

VIETNAMESE-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING IN CONVERSATIONS AMONG VIETNAMESE EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study investigates code-switching in conversations among Vietnamese EFL teachers in English 1, Faculty of English Teacher Education, University of Languages and International Studies. More specifically, it seeks to investigate the types of and reasons for code-switching found in conversations among the participants, using the typology suggested by Poplack (1980), and sets of reasons proposed by Malik (1994) and Appel and Muysken (2006). The data were collected by means of recording natural speech of the informants in their conversations with each other. Transcripts of the recorded conversations serve to provide instances of code-switching for categorization, which were then sent to participants. The teacher's self-report forms aim to elicit the informants' actual reasons for their code-switching in the recordings. Results show that instances of intra-sentential code-switching were dominant, accounting for nearly all of the detected instances. Meanwhile, the minority of the instances was extra-sentential code-switching, and no instances of inter-sentential code-switching were found. In terms of the motivation for code-switching, the most common reason is habitual expression, followed by the need to quote and to convey semantic significance. One reason not included in the provided list of reasons was given by an informant, which was "to save time". The findings bear significant resemblance to previous studies and reveal new aspects in the possible reasons for this phenomenon.

Key words: conversational code-switching, typology of code-switching, reasons for code-switching

1. Introduction

Code-switching is a widespread phenomenon in "bilingual communities where speakers use their native tongue (L1) and their second language (L2) in different domains" (Kim, 2006). Among these communities, those of teachers teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) are believed to be a group where code-switching is used frequently, especially when these teachers communicate with people working in the same field. Indeed, the alternate use of Vietnamese and English at work, to a certain extent, is an integral part of their communication with each other. This is understandable, considering the fact that EFL teachers, while living in their first language environment, are constantly exposed to English in their work and studies. In the researcher's initial observation, code-switching is

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most pronounced in conversations between EFL teachers teaching English skills in tertiary level. Since the researcher is a member of this bilingual community in a university in Vietnam, she has been captivated by code-switching used among her colleagues, and therefore decided to investigate this phenomenon.

Quite a number of research studies have been written on this code-switching phenomenon in recent years. In addition to early works that concentrate on linguistic aspects of code-switching (Gumperz, 1976; Poplack, 1980), much of recent research, which was conducted in countries other than Vietnam, has been concerned with the use of code-switching in the foreign and second language classroom (Moore, 2002; Celik, 2003; Dailey-O’Cain & Liebscher, 2005), in Internet chatting (Cardenas-Claros & Isharyanti, 2009), in advertising (Chen, 2006, Leung, 2010) and in conversations between fellow expatriates (Ho-Dac, 2003; Jalil, 2009). However, so far very little research has dealt with code-switching in Vietnam as well as of Vietnamese – English bilinguals, a linguistic phenomenon which has become common in their daily speech. Obviously, research on code-switching is still in its infancy in Vietnam and therefore leaves many gaps for those who are interested in this topic to investigate. This study aims at filling this gap. It illustrates the patterns and finds out the reasons for code-switching among Vietnamese EFL teachers at English Division 1, Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE), Hanoi University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University (VNU).

In short, the study aims to answer the two following research questions:

1. What are the types of code-switching found in conversations between Vietnamese EFL teachers at English Division 1, Faculty of English Language Teacher Education, ULIS, VNU?
2. What are the reasons for the use of code-switching in conversations between Vietnamese EFL teachers at English Division 1, Faculty of English Language Teacher Education, ULIS, VNU?

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Definition of key terms

2.1.1. Code

The term “code” is used by sociolinguists as a less popular name for “variety of language”, or just “variety” for short, which can be defined as “a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution” (Hudson, 1996, p. 22). In the context of this study, the term “code” or “variety” will be taken as the first language used by speakers of a country.

2.1.2. Code-switching

Though several definitions of code-switching have been proposed, the most general and accepted one seems to be that by Poplack (1980), in which code-switching is defined as “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent”, often with no change of interlocutor or topic. The type of switching mentioned in this definition may be thought of as forming a continuum ranging from whole sentences to single words.

2.2. Typologies of code-switching

2.2.1. Poplack’s typology of code-switching

According to Poplack’s (1980, as cited in Hamers and Blanc, 2000, p. 259), there are three types of code-switching:

- (1) extra-sentential code-switching, or the insertion of a tag, e.g. “you know”, “I mean” from one language into an utterance which is entirely in another language;
- (2) inter-sentential code-switching, or switch at clause/sentence boundary, one clause being in one language, the other clause in the other;
- (3) intra-sentential code-switching, where switches of different types occur within the clause boundary, including within the word boundary.

