Code Switching in Moroccan High School Classrooms

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Abstract

Code switching as a phenomenon has been extensively scrutinized especially in communities where people are exposed to more than two languages; that is, multilingual societies. Morocco is considered to be a multilingual country given the existence of a range of different languages (e.g. Moroccan Arabic, Tamazight, and French). Many research studies whose main concern was to deal with classroom discourse in bilingual/multilingual environments (e.g. Milk 1981, 1982; Gurthrie, 1984; Jacobson, 1979; Gonazalez & Maez 1980), were primarily concerned with the study of code switching between learners' first language and the language used as a medium of instruction.

The study at hand seeks to shed light on three essential points. **Firstly**, it aims at investigating the extent to which Moroccan high school teachers switch from one language to another. **Secondly**, it explores the hidden motives behind code switching in language classrooms. **Finally**, it examines students' perceptions towards code switching.

Keywords: Code Switching, EFL, Moroccan High School, Multilingualism.

Introduction

In today's multicultural world, the area of code switching has gained a great amount of attention in the landscape of language teaching and learning (Liu, P. (2006); Ríos & Campos (2013). This phenomenon might be attributed to a number of reasons and motivations among language learners especially EFL learners. Although the area is not new in the Moroccan context, attitudes towards code switching among learners might change based on the particularities of the recent technological revolution given that the twenty-first century learners are digital natives in the first place.

Hence, the paper at hand revolves around the use of code switching among Moroccan high school learners. Accordingly, this paper is divided into four main sections. The first section sheds lights on the rationale behind this research paper and its research questions. The second section situates the paper in its theoretical framework. The third one briefly sheds lights on research instrument and the participants. The fourth section deals with the data analysis and discussion.

1. Statement of the problem

Teaching a foreign language incorporates several linguistic and non- linguistic elements that have an immense impact on the performance of learners as well as teachers. Gulzar (2010) maintains that the issue of employing code switching in ESL/EFL classrooms has been given special interest since such studies can serve for various pedagogical purposes (Ríos & Campos (2013).

Thus, the article at hand aims primarily at examining the major reasons or the hidden motives that lay behind the use of code switching in Moroccan language classrooms in general, and EFL language classrooms in specific. It also seeks to explore the learners' perceptions towards code switching. It, consequently, intends to answer the following three questions:

1. To what extent do Moroccan high school teachers switch from one language to another in their classrooms?
2. What are the main motivations for using code switching by Moroccan High School language teachers in their classroom?
3. What are the attitudes of Moroccan High School students towards code switching in language classrooms?

2. Code switching in EFL contexts:

The growth and development of communication technologies, social media and virtual devices, contributes in enlarging and increasing the number of foreign language learners. This leads to the emergence of societies and communities in which there is the existence of more than two languages. Such communities are referred to as multilingualism. (Hoffmann 1991). In such communities the existence of code switching is likely to occur in daily conversations among multilingual and bilingual speakers. This issue is one of the most studied phenomena in the field of language contact and multilingualism research. Many researchers have attempted to provide with a definition of code switching. According to Grosjean (1982) code switching is "the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation" (p.145). Code switching might happen in a conversation moving from sentence to sentence, this type of code switching is referred to as inter-sentential, or within the same sentence, which is called intra-sentential code switching (Katja F. Cantone, 2007). Hymes describes code switching as "a common term for alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of language or even speech styles." Bokamba (1989) provides with a detailed definition of code switching. According to Bokamba (1989), the concept is used to refer to "the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical sub-systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event"(Liu, 2006).

Different development in the area of English Language Teaching (ELT) can be attributed to the ongoing interest in various societies, which are the result of different psychological and sociological understandings being applied in the landscape of language teaching and learning. Code switching is one of these phenomena that have attracted the attention of many EFL researchers.

