An Analysis of Code-Switching during English Team Teaching in a Japanese Primary School

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1 Introduction

This study investigates how code-switching is used and its effects on English language teaching and learning in a team teaching context in a Japanese primary school.

There has been much research on classroom discourse between teachers and pupils (e.g., Cazden, 2001; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; van Lier, 1988). However, research on interactions between an assistant language teacher (ALT), homeroom teachers (HRTs) and pupils during English classes in Japanese primary schools is minimal (Fukatsu, 2011). Therefore, it is important to analyze utterances made by these three parties and examine what is actually happening in English classes. This study, however, mainly focuses on code-switching by an ALT, although HRTs and pupils are engaged in interactions, responding to ALT’s utterances as a matter of course.

Throughout the investigation, code-switching used by an ALT has been classified into three types: (1) Code-switching into HRTs’ and pupils’ L1 at the beginning or end of the lessons, (2) Switching address terms adjusting to HRTs’ and pupils’ culture, and (3) Cooperative reverse code-switching between the ALT and HRTs. In the following section, I shall briefly review the existing research on code-switching.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Code-switching

Code-switching has been researched from various perspectives. Most
research concerning code-switching is related to bilingualism (e.g., Hoffman, 1991; Romaine, 2001). This field of bilingualism often uses categories of code-switching such as code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing (e.g., Appel & Muysken, 1987, explained in Klimpfinger, 2009). On the other hand, not all researchers categorize code-switching strictly as stated above and categorize them according to the situation (e.g., Myers-Scotton, 1993, explained in Cogo, 2009) and often use the classification ‘single words’, ‘short, more or less fixed phrases’, and ‘whole clauses and sentences’ (Klimpfinger, 2009, p.357). I shall define code-switching in the present study based on the latter categorization.

Furthermore, the research field of SLA tends to regard code-switching as compensation for a lack of linguistic proficiency of a lower proficiency learner (e.g., Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p.267; Legenhausen, 1991, p.61). In contrast to this approach, the data analysis of the present study is closely related to the field of sociolinguistics. A sociolinguistic perspective of code-switching tends not to emphasize linguistic non-proficiency in conversation (Auer, 1998, p.339; Cumperz, 1982, p.65, explained in Rampton 1997, p.299). Burt (1992) also interprets code-switching not as ‘compensation for linguistic deficit’ but as a ‘positive politeness strategy’, referring to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory (Burt, 1992: 183, see also Wagner & Firth, 1997, p.354). In addition, in relation to the ‘positive politeness strategy’ as stated above (Burt, 1992, p.183), Rampton (1997, p.275) shows code-switching as a ‘solidarity-creating strategy’ and Jenkins (2009) also refers to code-switching as ‘the signaling of solidarity’ (p.49).

Communication strategies are also associated with code-switching. Cogo (2009) investigates roles of code-switching from the perspective of ELF communication and regards code-switching not as a strategy for solving problems due to lack of linguistic proficiency but as the one for signaling affiliation, solidarity, agreement, listenership and engagement in conversation, achieving efficiency, and showing cooperation among speakers during interactions (Cogo, 2009, pp.254–259).

In this section, I have briefly reviewed code-switching from various perspectives. In what follows, I shall analyze the present data mainly based on
An Analysis of Code-Switching

sociolinguistic and communication strategic perspectives discussed here. Before
the data analysis, however, the next section will briefly explain the survey
methods.

3 Survey methods and data

This study is based on the observation of English classes at S Elementary
School. English classes were observed from 2009 to 2013. I was a participant
observer as well as a teaching assistant and taught English, with the ALT and
HRTs, to the pupils from the first to sixth grades. Utterances of the HRTs,
ALTs and pupils in English classes were audio-recorded and the transcribed
data was analyzed especially focusing on when and how the ALTs used code-
switching during classes and what kinds of functions it had, utilizing
conversation and discourse analytic methods.