2.2.2. Muysken’s typology

Muysken suggested three types of code-switching. The first type, insertion, is characterized by the insertion of a constituent from language B into a construction in language A, where A is the matrix language (Muysken, 2000, pp. 60-62). The second type (Muysken, 2000, p. 96) is termed “alternation”, and occurs where the two languages “remain relatively separate”, for example, when the switch is at the periphery of the clause (Muysken, 2000, p. 121). The final type of code-switching suggested by Muysken (2000, p. 122) is called “congruent lexicalization”, which occurs where the two languages share the grammatical structure of the sentence, either partially or fully.

2.2.3. Bloom and Gumperz’s typology of code-switching

Bloom and Gumperz (1972) distinguished two types of code-switching, namely situational code-switching and metaphorical code-switching, on the basis of sociolinguistic factors. In Bloom and Gumperz’s (1972, pp. 424-425) view, situational switching refers to cases where speakers switch languages due to a change in the situation, such as a change in participant, topic or setting. On the other hand, metaphorical switching takes place in cases where it is the choice of language that determines the situation.

The typology suggested by Poplack (1980) is adopted as the theoretical framework of this study.

2.3. Communicative functions of and reasons for code-switching

Many reasons for and functions of code-switching have been discovered, but ten reasons described by Malik (1994) appear to be most succinct yet comprehensive. They are: lack of facility, lack of register, mood of the speaker, to amplify and emphasize a point, habitual experience, semantic significance, to show identity with a group, to address a different audience, pragmatic reasons, and to attract attention. These ten reasons, along with one proposed by Appel and Muysken (2006), “to quote”, will be employed as the theoretical framework of the study.

2.4. Previous studies on Vietnamese – English code-switching and in Vietnamese context

One notable work attempting to deal with this phenomenon exhaustively is that by Ho-Dac Tuc (2003) on patterns of code-switching in Vietnamese – English bilingualism. By studying recordings of natural speeches of sixty Vietnamese immigrants residing in Melbourne, Australia from both structural and contextual perspectives, Ho-Dac found that single words are switched more often than entire clauses. Specifically, the results showed that different syntactic word classes switch at different rates, with nouns being the most common and articles being the least.

Two other studies on code-switching conducted in Vietnam that the researcher could find include one by Nguyen (2007) on the use of code-switching as a translation technique, and the other by Giap (2009) on language mixing phenomena in verbal communicative process between Vietnamese and English. While the former focuses on code-switching used in the context of translation, the latter only views code-switching as one among language mixing phenomena in verbal communication, which bears little relevance to the topic in question.

3. Methodology

3.1. Description of the context and participants

3.1.1. The context

Of the ten faculties in the University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE) is the biggest in size, with roughly 150 teachers and 2,000 students every academic year.

FELTE is divided into six Divisions, namely English 1, English 2, English 3, Translation and Interpretation, English for Specific Purposes, and English Language Teaching. The case under investigation in this study is English 1, which is responsible for teaching English skills for first year students majoring in English Language Teaching, Translation and Interpretation, and Business.

3.1.2. The participants

For primary data collection, 20 Vietnamese teachers at English 1, 18 females and two males, were chosen to be the participants of the study. Their age varied from 22 to 35 at the time of the study, with the youngest having one-year teaching experience and the others more than one year. All of them have been using English on a regular basis for at least ten years and majored either in TESOL or translation when they were undergraduates. They graduated from their universities with Distinction or Honour degrees and are currently teaching four English skills to first-year students of FELTE.

The EFL teachers in English 1, FELTE were chosen as participants for this case study for two reasons. First, the researcher has worked in the Division for almost three years and found access to the group fairly easy due to her participation in both professional and entertainment activities organized by the Division, through which she has had informal contact with all the teachers of English 1. Second, the researcher's initial observation revealed that the teachers in English 1 frequently conversed with each other during lesson breaks in the teacher's room to chitchat and share teaching experience. Such intra-group conversations like these produced a range of code-switching instances that are worth examining.

3.2. Data collection method

3.2.1. Data collection instruments

3.2.1.1. Recording of natural speech

During the course of collection, the researcher was able to collect several recordings of 20 informants in order to obtain samples of speech in a wide range of situations. These recordings consisted mainly of informal conversations between the informants in the teacher's room during lesson break times, in which there were two or more speakers. In no case were these conversations arranged for the recordings.

Ten conversations with the voices of all the participants were recorded, lasting three hours and twenty two minutes in total. The shortest recording was about three minutes and the longest one roughly one hour. Instances of code-switching were detected in all these conversations.