Horasan (2014) study of the use of code switching in EFL classrooms and the perceptions of both teachers and students on this issue reveals that students' use of code switching was high and teachers' code switching "was higher than expected". The study also discloses that all participants believe that code-switching enhances learning because of its numerous benefits. Moghadam, Smad & Shahraki (2012) state that the main reason behind students' code switching is the lack of vocabulary knowledge, especially if they are in a less formal environment. Students therefore mainly tend to code switch to avoid or to fill a linguistic gap. The study also revealed that teachers have other reasons behind their use of code switching. Teachers code switch to their first language when necessary to clarify and translate. Macaro (1997), Levine (2003) and later on Jingxia (2010) reveal that code switching has a significant role and has different functions in EFL learning. For instance, code switching is used to "translate

vocabulary items, explaining grammar, managing class, and building close relation with students" (Jingxia, 2010, p. 21).

3. Methodology

In this study, a questionnaire, which was addressed to Moroccan high school teachers, was the main tool to meet the above- mentioned objectives. The questionnaire was administered to 40 participants of whom 34 responded positively and were eager to share their experiences. The participants belong to different regions of Morocco. 36.8% of them were males while 63.2% were females. This instrument was written in both English and Arabic so that Arabic and French Teachers with low English proficiency will face no difficulties while filling the questionnaire. This part of study was quantitatively approached through the use of SPSS software.

Figure 1: Teachers' Teaching Experience
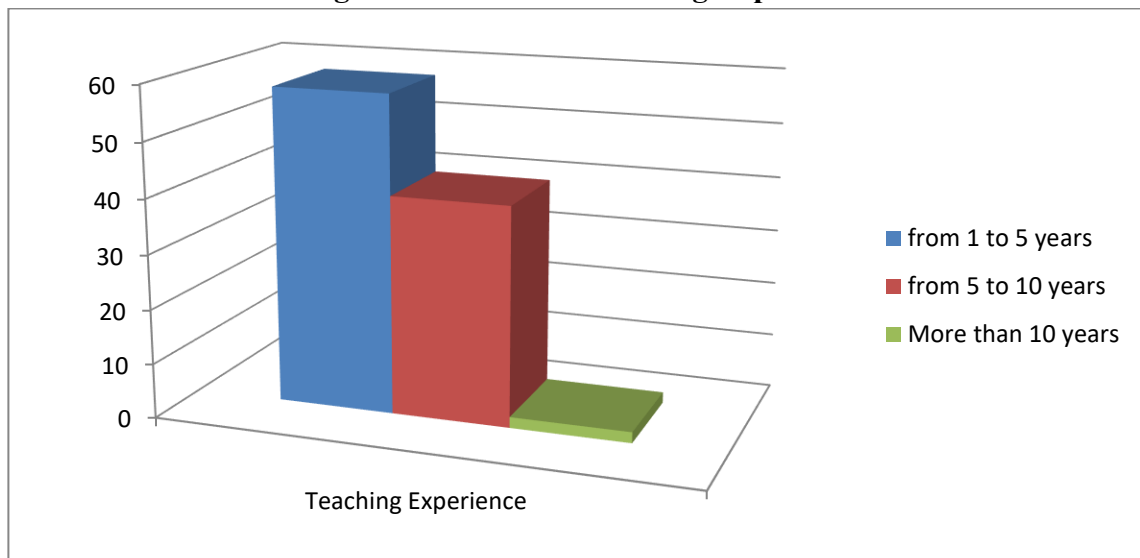
The teaching experience of teachers differs from one to another. 58% of the participants, which indicates the majority, have a teaching experience that ranges from one to five years. 40% of the teachers participated in this research have a teaching experience between 5 to 10 years. Finally, only 2% of them have more than 10 years of teaching experience. As regards languages taught, most of the participants 74% teach English and 26% of them teach French.

Besides, and in order to determine students' perceptions of the use of code switching in the process of learning a language, an interview was adopted to elicit the needed data. Participants were 60 high school students who belong to the three different levels (common core/ first year Baccalaureate/ and Second year Baccalaureate). That students' age ranged between 17 and 19 years old, and they are all from Mehdi El-Manjra High School, Tangier.

