondly, student interviews were conducted with the purpose of determining their attitudes towards code-switching.

4.1.1 Observations

Eight groups of foreign language learners (2 groups – 1st year of study, 2 groups – 2nd year of study, 2 groups – 3rd year of study, 2-groups – 4th year of study) were observed during one week. The recordings of the interaction were made by means of dictaphones as well as taking notes. Audio-recordings of 3 lessons were used to determine functions of code switching. The total recording time was 150 minutes. 21 students and 2 teachers participated in it. The activities take place among 3-year students.

4.1.2 Interviews

We have also conducted interviews with students of the university. 21 students participated in the interviews. The interviews were carried out to determine the attitudes towards code-switching. It was used to complement the information obtained during the observation. The questions include the participants' view on code-switching and their language use.

4.2 Participants

467 students from 1 to 4 courses, learning English as a foreign language participated in the questionnaire.

65% of the students were female, 35% were male. Coverage of respondents-students on the year of study was evenly distributed: 27% of students were freshmen, 22% were sophomores, 25% were junior students and 26% were senior students. The native language for 61.5% of students was Kazakh, 34.2% of them indicated Russian, and 4.3% indicated Uzbek as their mother tongue. Distribution of respondents-students according to their proficiency in English is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. English language proficiency level

Level	Percent (%)
Beginner	9
Pre-Intermediate	12
Intermediate	47
Upper-Intermediate	31
Advanced	1

As can be observed from Table 1, most of the students assessed themselves as Intermediate users (47%) and Upper-Intermediate users (31%). 12% of students referred to themselves as Beginner level of English. 12% of respondents assessed themselves as Pre-Intermediate English language users, and only 1% of respondents believe that they spoke fluent English.

5. Results

5.1 Observations

During the observation we have tried to determine the frequency of Kazakh-English code-switching. The main groups of situations with bilingual utterances of students include classroom activities and interactions outside the classroom in the university. The frequency of code-switching among students is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency of Kazakh-English code-switching

Situation	Frequency of code-switching	Percentage
Outside the classroom in the university	423	83 %
In the classroom	86	17 %
Total:	509	100 %

As can be seen from Table 2, students switch to English before, after or between the lessons when one

of the lessons is not deactivated fully, and another begins to be activated. 83% of the participants switched outside the classroom, whereas only 17% of students switched in the classroom during the activities.

We have also analysed the interaction between learners and teachers to reveal how English is used in the tertiary classroom. The analysis of the collected data demonstrates that code switching is one of the important tools in teacher-learner interaction. We have tried to determine some functions of code switching among teachers and learners. Due to space limitations, only some of the functions will be described and illustrated in this article.

Example 1 illustrates a moment when the teacher code switches to provide the meaning of L2 vocabulary.

Example 1.

1 (T): So, guys, who is the head of the executive branch of the government?

2 (S1): Executive? Eeehm. Executive деген не еді?

Is what Aux

Executive? What does "executive" mean?

3 (T): Executive means someone who has an administrative authority

4 (Pause)

5 (T): Executive дегеніміз атқару дегенді білдіреді. Атқару органы

is executive Aux. mean. Executive body

Executive means executive. Executive body

6 (S1): Aaaaah, yeah

Here, the students are engaged in the activities with a text. During the activity, the teacher asks a question concerning the topic. No one answers the question. One of the students asks the meaning of the word "executive" switching to Kazakh. The teacher answers the question in English. Then a pause comes which illustrates that most students have difficulties in understanding the word and its definition. The teacher then switches to Kazakh.

Example 2 presents a moment when the teacher code switches to L1 in order to facilitate understanding of the grammatical structure.

Example 2.

7 (S1): I'll meet Sarah at 5 o'clock on Friday.

8 (T): Really? This is a planned event. What should we use in this case?

9 (S1): Eehm, Yes, it is. The action is aaah in the future.

10 (T): Yes, you are right, but you also used the exact time. Eeehm, it means that you have planned it.

11 (S1): Yes, I have planned it.

12 (Pause) (5.6)

13 (T): What aspect do we use for planned actions in the future?

