Influence of Teachers' Home Language on Code-switching Use in the Classroom: A Case Study

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Abstract: This paper discusses whether home language has any effect on the teachers' views on code-switching use in the classroom. The paper is based on a quantitative study conducted at four senior secondary schools in the north-eastern Botswana whose teachers and learners had diverse home languages. Their views were solicited about the use of CS in the classroom and its effect on teaching and learning; and the results were analysed quantitatively. The results from the study showed that the teachers, irrespective of home language, code-switched in the classroom yet the country's Language in Education Policy (LiEP) states that English is the sole official Language of Instruction (LoI) from the second year of primary school and throughout the entire education system. However, teachers whose home language is Setswana code-switch more than others. The paper calls for the appreciation of the existence of code-switching in the classrooms of the said senior secondary schools, and that ways of utilizing it should be explored bearing in mind that language diversity exists in the school environment.

Keywords: Code-switching, Home language, Language in Education Policy, Language of Instruction, Diversity, National language, Setswana, English, Local languages

INTRODUCTION

Code-switching is defined structurally as the alternate use of forms from at least two languages, or varieties of the same language, one matrix, the other embedded, in the same sentence or within the same conversational turn [1]. This definition is derived from the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) [2] and the Matrix Language Principle (MLP) (Kamwangamalu, 1999) [3] which state that in any CS situation, there is the matrix language (ML) and the embedded language (EL). The ML plays the dominant role and licenses how CS should occur, while the EL takes on the morpho-syntactic structure of the ML. In the case under discussion, Setswana is the ML, while English is the EL as exemplified below:

Example:
(English): The tennis association discussed that problem at their last meeting. [4, p.75]

Setswana-English CS
Tennis association e-discuss-itse problem ele ko meeting wa bone.

      discussed   that problem at   theirs.

In the example above, the word order 'meeting wa bone' follows Setswana word order, but not that of English. Translated literally, this phrase equates to 'meeting their', which is not grammatically acceptable in English, as a pronoun for possession should precede a noun. Therefore, in English, the word order would be 'their meeting'. Further, the verb 'discussed' in the code-switched sentence assumes the morphological structure of Setswana, not that of English. Thus Setswana as ML licences how CS should occur. The internal constituent structure of Setswana remains unchanged while that of English (EL) is adapted.

[5] also defines CS as "any alternate use of two codes or languages whether they are within one utterance or between one utterance and in an interactional discourse." Furthermore, [6] defines CS as a "communicative resource which enables teachers and students to accomplish a considerable range of social and educational objectives". Shujing's definition refers to the general function of CS in any discourse, while Adendorff's definition explains the purpose of CS use specifically in education. However, both definitions focus on the functionality of CS, and are therefore applicable to this paper.

To better understand the occurrence of code-switching (CS) in Botswana classrooms, an awareness of the language situation in Botswana is imperative.