4. Results and Discussion

1. To what extent do Moroccan high school teachers switch from one language to another in their classrooms?

Concerning the extent to which teachers switch from the language they teach to another language; their answers vary from one another Figure 2. As demonstrated in the figure below, the majority of language teachers who took part in this study, which represents 64%, tend to **always** code
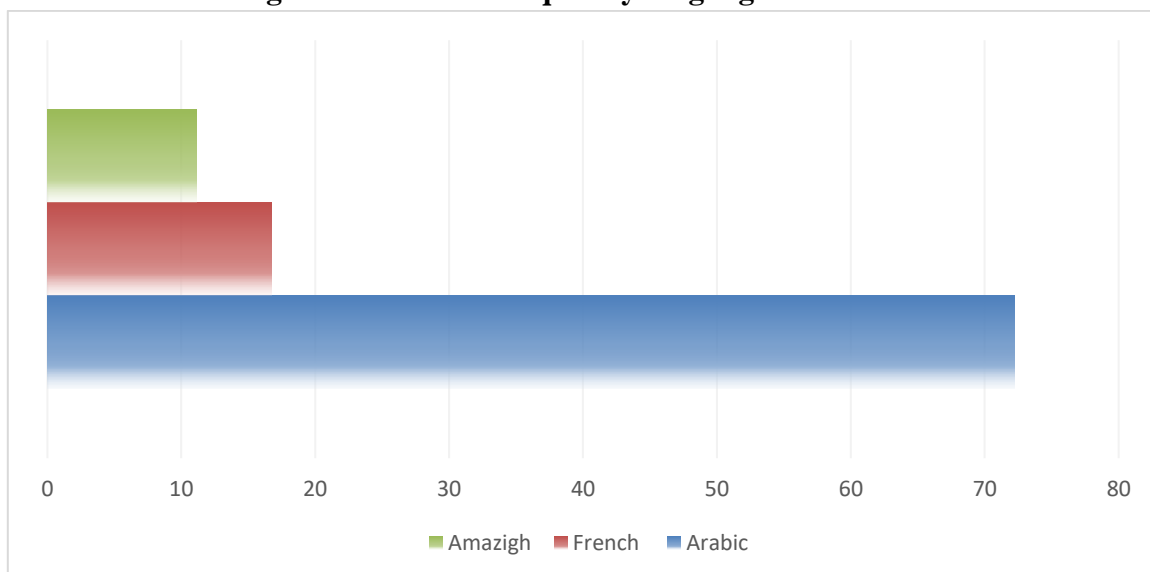
switch from one language to another in their classes, and 23% **often** adopt this option. Surprisingly, the lowest percentage (3%) was of participants who never switch to another language.

Figure 2: Teachers' Use of Code Switching
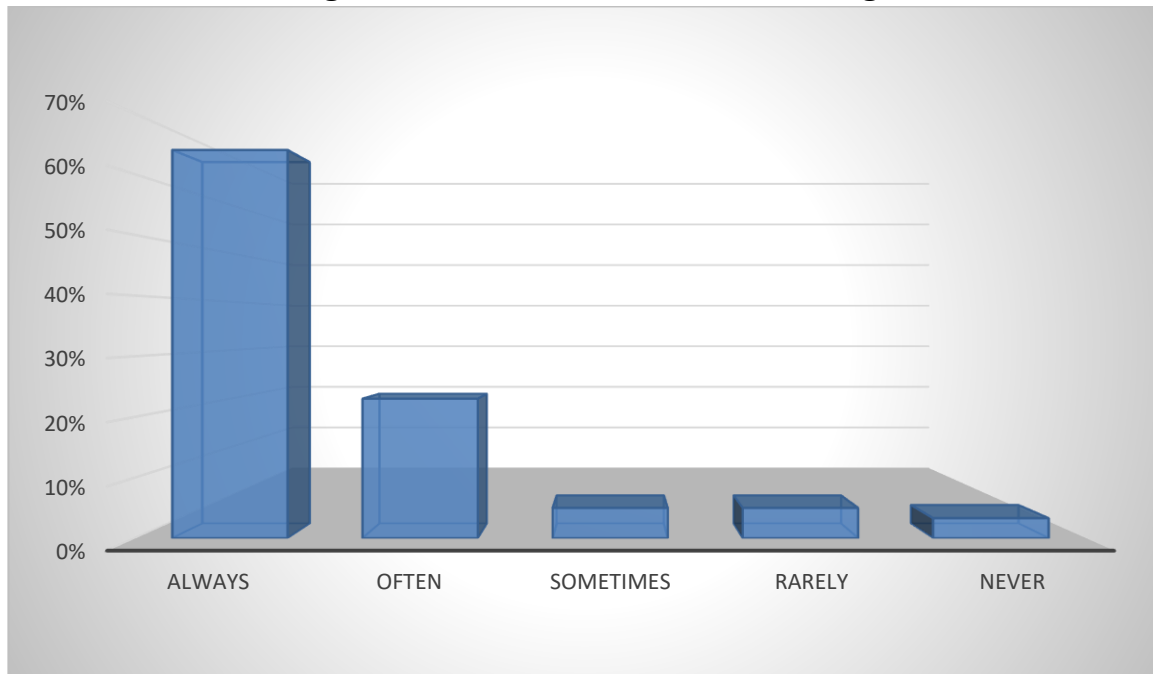
When it comes to the languages that are preferably used to switch to during a language class, it is apparent that most of the participants, as demonstrated in Figure 3, 72.2% use the Arabic language in general and the mother tongue (Darija) in specific when they switch. 16.7% of the participants use French and 11.1% use Amazigh. Most of English teachers assert that the reason why they rarely switch to French is because of their students' low level. Thus, they prefer to switch to classical Arabic in some cases and to the "Darija" (the mother tongue) most of the time and to Amazigh in places where people use it.