14 (Pause) (3.2)

15 (T): Біз жоспарланған іс-әрекетке қандай шақты қолданушы едік?

We planned action what tense use Aux?

What tense do we use for the planned action?

16 (S1): Aaah, Continuous-ті қолданамыз. (0.7) I'll be meeting Sarah at 5 o'clock on Friday.

Continuous- Aux use (1st person, plural)

Aaah, we use Continuous. I'll be meeting Sarah at 5 o'clock on Friday.

In the Example 2, the student gives a statement "I'll meet Sarah at 5 o'clock on Friday" in the Future Simple. The teacher explained the use of the Future Continuous in the previous lesson. The teacher tries to correct the student by giving some features of the Future Continuous aspect. After a pause, the teacher asks the question again. Then a pause comes again. After the pause, the teacher asks the same question switching to Kazakh. Then the student gives the answer and corrects his statement.

Example 3 shows the use of code switching in order to provide equivalent meaning of the term "asylum".

Example 3.

17 (T): Political asylum is a notion, eeehm which refers to the protection of a person (0.8) persecuted by his or her own country (0.6) by a foreign country. France was the first country that recognised the constitutional right to asylum.

18 (S1): Asylum? Вроде мағынасы түсінікті, бірақ аудармасы есіме түспей отыр.

A sort of (Russian) meaning Aux clear, but translation Aux mind come not

The meaning is a kind of clear, but I don't remember its translation.

19 (T1): Политическое убежище

Political asylum (Russian)

20 (S2): Aaaaah, ok.

As can be seen in the example, code switching to Kazakh occurs when there are some difficulties in understanding some terms and concepts. The student switches to Kazakh saying that the meaning of the word is clear but he cannot find the appropriate translation in his native language. The teacher gives the translation of the term in Russian. The student shows her understanding in Line 20. It should be noted here that the use of Russian among Kazakh-speaking bilinguals is common due to historical reasons (Russification policy) during the Soviet Union period.

Example 4 illustrates the use of code switching in opening the class.

Example 4.

21 (T): Let's start the lesson, guys. I'd like you to remember the political system in general. Any

news on the policy of our country? (The students talk with each other in Kazakh and Russian)

Guys, let's start the lesson. Any interesting news? Саясатқа байланысты қандай жаңалықтар естідіңдер?

Policy Aux about what news hear (Past, 2-person, Plural)

What news have you heard concerning the policy?

22 (S1) Prime-minister ауысыпты.
change (Past)

The prime-minister has changed.

23 (T): Ия. Who is the new prime-minister?

24 (S1): Our new prime-minister is Serik Akhmetov.

The example shows that the teacher switches to Kazakh in order to start the class. After starting, she asks the question about the political news. However, the students do not pay attention to her and keep on talking in Kazakh and Russian. Then the teacher switches to Kazakh asking the same question and gets the students' attention. The student answers it by switching from English to Kazakh. The teacher asks another question switching from Kazakh to English thus following the institutional requirements to use English during the lesson. The student answers the question in English. Here it is seen that the teacher switches to the target language to maintain the planned structure of the class.

Example 5 illustrates the use of learners' code switching in peer interaction to help each other. The work is done in groups.

Example 5.

25 (S1): So, what is the difference between an asylum and a refuge? Could you give their definitions?

26 (S2): Asylum is different from refuge. The asylee acquires his or her status after arriving (1.1) in a foreign country and (0.8) a refugee acquires his status before it.

Asylee – барғаннан кейін, ал refugee - бармай тұрып.

Asylee - go Aux after, but refugee – go not before.

Asylee – after coming, but refugee – before going.

27 (S1): Аааа, ок. Asylee басқа елге бармай тұрып, ал refugee барғаннан кейін статустарын алады ғой?

another country Aux go not Aux, but go Aux after statuses acquire Aux?

Аааа, ок. Asylee acquires his status before going to another country, but refugee acquires it before going there, doesn't it?

28 (S2): Yes, that's right.

As can be seen from Example 5, code switching is used among students to help each other. Here it is also noticeable that S1 uses code switching to check her understanding.