4 Findings from the observation

The use of code-switching by the ALT in interactions with HRTs and pupils
in the study is mainly classified into three types as follows:

1 Code-switching into HRTs’ and pupils’ L1 at the beginning or end of
the lessons

This happens when the ALT uses HRTs’ and pupils’ L1 (Japanese) at the
beginning or end of lessons to introduce or wrap up the day’s target
phrases to enhance pupils’ understanding.

2 Switching address terms adjusting to HRTs’ and pupils’ culture

This happens when the ALT uses address terms adjusting to HRTs’ and
pupils’ culture (Japanese one) to show polite attitude, decrease social
distance, and accommodate to the host culture.

3 Cooperative reverse code-switching between the ALT and HRTs

This happens when the ALT uses pupils’ L1 (Japanese) if pupils seem not
to understand teachers’ utterances in English while HRTs stick to
English.
In the following, I shall explain each of these different types of code-switching.

4.1 Code-switching into HRTs’ and pupils’ L1 at the beginning or end of the lessons

This type of code-switching is used when the ALT uses HRTs’ and pupils’ L1 at the beginning or end of lessons to introduce or wrap up the day’s target phrases to enhance pupils’ understanding as stated above. A typical example of this is seen in Ex1, which is from a situation where the ALT introduces the phrase ‘How is the weather?’ at the beginning of the class.

[Ex1] 1 ALT: OK, today’s phrase is how, today’s phrase is
   ‘How is the weather?’
   3 HRT: ‘How is the weather?’
   4 ALT: OK listen. How is the weather? How is the weather?
   5 How is the weather?
→ 6 ALT: 日本語で言える？ お天気…
   (How do you say ‘How is the weather?’ in Japanese?)
   7 HRT: お天気今日は何？ お天気何？
   (How is the weather today? How is the weather?)
→ 8 ALT: そうそうそう (laughter). Yes ((laughter)).
   (Yes, yes, yes)
   9 How is the weather? Repeat after me, ‘How is the
   →10 weather?’ せーの！ (Here we go!)
   11 Ps(Pupils)&HRT: How is the weather?
   12 ALT: How is the weather?
   13 Ps&HRT: How is the weather? 

Here, the ALT and HRT introduce the topic sentence ‘How is the weather?’, using repetitions from lines 1 to 5. After that, the ALT asks the meaning of ‘How is the weather?’ in Japanese in line 6 (日本語で言える？ お天気…). The HRT answers the ALT’s question in line 7 (お天気今日は何？ お天気何？), and the ALT responds to the HRT’s answer in Japanese in line 8 (そう
An Analysis of Code-Switching

そうそう). Here, the ALT code-switches into the HRT’s and pupils’ L1 in line 6 to check the pupils’ understanding of the target phrase with the help of the HRT’s answer in line 7 and then in line 8 to acknowledge it in Japanese. The ALT also uses Japanese in line 10 (ćeーの) to encourage the pupils to repeat the phrase ‘How is the weather?’, thus, it plays a different function compared to line 6. That is, code-switching here is used to show solidarity and decrease social distance (Klimpfinger, 2009, p.361, see also Myers-Scotton, 1993) as this ‘ćeーの’ does not convey any information.

Ex2 below is also an example of code-switching to enhance understanding where the ALT checks pupils’ understanding as to how to answer the question, ‘Do you have…?’ this time, however, at the end of the lesson. That is, by now the pupils have already learnt ‘Do you have…?’ and ‘Yes, I do/ No, I don’t’ and have also practiced these questions and answers through activities during the lesson.

[Ex2] 1 ALT: OK, today’s topic, today’s topic is ‘Do you have

2 何々？’(bla bla bla?)

3 HRT: Uh-huh

→ 4 ALT: はいそうです、英語で?

(How do you say ‘Yes, I do’ in English?)

5 Ps (Pupils)&HRT: Yes, I do.

→ 6 ALT: Yes, I do, いいえいいえ、英語で?

(How do you say ‘No, I don’t’ in English?)