Figure 3: the most frequently language switched to

2. **What are the main motivations for using code switching by Moroccan High School language teachers in their classroom?**

The main motivations behind switching from one language to another differ from one teacher to another and from one classroom to another. Results of the study show that 50% of the participants switch in the classroom *to reach better elucidation and to get their students better understand lessons*.
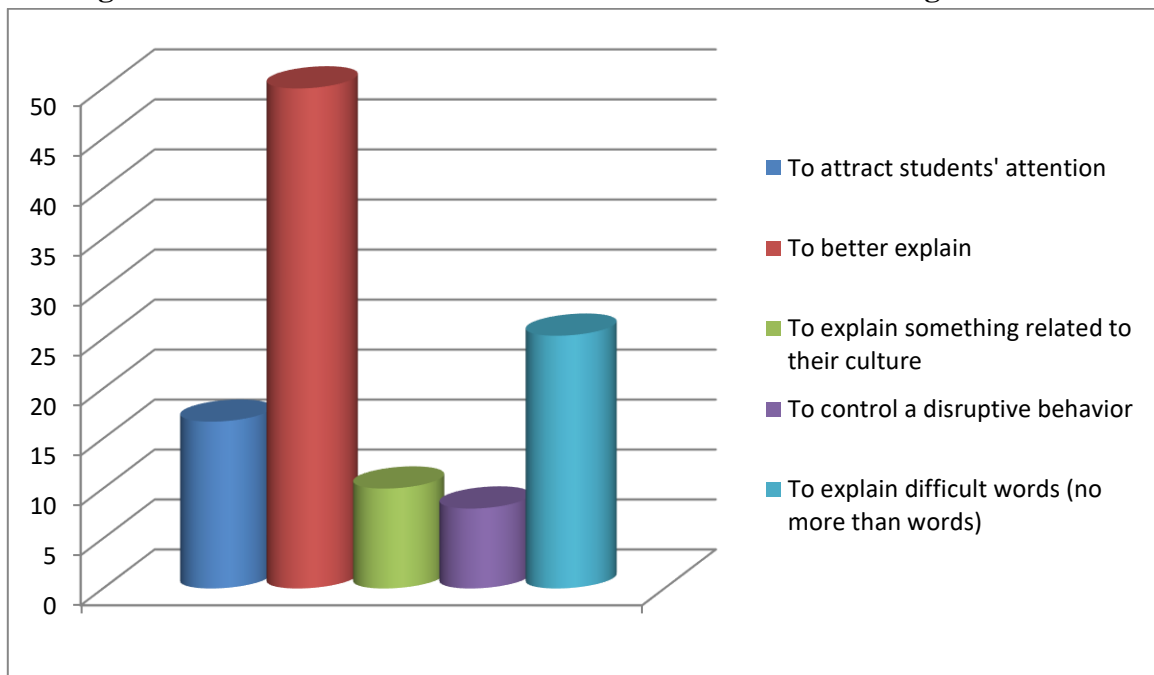
25.3% switch from the language taught to another only *to explain tough words*. Vocabulary is one of the most challenging parts of language in the procedure of teaching especially when instructors lack necessary equipments (such as pictures, data shows...). This is unfortunately the case in numerous Moroccan public institutions. a teacher asserts that:

