

# **IMPROVING STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING IN ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS BY USING CODE-SWITCHING**

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## **Abstract**

*Sociolinguistics phenomenon such as code-mixing and code-switching commonly found in the bilingual and multilingual society, including in school and classroom area. Psychologically and naturally, bilingual and multilingual people tend to mix and switch their code or language in order to have intended messages and effective purposes of communication. Code-switching is mostly found in the English teaching and learning activities in Indonesia at almost every level. Teacher and students need to switch their codes into their mother tongues or their second languages in order that the "difficult" English features could be learnt and comprehended well. Therefore, instead of avoiding code-switching and the use of the learners' mother tongues as the instructional language, the teachers are recommended to use and organize as effectively as possible the L1 and code-switching in deliberating English material to establish and improve students' understanding in English. It is believed that code-switching may have psychological and pedagogical effects to motivate students to have linguistic competence.*

Keywords: Code-switching, English understanding, TEFL.

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## **1. Introduction**

Almost all people in Indonesia is bilingual and even multilingual people, it means that they have ability to use two languages and even many languages to communicate each other. Those ability can caused the sociolinguistics phenomenon such as code-mixing and code-switching.

Bilingual and multilingual speaker tend to mix or switch their codes (languages) in order to have intended messages and effective purposes of communication. Most speakers command several varieties of any language they speak, and bilingualism, even multilingualism, is the norm for many people throughout the world rather than unilingualism. People, then, are usually required to select a particular code whenever they choose to speak, and they may also decide to switch from one code to another or to mix codes even within sometimes very short utterances and thereby create a new code in a process known as code-switching<sup>2</sup>.

Many reserachers and experts, both on linguistics and language teaching, believe that code-switching may also take place in formal society, such as classroom. In Indonesia classroom, it is usually occur in classroom of English as a foreign language. The appearance of code-switching in the English as a foreign language classroom also proved that the use of students' L1 as the instructional language in classroom interactions was academically us eful. It is right that the ideal language used in English classes is the English language itself, but the use of Indonesian language and even local languages in English classes cannot be totally avoided. Since it is impossible to avoid the use of students' L1 and the appearance of code-mixing and code-switching in teaching English as a FL in Indonesia, it is reasonable to put them in effective uses as the ways to improve the students' understanding in English.

## **2. Review of Related Theories**

### **a. Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language.**

As state in preceding introduction that code-switching usually appear in English classroom in which English is the foreign language. Therefore, it is need to know the theories of teaching and learning English as a foreign language itself.

The term teaching and learning are used interchangeably to mean "teaching" or "learning" as the main focus of human education. The interchangeable use of the two term may caused by concept which states that teaching implies learning. Joyce et.al. in Refnita<sup>3</sup> argue that whatever we do for teaching reflects something to do with learning. In fact, the most important long-term outcome of instruction may be the students' increased capabilities to learn more easily and effectively in the future, both because of the knowledge and skill they have acquired and because they have mastered learning process.

That teaching and learning are two faces of the same coin could be accepted by educators and educationist. Stern<sup>4</sup> states that language teaching can be defined as the activities which are intended to bring about language and learning. Thus, it can be argued that a theory of language teaching always implies concepts of language learning. A good language teaching theory would meet the conditions and needs of learners in the best possible ways. In general, the classification of language status as L1, L2 or FL are assigned in language teaching. In accordance with the classification, English is learnt in Indonesia as a foreign language. It is because English is not the

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<sup>2</sup> Wardaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, (2002), 100

<sup>3</sup> Refnita, Lely. *Improving Students' Awareness and Achievement on English Grammar Through The Effective Use of Code-Switching* (Proceeding of The First COTEFL International Conference). (2009), 50

<sup>4</sup> Stern, H.H. *Fundamental Concept of Language Teaching*. (1984), 21

native language in Indonesia and it is acquired later than the native language (local language or Indonesian language).

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) as teaching English to students whose first language is not English. TEFL usually occurs in the student's own country, either within the state school system, or privately, e.g., in an after-hours language school or with a tutor. TEFL teachers may be native or non-native speakers of English<sup>5</sup>

Another definition<sup>6</sup> also offer other explanation about TEFL. It state that Teaching English as Foreign Language is teaching English to people in a country where English is not the local language, e.g. teaching English in Spain and Argentina. In a TEFL environment the class will have a common language, e.g. Spanish when it is taught in Argentina or Spain. As it is taught in a Spanish speaking country, in an 'emergency' (if the teacher can speak some Spanish) the teacher can make explanation in Spanish that everyone will understand.

Based on these theories, it can be conclude that in Indonesia, English is a foreign language because in daily life Indonesian people usually used Bahasa or local language to communicate each other, even when they are in English classroom area. In this case, however, the English teacher has to work hard to taught and introduced English in Indonesian classroom as well as possible and also suitable with the students' condition.

For most Indonesian people, the aim of Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia is to be able to communicate in English. It is related to the realization that English undoubtedly plays crucial role in International communication as well as in knowledge and technology transfer. The activity of send and receive message effectively and negotiate meaning among people, nowadays, has mostly carried out in English. Therefore, English has been taught in Indonesian schools as a subject served from elementary school level till university level.