The population of Botswana is 2,024,904 [7]. Linguistically, this population is divided into at least 25 languages, including English and Setswana. Setswana is spoken by at least 80% of the population either as mother tongue or as a second language [8; 9; 10; 11]. By implication, Setswana is the most widely spoken language in the country, hence its status as the national language. As the national language, Setswana has limited use in some of the secondary domain clusters such as education, government administration, the judiciary and the media. However, it still predominantly functions in primary domain clusters as a language spoken by family, friends, in religion, in the local markets, domestic service, and in traditional social institutions. It therefore, practically functions as the country's lingua franca. Other local languages are spoken by about 20% of the population as mother tongue, and function strictly within primary domain clusters. English is the official language in Botswana used in the secondary domain cluster functioning as the language of education, government administration, the judiciary, science and technology, trade and industry, and the media.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Markedness Model (MM) [2] formed the conceptual framework of this paper. The MM claims that "all linguistic choices, including CS, are indications of the social negotiation of rights and obligations that exist between participants in a conversational exchange [2, p.75]." This implies that a linguistic choice made for a conversational exchange is determined by the conversational topic, the status of the participants, or the setting of the conversational exchange [12]. All these situational features combined and the individual speaker's judgment of the situation will influence the type of linguistic choice considered appropriate for a given conversational situation or topic. Under the MM, CS performs three main functions [2]. First, CS as an unmarked choice in a conversation, that is, it is the expected choice. It is a communicative strategy that serves an inclusion function either as sequential unmarked choice or an unmarked choice. The former occurs if situational factors change during a conversational exchange; the latter occurs when situational factors hardly change [2, p. 114]. Second, CS as a marked choice, it is an unexpected choice used as a conversational strategy to exclude deliberately some members present. The speaker switches to a language that will only be understood by a certain section of the audience. This type of CS is hardly used deliberately in a classroom situation because the objective is not to exclude any learner from the learning process. Third, CS as an exploratory choice is used where there is some degree of uncertainty about the choice of a mutual language. The first speaker initiates a conversation in one language, and if the addressee does not fully understand, the initiator of the conversation switches to the most likely language that is intelligible to both parties. Because in a classroom situation, the objective is not to exclude any learner from the learning process but to include everyone, CS as an unmarked choice and CS as an exploratory choice are possible.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In Botswana, there is CS in the classroom between English, the language of instruction and Setswana, the national language. Sometimes CS is extended to other indigenous languages in various parts of the country where Setswana is not the home language of the majority of the learners [9]. This practice is against the government's decision in 1994 to formally declare English the medium of instruction (MoI) from Standard Two onwards. The declaration implied that all lessons should be taught in English only except during Setswana as a subject. The decision was informed by the finding that learners lacked proficiency in English because they were exposed to it at a relatively late stage – in Standard Four [13]. Because learners received their tuition in Setswana during the first three years, this delayed their acquisition of English as the language they need for their entire education, training and eventually work. The implication of the declaration was that the national language was officially excluded as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT). However, its use is still apparent in the form of CS in Botswana classrooms [14; 15; 10; 9; 16; 1]. It is against this background that the researcher investigated whether there was a link between the teachers' home language and their CS use in the classroom. No study known to the researcher has specifically addressed this within the context of Botswana.

In order to shape the study, the following three research questions were used:
1. To what extent is CS used in the classroom?
2. Does CS use indicate the teachers' and learners' lack of proficiency in English?
3. Should the LiEP be revised to ensure that the LoLT promotes maximum delivery and acquisition of knowledge and skills development?

METHODOLOGY
Study context

The study was conducted at four senior secondary schools situated in the north-eastern part of the country. Senior secondary schools teach Form Four and Form Five, and this leads to the writing of Botswana's General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) examinations. Successful candidates are eligible for tertiary education. Two of the schools are located in an urban area; and the other two are located in a rural area. However, school location was not a variable in this study. The teachers'socio-linguistic profiles showed that Setswana is the home language for

the majority of the teachers (56%); Ikalanga is the home language for 18% of the teachers; 12% spoke other languages as home language; 14% were bilinguals speaking Setswana and Ikalanga as home languages. The home language situation was consistent with government policy that the teachers' deployment to schools was not determined by the teachers' linguistic profile. Concerning the learners, Ikalanga was the home language for the majority of them (46%), followed by Setswana at 38%. This is significant given that CS in the classroom was mainly between English and Setswana. The remaining 16% included 8% who indicated Ikalanga and Setswana as home languages; and 8% who spoke other languages at home – including English (1%).

Process

The study was both theoretical and empirical in design, and the data were collected quantitatively through close-ended questionnaires administered to the teachers. One hundred and thirty teachers (46%) from a total of 280 teachers for the four schools were selected to participate in the study. Ninety-four teachers (72%) returned the completed questionnaires (41 male teachers or 44% and 53 female teachers or 56%). The selection of the participants was through stratified random sampling. All the teachers who participated in the study were citizens of Botswana who could speak both English and Setswana. The majority of the teachers (91%) were holders of a first degree in their disciplines and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education; 9% were Master's degree holders. This was consistent with the Government's policy that all teachers at senior-secondary schools should possess at least a first degree and a teaching qualification. Therefore, all the teachers were considered professionally well qualified. Teaching experience ranged from less than one year to 28 years, and the average experience was eight years; hence the majority was well- experienced. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the teachers selected taught English and Biology, which are compulsory subjects for all learners. The remaining 22% taught optional subjects - History (Humanities) and Home Economics (practical subject).

