Chapter 5

CODESWITCHING IN THE L2 CLASSROOM: A COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING STRATEGY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Codeswitching (switching between two or more languages) in naturalistic discourse occurs when a speaker and an interlocutor share more than one language or dialect. It occurs because the speaker finds it easier or more appropriate, in the linguistic and/or cultural context, to communicate by switching than by keeping the utterance totally in the same language. Codeswitching occurs frequently and is widespread throughout the world’s bilingual language communities. The fact that bilinguals can codeswitch is an asset and a valuable addition to their array of communication strategies.

In classroom discourse, by contrast, codeswitching is considered by many to be neither an asset nor a valuable addition. This may seem surprising given that so often, in modern approaches to language teaching and learning, teachers attempt to make the second language classroom a mirror of the outside world. Why then should there be this difference of attitude towards codeswitching?

My research on codeswitching has been carried out entirely in formal classroom settings among adolescent learners. Moreover, although I will review a variety of other classroom settings, my research has been in classrooms where the learners, by and large, share the same L1. Although in these classrooms the teacher may not necessarily share the same L1 as the

E. Llurda (Ed.), Non-Native Language Teachers. Perceptions, Challenges and Contributions to the Profession, 63—84.
learners (*i.e.* they will not be of the same nationality), he/she will be at least as competent in the learners’ L1 as they are in the language that they are learning (usually the teacher’s native language). This is therefore a different context from the one which the monolingual native speaker (usually English) teacher operates in and illustrated elsewhere in this volume (*e.g.* by Cook). For this reason I will use the terms *monolingual teacher* and *bilingual teacher* rather than *native speaker* and *non-native speaker*.

Codeswitching, by definition, is only available to the bilingual teacher. Whilst, as I shall argue, the ability of the bilingual teacher to codeswitch is to be viewed as an asset, it also brings with it a number of problems and issues.

My aim in this chapter, is to attempt to answer eight questions related to codeswitching in the second language (L2) classroom:

- Why is codeswitching in the L2 classroom such a contentious issue?
- Is codeswitching contentious as classroom behaviour just for the teacher or also for the learners?
- What do language teachers think of the practice of codeswitching?
- For what purposes (or communicative functions) do language teachers codeswitch and how much codeswitching goes on?
- What do learners think about teachers codeswitching during lessons?
- What are the effects of codeswitching or not codeswitching on classroom interaction?
- What are the effects of not codeswitching on the learner’s strategy development?
- Can codeswitching be a systematic, principled and planned part of the L2 curriculum?

2. **WHY IS CODESWITCHING IN THE L2 CLASSROOM SUCH A CONTENTIOUS ISSUE?**

In other publications (including my own) the phrase ‘recourse to L1’ is sometimes used in addition to or instead of ‘codeswitching’. This implies *a priori* that codeswitching in the classroom is undesirable or to be regretted. Why should this be, given that codeswitching occurs naturally among bilinguals? We will note that, in the introductory paragraph, I suggested that bilinguals codeswitch because they find it easier or more appropriate for the purposes of communication. I have also argued elsewhere (Macaro, 1997, 2001a) that communication strategies, whilst being of great indirect benefit to L2 users (in that they keep the interaction going, attract greater quality input, etc.), do not in themselves lead *directly* to greater language