## **b. The Theories of Code Switching**

### **1) Code**

A neutral term used by sociolinguists to refer to a language or a variety of a language used in communication is *code*<sup>7</sup>. In a bilingual or multilingual society, it is normal for the people to be in situation where a choise between two or more codes has to be made. In the situation the bilinguals may want to consider for example, who speaks to them, in which language or variety, and ehwn or where the conversation takes place. To a bilingual or multilingual, although choosing a code is one of the routines, the skill in deciding which code should be choosen still need developing. Monolinguals face a different situation of code-choosing. They sometimes come to a state where they can choose to speak a variety of the language instead of the other(s).

In this sense, people practically choose an appropriate code in daily communication. Bilingualism and multilingualism are principally caused by language contact, generally, the bilingualism or multilingualism may be societal and individual. Sometimes the term bilingualism may also refer to multilingualism in the sense that a given speaker or society is able to use two or more languages (codes) in verbal communication<sup>8</sup>. Sometimes code switching occurs between the turns of

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<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching\\_English\\_as\\_a\\_Foreign\\_Language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching_English_as_a_Foreign_Language))

<sup>6</sup> TEFL ([http://www.britishcouncil.org/teacher\\_recruitment-tefl-qualification-tefl-or-tesol.html](http://www.britishcouncil.org/teacher_recruitment-tefl-qualification-tefl-or-tesol.html))

<sup>7</sup> Wardaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, (2002), 87

<sup>8</sup> Refnita, Lely. *Improving Students' Awareness and Achievement on English Grammar Through The Effective Use of Code-Switching* (Proceeding of The First COTEFL International Conference). (2009), 52

different speakers in the conversation, sometimes between utterances within a single turn, and sometimes even within a single utterance.

## **2) Code Switching**

There is a situation where speakers deliberately change a code being used, namely by switching from one to another. The change is called code switching<sup>9</sup>. Code switching is found more with bilingual or multilingual speakers, although multilinguals may actually be said to switch from variety or style to another. There are several reasons why bilinguals do code switching. Among the obvious factors are namely, quoting someone, marking, and emphasizing group identity or solidarity, including or excluding someone from a conversation, raising status, and showing language expertise.

According to Wardhaugh<sup>10</sup>, when a speaker switches his/her languages, the code-switching occurs. According to him, there are two kinds of code switching: situational and metaphorical code-switching. Situational code-switching occurs when the languages used change according to situations in which the conversant find themselves: they speak one language in one situation and another in different one. No topic change is involved. When a change of topic requires a change in the language used, we have metaphorical code-switching. Many reasons have brought the switching based on the needs and purposes of communication.

The types of switching based on the need for switching: (i) switching can serve the referential function because it often involves lack of knowledge of one language or lack of facility in that language on certain subject, (ii) switching can serve a directive function in that it involves the hearer directly, (iii) switching involves the expressive function, (iv) often switching serve to indicate a change in tone of the conversation, and hence a phatic function, (v) the metalinguistic function of code-switching comes into play when it is used to comment directly or indirectly on the languages involved; and (vi) bilingual language usage involving switched puns, joke, etc, can be said to serve the poetic function of language<sup>11</sup>

Since English has gained the status as the world lingua franca, there are lots of bilingual or multilingual speakers who do code switching from their native languages to English. The first example of code switching below involves 'showing language expertise' factor which is possibly combined with the factor of 'raising status'. The other examples are interpreted to be likely to entail other factors as well in addition to those factors.

## **3) Code Switching in English Classroom**

Communicative language teaching in what we might broadly categorize as an EFL context is clearly a greater challenge for students and teachers. Often, intrinsic motivation is a big issues, since students may have difficulty in seeing the relevance of learning English. Their immediate use of the language may seem far from removed from their own circumstances, and classroom hours may be the only part of the day when they are exposed to English. Therefore, the language that you present, model, elicit and treat takes on great importance<sup>12</sup>

As a small society, classroom may have verbal interaction by means of language like a natural society has. Therefore, the phenomenon of code-switching is commonly

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<sup>9</sup> Jendra, Made Iwan Indrawan. *Sociolinguistics (The Study of Societies' Language)*, (2012), 73.

<sup>10</sup> Wardhaugh, Ronald. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, (2002), 102-103

<sup>11</sup> Apple and Muysken in Refnita, Lely. *Improving Students' Awareness and Achievement on English Grammar Through The Effective Use of Code-Switching* (Proceeding of The First COTEFL International Conference). (2009), 55

<sup>12</sup> Brown, Douglas. *Teaching by Principles*, (2001), 117

found in the classroom interaction. In the result of the previous researches about code-mixing and code-switching in bilingual language classrooms had important communicative functions. In addition, the appearance of code-switching followed certain communicative patterns as well. Bilingual education accommodates the matters of code-mixing and code-switching occurring in the classroom interaction. It would seem that learners in bilingual communities should have the opportunity to be educated in two languages: the language of the home and the language of other group in the community. In all cases, there is what is often called a home-school language mismatch or switch. Although in some cases the switch can have several negative consequences, for example poor educational achievement, in other cases the switching is necessary and communicatively helpful.