5.2 Interviews

Interviews with students enrolled in the Business English course of the university have been carried out to determine their attitudes towards code-switching. The informants answered the questions of interview in three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English. The questions are as follows:

What do you think about Kazakh-English code switching?

What's your attitude towards using the native language in the English language classroom?

Many respondents think that code-switching is an effective way of learning a foreign language. The answers of the following participants prove the statement.

«Менің ойымша, код ауысымы тілді үйренуде өте тиімді құрал. Ағылшын тілін үйренуде кейбір түсініксіз мәселелердің мағынасын қазақ тілінде түсіндіру арқылы жеткізуге болады». (Студент, 19 лет, муж.)

«In my opinion, code-switching is a very effective tool. When you learn difficult issues in English their meaning can be given by means of Kazakh». (Student, 19 years old, male)

As can be seen from the answer above, code-switching is considered as a tool that assists in a foreign language learning. However, it should be noted that for some respondents, code-switching is associated with a deficiency in second language acquisition. They believe that code-switching negatively affects learning the languages.

«As a learner of English I prefer to speak only English in English lessons. Maybe, code-switching helps us in some way but using only English contributes to effective learning of the language». (Student, 22 years old, female)

«Я думаю, что переключение кодов мешает полноценному усвоению иностранного языка. Студент привыкает переключаться с одного языка на другой, следовательно, не говорит полноценно ни на одном языке». (Студент, 2-курс, 18 лет, жен.)

«I think that code switching prevents second language acquisition. A student gets used to switch from one language to another, consequently, he does not speak any of these languages coherently». (Student, 2-course, 18 years old, female)

The results of interview illustrate that there is no unanimous opinion on code-switching. For most of participants, it is important to keep the target language exclusively. Moreover, many of the believe

that there is no beneficial aspects of code-switching. Only few of the participants think that code-switching promotes foreign language learning.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was an attempt to determine attitudes towards Kazakh-English code switching among students and define some functions of code-switching. In order to achieve the aim of the research the following methods were used:

- 1) observation of the activities in the classroom and outside the classroom;
- 2) interviews with students.

During the observations the frequency of code-switching among students were identified. Code-switching mostly occurred outside the classroom. This can be explained by the fact that during the breaks between classes the second language is not deactivated fully, therefore, it happens frequently. Besides, the use of the native language in the foreign language classroom is not desired and, in some cases, even not allowed.

The analysis of interaction among students show that code switching contributes to understanding of words, expressions, and concepts, explaining grammatical rules and structures, regulating classroom interactions, asking equivalent meanings in L1, clarifying understanding of vocabulary and grammatical rules thus implementing content transmission and classroom management. Despite the fact that code switching is regarded as a negative phenomenon in the foreign language learning process, the results of informal talk with teachers and students show their positive attitude towards it. They believe that code switching contributes to successful fulfilment of tasks, helps them to feel satisfied with language learning. They also feel more comfortable and less tense during the lessons. In general, code switching plays an important role in foreign language learning.

The results of the interview illustrate controversial opinions on code-switching. Although many of the respondents support code-switching, there is still some doubts in using the native language in English language classrooms. For many students, code-switching is an undesirable action in foreign language classes. They do not accept using code-switching in a classroom. However, during the observation of lessons code-switching occurred in the speech of teachers as well as students. This confirms the fact that some of informants are unaware of their usage during the lessons. It was difficult for participants to find a compromise between, on the one hand, exclusive use of the target language, and, on the other hand, no use of it.

In general, the results of the research illustrate that code-switching occurs in the speech of students. Most of them regard code-switching positively but there is still negative attitude towards it among them. For majority of students it is rather a helpful tool in acquiring the foreign language.

It should be noted that the bulk of studies on code-switching has been carried out in a natural bilingual settings. Therefore, the area of code-switching in the classroom deserves to be studied further. The studies on code-switching in the classroom as a way of assisting students in the learning process, the research on how students use code-switching in a foreign language classroom with a larger number of students and a longer time will be of an interest for the researchers in the future.

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