3.2.1.2. Teachers' self-reports

In order to find out the reasons for the informants' code-switching during the recorded conversations, a teacher's self-report form was developed and sent to the informants to ask for their retrospective account. In this case study, the informants were asked to comment on what had triggered them to code-switching while conversing, using the transcripts of their recorded conversations. Possible reasons for code-switching were provided for the respondents' convenience and for the convenience of data analysis.

Apart from the title, introduction and definition of key term, the main part of the teacher's self-report form consists of two sections A and B. Section A provides the transcript of the recorded conversation in which the recipient of the form participated as an interlocutor. In this transcript, instances of code-switching that the recipient made during the conversation are italicized, underlined and numbered in order of appearance from one (01). Section B presents a table divided into two columns, with one including eleven reasons for code-switching proposed by Malik (1994) and Appel and Muysken (2006) and the other left blank for the respondents' answers. In this section, informants are asked to insert in the right column a number representing the token of code-switching in the transcript in part A which illustrates the relevant reason for their code-switching. If there is any other reason for the informants code-switching which is not mentioned in this table, they could specify in another table that follows, which has the same format and headings as the preceding one but is left blank. The form ends with a final thank-you.

3.3. Data collection procedure

The process of data collection consisted of four main steps.

Step 1: Designing the teacher's self-report form

The teacher's self-report form was designed with a view to collecting the participants' retrospective accounts of the reasons for their code-switching during the conversations under investigation. The reasons provided beforehand in the form consist of ten reasons suggested by Malik (1994) and one by Appel and Muysken (2006).

Step 2: Recording natural speech

First, an email was sent to all informants asking for their permission for the recording of their conversations with each other. When their approval had been granted, the researcher started to discreetly record the natural conversations between the informants.

Step 3: Transcribing the recordings

Transcription of the data was carried out as soon as one conversation had been recorded. In each transcript, instances of code-switching occurring during the conversation were italicized, underlined and numbered in order of appearance from one (01). The transcripts were then copied to section A in self-report forms.

Step 4: Sending the audio files and teacher's self-report forms to participants

As soon as the transcript of one recording was finished, a teacher's self-report form with the transcript and the corresponding audio file was sent via email to an informant speaking in the conversation to obtain data on reasons for his or her code-switching detected in the conversation. Informants were expected to listen to the audio file and read the transcript simultaneously before clarifying why they had code-switched. When

informants had finished the forms, they were asked to send them back to the researcher’s email address for data analysis.

3.4. Coding and data analysis procedure

Three hours and twenty two minutes of recorded speech in which all the informants participated provided 213 instances of code-switching, which served as qualitative data for the research. In order to answer the first research question, these code-switching instances were categorized into three types suggested by Poplack (1980), namely extra-sentential switching (or tag switching), intra-sentential switching and inter-sentential switching. Also, each instance of a switch was coded as to its syntactic function in the utterance. Breakdown of switching according to Poplack’s typology and by word classes were then tabulated.

Responses obtained from the participants’ self-reports were processed in the same way in order to find the answer to the second research question. Instances of code-switching were calculated according to the reasons for which they were uttered and subsequently presented in tables in descending percentage order.

The names of twenty participants were also coded into letters from A to T to guarantee the confidentiality of their identities and personal information.

Examples from the transcripts were used for the discussion of results, each of which was followed by an English translation while switched words and phrases were indicated with underlining.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Types of code-switching found in conversations between Vietnamese EFL teachers at English Division 1, FELTE, ULIS, VNU

Based on the definition of code-switching proposed for this study, there are 213 code-switches in the corpus. This number was obtained after borrowings such as “CD” or “mail (“meo”)” were excluded.

The detected code-switches were divided into three types according to Poplack’s (1980) typology, namely extra-sentential code-switching (or tag switching), inter-sentential code-switching, and intra-sentential code-switching which can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 1. Breakdown of detected code-switching instances according to Poplack’s (1980) typology

Type	Number of instances	Percentage
Extra-sentential code-switching	2	0.93%
Inter-sentential	0	0%
Intra-sentential	211	99.07%
Total	213	100%

Table 1 shows that intra-sentential code-switching accounts for nearly all cases of code-switching, which serves to reinforce the common viewpoint that only very proficient bilinguals will switch within sentences (Holmes, 2008, p. 46). Also, linguists agree that people who are less bilingual will tend to switch at sentence boundaries (inter-sentential code-switching) (Holmes, 2008, p. 46), which may account for the absolute lack of this type of code-switching in the corpus. Only two extra-sentential instances of code-switching in the conversations were recorded, both of which are injections, namely “No” and “No thanks”.