### **3. Teaching and Learning English in Indonesian Classroom Through Code Switching to Improve Students' Understanding.**

The use of English as the only language in classroom interaction in teaching and learning English as a foreign language is almost impossible. Especially in Indonesia, learner had had their L1 and L2 before they began to learn English. As the result, most learners of English in Indonesia do switching and so do the teachers. Besides being a natural phenomenon, it takes place to fulfill communicative need. A research conducted by Refnita in 2000 and 2006 revealed that there were thirteen communicative function of code-switching identified in these research: *to make metalinguistic comments, to whisper, to quote, to translate, to exclude, to clarify, to code conclusion, repetition and topic changing, to emphasis, to give example of theoretical application, stimulating students to think over, to facilitate fluent communication, to request, and to remind*. Based on the data, it can be concluded that although ideal language used in English teaching and learning process is English, but the code-switching could not be avoided. It seem that the code-switching is necessary in some cases since it has essential communicative functions in the teaching-learning processes. In fact, the use of Indonesian language as the instructional language in English classroom was psychologically and academically helpful. On order to explain and to emphasis some features of English, the use of Indonesian language could help the learners to improve their understanding in English being learnt. It is implies that code-switching is psychologically and academically needed at the teaching and learning English in Indonesian classroom.

Other research of using code-switching in English classroom was conducted by Nur Adilla in University Teknologi Malaysia on March 2004. Almost same with Indonesia, Malaysia is known as a multiracial country with the multilingual ability of people. It is inevitable that all Malaysians are faced with the options of choosing their preference codes when conversing among themselves. Nur Adilla was done the research in a group discussion of Engineering students under English classroom setting. She found that most of the multiraces students who are at presents following year programme at University Teknologi Malaysia were usually used code-switching when they were attended the classroom' discussion. From her finding, she proved that in English classroom where English used as a foreign language, code-switching should not viewed as an interference phenomenon but a device to compensate the deficiency of the L2 itself<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Nuradilla, ([http://www.fp.utm.my/ePusatSumber/pdfail/ptkgdfwP/ADILAAP000356\\_2004TTP.pdf](http://www.fp.utm.my/ePusatSumber/pdfail/ptkgdfwP/ADILAAP000356_2004TTP.pdf))

Code-switching is mostly found in the English teaching and learning activities in Indonesia at almost every level. It is really hard to use English all time in classroom interaction. Switching from English into students' mother tongues (into Indonesian language or local languages) were psychologically natural and in some cases were academically needed. Teacher and students need to switch their codes into their mother tongues or their second languages in order that the "difficult" English features could be learnt and comprehended well. Explanation given and classroom interactions in English all time including for "difficult" English features might cause communicative problems. Therefore, instead of avoiding code-switching and the use of the learners' mother tongues as the instructional language, it is better to use and to organize them effectively in order to establish and improve students' understanding in English.

As an example in my own classroom, the students are not coming from English department students. In their daily classroom activities, the subject materials are delivered by using *Bahasa* meanwhile when my subject material is delivered by using English in whole times they are difficult to understand the material. Some materials in English such as tenses, aspect, word order, etc. are linguistically different from those of Indonesian language. Most students are in problems to learn and to understand those English features. If the explanation and classroom interaction must be held in English all time, the problems not only in the features of English but also in communicative function. In this case, using L1 and code-switching in effective ways were supposed to be helpful. The teachers are recommended to use and organize as effectively as possible the L1 and code-switching in deliberating English material explanation, giving emphasis on particular points, and having classroom discussion in theoretical and conceptual of English material. The effective uses of code-switching can establish and improve students' understanding in English material, students' understanding in the similarities and differences between English and their L1. It is believed that code-switching may have psychological and pedagogical effects to motivate students to have linguistic competence. It is necessary as a good foundation to improve students' understanding and achievement in English, as well.

There are some recommendations for using code-switching effectively in grammar class; firstly, the teacher may use and organize as effectively as possible the first language and code-switching in deliberating English grammar. The effective use of code-switching can be established and improve students' awareness on the similarities and differences between English grammar and their first language. Secondly, grammar is regarded as the monotonous and difficult subject by many students, especially if the students are not coming from English department student. They think that it is full of rigid rules and static. It is suggested that effective use of code-switching may help serious problems. The teacher is expected to clarify and give interesting explanation by means of using understandable language. Lastly, some students assume that grammatical units and rules are not communicatively needed in daily communication. This idea is academically problematic. In order to establish and improve the grammatical awareness, teacher needs to explain the grammar clearly and scientifically. Teacher's explanation by having code-switching may help students establishing grammatical linguistic competence.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Improving students' understanding in English as the foreign language can be done in many ways. This paper proposes that the effective use of code-switching—English into students' L1 or L2 or vice versa—is believed as a way to help students in building and improving their understanding in English psychologically and academically. In addition, good students' understanding would give parallel effects to their learning achievement. And of course, the use of code-switching should be carefully selected by the teachers in order that it does not give negative effects to the teaching of English as a foreign language academically.

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