7 Ps&HRT: No, I don’t. [III-13]

During the class, the ALT rarely uses Japanese. However, here, towards the end of the day’s lesson, he uses Japanese in lines 4 and 6 (はいそうです、英語で？／いいえいいえ、英語で？) to check pupils’ understanding of the meaning in Japanese. Klimpfinger (2009, p.363), who investigates English as a lingua franca (ELF), also mentions that ‘a switched appeal is sometimes employed strategically in order to enhance faster understanding’.

In this way, ALTs sometimes use code-switching into HRTs’ and pupils’ L1
at the beginning or end of the lessons to introduce or wrap up the day’s target phrases and enhance pupils’ understanding. We shall now move on to the second type of code-switching.

4.2 Switching address terms adjusting to HRTs’ and pupils’ culture

This type of the ALT’s code-switching is used when ALTs switch address terms into a Japanese style when they call pupils as seen in Ex3. This is a situation where the ALT judges a ranking of teams A to D in a game activity and then asks two pupils to demonstrate introducing each other in front of others, using phrases which they have already practiced in the activity.

[Ex3] 1 ALT: OK, BACD again. Good job!
   2 ALL: ((clapping))
   3 ALT: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you
   → 4 Maki-san, Hiromi-san³, go!
   5 HRT: Go!
   6 ALT: Go! Oh, OK? OK?
       ((The ALT comes close to the pupils and encourages them to start demonstration)) [III-5-a]

Here, the ALT judges the result of the game in line 1 (OK, BACD again. Good job!), and everyone in the classroom claps his/her hands to encourage each other in line 2. Then, the ALT collects little items which were used in the game from each team, saying thank you in line 3. After that, he asks two pupils to demonstrate their self-introduction in front of the class in line 4 (Maki-san, Hiromi-san, go!), calling their names with ‘san’ which is a suffix used after names to indicate politeness in Japanese. Thus, the ALT is showing a polite attitude and solidarity to the pupils here, using address terms in a Japanese way as well as accommodating to the host (Japanese) culture by adopting the same way of using address term as the Japanese teachers since they always call pupils with Japanese ‘san’ in this school.
It is also found that the ALT sometimes switches address terms intentionally as seen in Ex4, which is a situation where the ALT and HRT tell the pupils to go backward, trying to make groups for the next activity.

[Ex4] 1 ALT: Go back please. Go back go back go back go back
   2 go back go back.
   3 HRT: Go back go back go back go back go back go back
   4 go back go back ( )^{4}-san, go back.
→ 5 ALT: Kana, Shuto. Kana-san, Shuto-san.
   6 P: 俺ら？ (Do you mean ‘us’?)

Here in line 5, the ALT asks two pupils to move and join the other group, calling them first in the English way without using the suffix ‘san’ (Kana, Shuto). Then he calls their names with the polite Japanese expression ‘san’ for the second time (Kana-san, Shuto-san). Here, we can see that the ALT is using ‘san’ intentionally to show politeness and solidarity to them with his effort to accommodate to the host culture.

To sum up, it is found from Exs3 and 4 that the ALT tends to use address terms in a Japanese way to show politeness and solidarity to interlocutors and accommodate to the host culture.

4.3 Cooperative reverse code-switching between the ALT and HRTs

In this section, I shall examine the third type of code-switching ‘Cooperative reverse code-switching between the ALT and HRTs’, which is used by the ALT if pupils seem not to understand his utterances in English, while HRTs are also sticking to English. A typical example is Ex5, which is a situation where the ALT and HRT try to make pupils go backward in the classroom to start a game.

[Ex5] 1 ALT: Have you finished? OK, OK, OK… easy?
   2 HRT: OK
   3 ALT: Let’s challenge, go back
Here, after checking that the pupils have finished practicing (line 1), in line 3, the ALT gives them instructions to go back (Let’s challenge, go back). Then, in line 4, the HRT repeats the ALT’s instruction twice in English (Go back, OK? Go back). However, most pupils would not move. Therefore the ALT in line 5 uses the Japanese translation (下がって) to make sure that the pupils understand. Finally, they start moving and the game starts.