4.2. Reasons for the use of code-switching in conversations between Vietnamese EFL teachers at English Division 1, FELTE, ULIS, VNU

The breakdown of all detected instances of code-switching according to reason can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Breakdown of detected code-switching instances according to reason

Reason	Number of tokens	Percentage
1. Lack of facility	18	8.45%
2. Lack of register	16	7.51%
3. Mood of the speaker	10	4.69%
4. To amplify and emphasize a point	23	10.79%
5. Habitual experience	131	61.50%
6. Semantic significance	34	15.96%
7. To show identity with a group	7	3.28%
8. To address a different audience	0	0%
9. Pragmatic reasons	17	8.92%
10. To attract attention	2	0.93%
11. To quote	33	15.49%

Table 2 shows that habitual expression and the quotation function of code-switching were given by informants as the main factors for their code-switching. Another contributing factor is the purpose to amplify and emphasize a point. As the informants were proficient in both languages, few cases of code-switching resulting from lack of facility or registers were detected. An informant added a reason not included in the provided list of reasons, which was “to save time”. She explained that Vietnamese equivalents would take longer to utter, and gave four examples to support her response.

5. Conclusion

This study has attempted to present the phenomenon of code-switching conversations among Vietnamese EFL teachers in English 1, FELTE, ULIS, VNU. Specifically, the study first aims at finding out the types of code-switching found in conversations between Vietnamese EFL teachers, using the typology suggested by Poplack (1980). Another aim of the study is to investigate the reasons of code-switching among the sample. For these purposes, twenty Vietnamese EFL teachers at English 1, FELTE, ULIS were chosen as participants. The results show that nearly all detected instances of code-switching are intra-sentential code-switching and two are extra-sentential code-switching. No instances of inter-sentential code-switching were found in the recorded conversations. Regarding the reasons for the participants' code-switching, the most common one is habitual expression, followed by the need to convey semantic significance and to quote book titles or from books. None of the respondents code-switched to address a different audience.

6. Implications and suggestions for further studies

The findings reveal the ease and frequency with which Vietnamese EFL teachers code-switched in their daily conversations with each other. This habitual practice of code-switching in their community allowed for a more relaxing atmosphere among the participants and greatly assisted them in conveying the exact meaning of their utterances.

The general approach in this case study may be useful in doing further research in areas that is not included in the present work. One such area is the description of how code-switching can be exploited in Vietnamese EFL classrooms, both by teachers and learners, to facilitate the teaching and learning process, such as in the acquisition of vocabulary.

This study has focused on code-switching in conversations between Vietnamese EFL teachers working at tertiary level. In the researcher's initial observation, code-switching occur most frequently among this population. Therefore, it would be desirable for other researchers to conduct studies on other populations, such as teachers working at primary or secondary level. Since the degree of their exposure to the English language and their English proficiency vary, more new findings are expected to emerge from studying these populations.

The final suggestion is for research on this phenomenon in formal settings or in written discourses to be conducted. Different levels of formality may imply different choices of language and different frequencies of code-switching. Also, participants' attitudes towards their colleagues' and their own use of code-switching could be a promising topic to research on.

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HIỆN TƯỢNG CHUYỂN MÃ TIẾNG VIỆT-TIẾNG ANH TRONG HỘI THOẠI GIỮA CÁC GIÁO VIÊN DẠY TIẾNG ANH NHƯ MỘT NGOẠI NGỮ

Tóm tắt. Nghiên cứu sử dụng các khung lý thuyết có sẵn để tìm ra các kiểu chuyển mã và những lí do chuyển mã trong các hội thoại giữa những giáo viên dạy tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ. Dữ liệu được thu thập thông qua việc thu âm những cuộc hội thoại tự nhiên giữa những người tham gia. Phần lời của các cuộc hội thoại cho ra các trường hợp chuyển mã để phân loại. Những người tham gia sử dụng một bản tự thuật được cung cấp sẵn để đưa ra lí do thực sự cho việc họ đã chuyển mã. Kết quả cho thấy kiểu chuyển mã trong phạm vi câu là phổ biến nhất, chuyển mã ngoài câu chiếm rất ít, và không có chuyển mã liên câu. Về mặt lí do chuyển mã, lí do phổ biến nhất là do thói quen, tiếp đó là để trích dẫn và để truyền tải ý nghĩa về mặt ngữ nghĩa.

Từ khóa: chuyển mã trong hội thoại, phân loại chuyển mã, lí do chuyển mã