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analysed quantitatively using exploratory statistics and the results were tested for statistical significance, using a Chi-square test, to determine the degree of relationship between the teachers' views expressed about CS use in the classroom and home language. The relationship could be very strong (Highly significant), strong (Significant) or non-existent (Not significant), and the parameters used to describe the significance of the results were: 0.01(Highly significant); < 0.05(Significant); > / = 0.05 not significant. In addition, Fisher's Exact Test was used to test the results for statistical significance because the sample was small.

FINDINGS

The results from the study indicated that CS use was rampant in the classrooms. To better address the study question, the three research questions were used. The first research question was: To what extent is CS used in the classroom? This question addressed two issues; first, the teachers' views about the extent of CS use in the classroom; second, whether or not teachers allowed learners to code-switch in the classroom. The results showed that the teachers for whom Setswana was a HL code-switched the most (56%), but 53% of the teachers for whom Ikalanga was a HL and 56% of the teachers who spoke other languages as HL did not code-switch. HL had a significant influence on the teachers' use of CS in the classroom; and the results were statistically significant ($p = 0.02$). For the teachers who agreed that they code-switched to Setswana, CS was an exploratory choice [2]. They initiated the conversation in English, but when learners fail to participate in class, they switch to Setswana. It appears teachers who code-switched (Sets: 56%, Ika: 47%, Other: 44%), used CS as a communication strategy. The opinion was strongest among the teachers for whom Setswana was a HL. This is not unexpected given that for these teachers, Setswana is their first language and they can better express themselves in it. More so, these teachers constitute the largest number of teachers in the study (56%).

On whether or not learners were allowed to code-switch in class, 56% of the teachers for whom Setswana was a HL and 79% of the teachers for whom Ikalanga was a HL said they did not allow their learners to code-switch. It is ironical for the teachers for whom Setswana is a HL to code-switch but to deny their learners the same privilege. However, for the teachers for whom Ikalanga was a HL, their views about CS were consistent – they code-switched the least (47%) and allowed it the least (21%). However, 60% of the teachers who spoke other languages as HL said they allowed their learners to code-switch in class. It appears these teachers did not have a problem with learners' CS in class. According to them, CS enabled learners to express themselves in class; hence learning took place. The results were not statistically significant.

Having established that CS was generally used in the classrooms, the second research question sought to find out if CS was used in class because both teachers and learners lacked proficiency in English as the Language of Instruction (LoI). In response to the relationship between teachers' CS and lack of proficiency in English, the majority of the teachers whose HL is Setswana (68%) and teachers who spoke other languages (75%) did not think that teachers code-switched because they lacked proficiency in English. However, for the teachers for whom Ikalanga was a HL, their views were evenly split between agree (34%), disagree (38%) and not sure (38%). HL had a

significant influence on the teachers' views; and the results were statistically significant (P = 0.04). The results imply that the teachers whose HL was Setswana and those who spoke other languages code-switched to assist the learners to learn, but not because they lacked proficiency in English. To them, CS was the unmarked choice – it is the expected choice [2]. Their views are consistent with [17] that they code-switched to accommodate the learners' linguistic deficiency. The implication is that English had some instructional limitations; therefore teachers resorted to CS to facilitate communication [6].

However, concerning the teachers for whom Ikalanga was a HL, the split views indicate that these teachers were not totally convinced that the teachers' CS was guided more by the desire to assist the learners to learn than by their lack of proficiency in English. Although these teachers were fewer in number than the teachers whose HL was Setswana (18% vs. 56%), nonetheless, their views show that they were not keen on CS to Setswana, which is a second language for most of them. To them, CS to Setswana was an unmarked choice [2] used to exclude the learners whose HL was not Setswana.

Interestingly, concerning the second part of the question, that is, if learners code-switched because they lacked proficiency in English, the teachers, irrespective of HL (Setswana: 87%, Ikalanga: 83%, Others: 83%) agreed that the learners' CS was due to lack of English proficiency; and the results were not statistically significant. This therefore, justifies the teachers'CS; that they used it to reinforce learning or clarify the lesson content which may not have been fully understood when initially presented in English [18].