In this extract, the ALT seems to be playing the usual HRTs’ role, using HRTs’ and pupils’ L1 in line 5. That is, in the previous research, some HRTs are found to literally or partially translate ALTs’ English instructions into Japanese to help pupils’ understanding (see Fukatsu, 2011). By contrast, this extract shows that the ALT translates the English instructions into Japanese, using code-switching when the HRT keeps using English. Thus, here it appears the usual role is reversed between the ALT and HRT.

Another example (Ex6) is a situation where the ALT gives instructions to the pupils to prepare for an activity, which happens in the same class as Ex5.

[Ex6] 1 ALT: Write your name and cut
   2 HRT: Oh
   3 ALT: OK? どうぞ (Go ahead)
   4 HRT: OK
         → 5 ALT: 早く (Hurry up)
         → 6 Ps&HRT: (laughter))
         7 Ps: 英語で書くの？ 英語で書くの？
              (Do I have to write in English? Do I have to write in English?)
              ((The HRT doesn’t respond to the question))
         → 8 ALT: 英語です (Yes, in English please)
         → 9 HRT: Hurry up
An Analysis of Code-Switching

Here, in line 5, while the pupils prepare for the activity, the ALT asks pupils to hurry up in Japanese, although most pupils know the meaning of the English phrase ‘hurry up’. In response to the ALT’s ‘早く (Hurry up)’, the pupils and HRT do not say anything but laugh, showing their approval to the ALT’s request (see also Klimpfinger, 2009 for the role of laughter in using code-switching). After that in line 7, the pupils ask questions in Japanese, to which the ALT answers in Japanese (英語です) in line 8, while the HRT remains silent. Here, too, the ALT could be said to be playing a reversed role of the HRT in a similar way as in Ex5, as he responds in Japanese to the pupil’s question in Japanese where usually HRTs would do so (Fukatsu, 2011). By contrast, in line 9, the HRT tells the pupils to hurry up in English, which corresponds to the ALT’s Japanese utterance (早く) in line 5. Here, reverse code-switching is used both by the ALT and HRT in tandem as the ALT uses Japanese in line 5 (早く) and the HRT uses the English version of the ALT’s utterance in line 9 (Hurry up). Compared to the reverse code-switching used by the ALT in Ex5, reverse code-switching here can be said to be two-way between the ALT and HRT.

To sum up, it is found that (1) the ALT sometimes uses reverse code-switching to make up for the usual role of the HRT as we have seen in Exs5 and 6 and (2) the HRT also uses reverse code-switching, switching from the ALT’s Japanese utterance into English. Thus, it seems that both the ALT and the HRT sometimes use reverse code-switching regardless of their L1 during English classes in a team-teaching context.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, it is shown that the ALT uses mainly three types of code-switching, that is (1) code-switching into HRTs’ and pupils’ L1 at the beginning or end of the lessons to introduce or wrap up the day’s target phrases and enhance pupils’ understanding, (2) switching address terms adjusting to HRTs’ and pupils’ culture to show politeness and solidarity to interlocutors and accommodate to the host culture, and (3) cooperative reverse code-switching
between the ALT and HRTs to cooperate with the HRTs and pupils and achieve successful language teaching and learning. To find more effective ways of language teaching, further research would be needed as to how ALTs and HRTs should cooperate with each other, considering pupils’ successful language learning in English classes in Japanese primary schools.

References
Klimpfinger, T. (2009). “She’s mixing the two languages together”: Forms and
An Analysis of Code-Switching


Notes

1 Total length of recording was about 50 hours.

2 This paper does not directly deal with ALTs and HRTs’ teaching methodology. Therefore, it does not discuss whether the methodology is effective or not.

3 All pupils’ names in the present study are pseudonyms.

4 Empty parentheses indicate the presence of an unclear fragment on the audio data.

5 However, it needs to be considered whether translation into pupils’ L1 would be
effective for their language learning or not from the perspective of language pedagogy (e.g., Macaro, 2001; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009).