Participant 1

It is both easier for me and my students to switch to a language that they are familiar with to quickly explain a word that is difficult for their level especially when it comes to abstract words that cannot be explained through pictures and concrete materials.

In other words, code switching can serve teachers' time and energy especially when there is a program that has to be accomplished by a due time and the classroom include students whose level is really below average. The reason behind that is that learners who have lower levels than should be need much time to spent on things that should be already mastered, the teacher hence may consume much time on details that are far away from the objectives of the lesson.

Figure 4: Reasons/motivations behind the use of code switching in the class

On the other hand, a few teachers (6.7%) switch from the language taught to another in order *to attract learners' attention*. According to them, when a teacher moves from the target language to another one, the student gets excited and more attention is given to teachers. For instance, a language teacher confirms that:

Participant 2

Using the same language for two hours may be vey tiring and demanding for a language learner. At some points, as a teacher, I feel that some of the students lose

attention but when I switch to their mother tongue language by using a joke or a quick remark, they become involved and get back on the right track.

Results also show that only 10% of the participants affirm that they switch *to explain things that are related to the learners' culture*. Culture is part of their identity and students most of the time are eager to talk about their culture in their own language. Especially when there are words that cannot be translated into the learned langue and carry within them an entire history and deep meanings. Finally, very few 8% switch from one language to another to *control a disruptive behavior*. Almost the majority of disruptive behaviors steam from students who are not interested or unable to follow with the teacher because of their low level. Thus, in many cases addressing such students in the language learned would be in vain because they won't be able to understand what their instructors are saying.

Participant 3

I usually don't use another language rather than English in my language classrooms, however; I feel obliged to switch to Darijaa (Moroccan Arabic) whenever a student misbehaves. Otherwise, the student would keep provoking me by saying things in Arabic like: what are you saying teacher? I don't understand?

3. What are the attitudes of Moroccan High School students towards code switching in language classrooms?

Concerning the students' perspectives students towards code switching in language classrooms, almost all teachers acknowledge the positive effect of implementing code switching in their classrooms. Some of them admit that students are more enthusiastic to learn when their teachers switch to a language that they better understand and are acquainted with when necessary.

Participant 4

Whenever I switch to my students' mother tongue language (Darija), I feel that my students are happy and relieved and everyone tries to get involved in the discussion, I know many teachers might not agree with me, but I prefer to provide them with a very tiny time where they can feel free to switch to their first language (A French teacher explains).

Put differently, many students lose their intense interest and enthusiasm when the language learned is the only language used in the class. So, switching sometimes to a language that students feel free to express themselves in it would create an enjoyable time in the classroom and would feel that they are taking a break.

Another English teacher asserts that:

Participant 5

My students have definitely positive attitudes towards switching to their first language, they have been complaining that I use too much English in the classroom and they asked me many times to use Darija in the classroom.

Also, from the students' perspectives, all students that is 98% show positive attitude towards code switching in the class, while only 2% who prefer not to use another language in the class rather than the one been taught. Students seem to prefer the idea of talking in a language where they find themselves comfortable and safe. Some students even complain when the teacher depends only on the language that he/she is teaching. They claim that such classes are so exhaustive and therefore don't like to attend.

Figure 5: Students' Attitudes Towards Switching form One Language to Another

5. Conclusion

This study attempted primarily to investigate the major motives that lead language teachers to switch from the target language to the first language. It also aimed at surveying the learners' perspectives towards code switching in their language classroom. Results of the study showed that teachers have different opinions towards applying code switching in the classroom. They also have different motives and reasons on why they switch from the language been taught to the students' first language. Besides, students have almost the same opinion in the sense that they like the idea of talking in a language where they find themselves relaxed and easily express themselves.

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