Thus far, the results have shown that CS use was a common occurrence in the classroom because learners lacked proficiency in English; and teachers used it to ensure teaching and learning take place. The results have some implications for the Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) of Botswana. The implication is that CS use in class is an obvious violation of Botswana's LiEP that states that classroom instruction at this level should be done in English only [13]. This brings us to the third and final research question: Should the LiEP be revised to ensure that the LoLT promotes maximum delivery and acquisition of knowledge and skills development? The LiEP's revision could mean one of the following: First, should English cease to be the LoLT and instead taught as a second or foreign language only? Second, should the LiEP be revised to include Setswana as LoLT? Third, should other local languages, such as Ikalanga, also be used in education as languages of instruction? In response to the first issue, the majority of the teachers (Setswana: 85%, Ikalanga: 86%, Other: 82%) irrespective of HL, did not support the view that

English should cease to be the LoLT and instead be taught as a second or foreign language only. Because HL did not significantly influence the views of the teachers, the results were not statistically significant.

Concerning the use of Setswana as LoLT, the majority of the teachers whose HL is Setswana (57%) and Other (58%) supported this view; but the teachers whose HL is Ikalanga (60%) did not. The results indicated that HL influenced the teachers' views and the results were statistically highly significant (p =0.002). The views of the first two groups of teachers were consistent with [19] that it is easier to learn in one's Mother Tongue (MT) than in a foreign language. However, these teachers were oblivious of the fact that in a multilingual classroom such as in the present study, this policy would favour learners for whom Setswana is a HL, but it will be discriminatory to those for whom Setswana is not a HL, consistent with [20]'s view that CS may be problematic if learners have no common language. By implication, the views of these teachers are consistent with their earlier views that CS to Setswana in class was acceptable. They seemed unaware that in a classroom where the learners'HL was not homogeneous, CS would be a marked choice [2], albeit, unintentionally. It would exclude those learners whose HL is not Setswana. The objection to this view by the teachers for whom Ikalanga was a HL was reasonable because it would exclude the learners who shared the same HL as them. A LiEP should be inclusive of all ethnic groups; otherwise it unwittingly gives unfair advantage to the learners whose HL is used in the classroom. Furthermore, the teachers whose HL falls under 'Others' appear to have accepted Setswana as a national language, and also found it didactically useful even though their languages are not used in education.

On the use of other local languages in education, the majority of the teachers whose HL is Ikalanga (86%) and Other (65%) supported this view. However, 41% of the teachers whose HL is Setswana disagreed (41%), 25% was non-committal, and only 34% supported this view. Home Language had a significant influence on the teachers' views; and the results were statistically highly significant (p =0.008). It is worth noting that the teachers whose HL is Ikalanga overwhelmingly supported this view. These teachers were of the view that learners should learn in their respective HLs, consistent with [19]'s view. The most progressive of the three groups of teachers were the teachers whose HLs fell under others. They supported a LiEP that is inclusive. They supported the view that Setswana as well as other local languages should be given a space in education, while English is maintained as the main LoLT. The teachers for whom Setswana was a HL were the least progressive; they supported the hegemony of Setswana over other local languages in education. Concerning the teachers for whom Ikalanga

was a HL, their view implied that if other local languages were not used in education, then Setswana should also not be used. However, to some extent, they were also progressive because they advocated for a LiEP that will recognize the existence of other local languages. The divergent views expressed by teachers show that Botswana's LiEP in its present form, is undemocratic, unjust and unfair because it continually marginalizes other local languages.

LIMITATIONS

The study has given insight of what happens in the classrooms of the senior secondary schools in the study regarding the use of English as the language of instruction, Setswana as the national language, and the teachers' local languages. However, the major limitation was the subjective responses inherent in any study that is based on self- reports by informants. The other limitation is that the results of the study are limited to the senior secondary schools that participated in the study; therefore, the results cannot be generalized unless a similar study is conducted in other senior secondary schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study have shown that the teachers, irrespective of HL, generally had a positive attitude towards CS use in the classroom and therefore, code-switched. In their view, they used it to address the problem of lack of full competence in English among the majority of their learners, which negatively affected teaching and learning. The teachers' views also suggested that regardless of their HL, they believed that they had acquired proficiency in English (despite some reservations implied by some teachers for whom Ikalanga was a HL (38%). Despite the teachers' general support of CS use, the teachers for whom Setswana is a HL were the most CS users and allowed it the most. These teachers code-switched to manipulate the situation in class as they wished [21]. One is inclined to think that for these teachers, CS to Setswana has less to do with assisting learners to learn and more to do with the fact that they were more comfortable communicating in their HL than in English. Why would learners have more difficulty communicating in English during the lessons of teachers for whom Setswana is a HL than during lessons of other teachers? One can ask. It is doubtful if this is the case. The teachers whose HL fell under 'other' were the next frequent users of CS in class and also allowed it the most (60%). For these teachers, their positive attitude towards CS to Setswana could be attributed to their very low number (12%) and the fact that Setswana was a national language. However, they still supported the continued use of English as LoLT, the use of Setswana alongside English as well as the use of other local languages in education.

These two categories of teachers – Teachers who spoke Setswana as HL and teachers whose HLs were 'other'- seem to overlook the fact that when learners are assessed, inevitably English is the language of assessment for all subjects 'taught' in English [15; 1]. Therefore CS is only limited to classroom instruction. Through CS they may aid learning, but from the language development point of view, CS does not assist the learners to express themselves proficiently when writing in English. This inevitably affects the learners' performance, which ultimately is used to judge their academic success or failure. The teachers should assess both the short-term and long-term results of CS use in teaching and learning. Even though [22] and [23] argue that learners should maintain contact with their home language in a learning environment so that they take their identities, values and interests with them, teachers should not lose sight of the fact that the learners need to master the target language. Furthermore, these teachers seemed to overlook the fact that Setswana was not the main HL for the majority of the learners (62%), and that only 38% spoke it as the main HL. [20] made a similar observation that CS in multilingual classrooms can create problems if there is no common language for all the learners.

On the contrary, the teachers for whom Ikalanga is a HL used CS the least and allowed it the least in class. It appears these teachers were mindful of the necessity for the learners to learn the target language. Whilst they supported the continued use of English as LoLT, they advocated for the exclusion of Setswana in education and the inclusion of other local languages (including theirs). Their views were somehow consistent with Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual education (MBBE) which calls for the use of MT in the formative years of education and the gradual introduction of the LoLT.

The results also showed that the teachers whose HL is Setswana and those whose HLs were 'Other' consistently shared similar views on issues relating to language use in the classroom. In addition, the latter were positive about the use of Setswana in class. This suggests that they have accepted it as a national language, perhaps because of their low number (12%). The teachers whose HL is Ikalanga were generally negative about the use of Setswana as LoLT; while the teachers whose HL is Setswana were consistently negative towards the use of other local languages, such as Ikalanga in education. Therefore, concerning these two categories of teachers - those who speak Setswana as HL and those who speak Ikalanga as HL - teachers'HL had influence on CS to Setswana in class. Home language did not have much influence on the views of the teachers whose HLs were categorised as Others about CS use in the classroom.

Based on the findings above, it is recommended that the policy makers should acknowledge that CS exists in the classrooms because

they are bilingual settings [24], and that often if the teachers and learners have access to different languages, they are likely to utilize them [25]. In that regard, CS has a functional role in the classroom; without it, teaching and learning become mammoth tasks. Therefore, a space should be created for its use as a legitimate pedagogic approach [26], such as in the teaching of culturally-relevant topics where comprehension will be maximized by code-switching to Setswana. However, the teachers, especially those for whom Setswana is a HL should not lose sight of the fact that the learners need to master the target language (English). Therefore, CS use should not be willy-nilly; but should be guided by the need. Adendorff [6] proposes for the sensitization of the teachers about the role of CS in the curriculum. Similarly, [27] suggests that CS techniques should be infused into the teacher-preparation programmes so that CS could be effectively utilized in teaching without replacing the language of instruction (English) with the language that the majority of the teachers (Setswana) and learners (Ikalanga) speak either as a lingua franca or as HL. It should also be acknowledged that CS could be as a symptom of a lack of proficiency in English as the LoLT, but not as its cause. Therefore, consideration should be given for the training of subject-language specialists (English) [28] especially at lower levels of education to assist the learners to acquire a proficiency in English at an earlier level.

In conclusion, it is necessary to investigate the level of proficiency in English among teachers by home language. Hopefully, the results of such a study will shed more light on why certain teachers use CS more in class than others.

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