The Code Switching and English Language Proficiency Performed by Students in Learning English as a Foreign Language at STKIP-MB

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Abstract

This study aims to prove the effect of language proficiency on code switching by bilingual Indonesian students in learning English as a foreign language. The data were collected from 22 participants studying in English department at STKIP-MB. They used mixed Indonesian-English in the teaching and learning process. Based on English proficiency, the participants were divided to be two groups, lower and upper group. The participants were given the same tasks to read four different groups of words; Monolingual Indonesian group of words, monolingual English group of words, bilingual Indonesian-English group of words, and the bilingual English- Indonesian group of words. The statistic showed that there was no significant different time used in performing each task, it was found $F(0,05)= .842$, $p>.05$. Furthermore, the same result was found in the effect of language proficiency toward the code switching, there was no significant effect of English language proficiency on the bilingual tasks.

Keywords: code switching, English language proficiency, bilingual

Introduction

Literally, bilingual means speaking two different languages. Grosjean (2010) said that bilinguals are people who use two or more languages (dialects). Regarding to the language acquisition, some people can be bilingual by acquiring or learning two languages at the same time, and some people acquire the second language after mastering their first languages. Furthermore, there are four different categories of bilingual people. They are elite bilinguals, children from linguistic majorities, children in bilingual families, and children from linguistic minorities. Nowadays it is seen as normal to mix the languages to some extend in the early bilingual childhood (Fromkin, Hyams and Rodman 2003: 375).

In this study, writer observes the bilingual students in English Department, STKIP Muhammadiyah Muara Bungo. As they are living in Bungo, a small city, learning English as a foreign language is not easy. Most of them start learning English in junior high school, and until now they are still continuing to learn English as English Department students. As English students, they use bilingual (English – Indonesia) inside and outside the classroom, especially during the class.

As they are studying in the bilinguals community, it often appears code switching to alternate their communication. The code switching phenomenon of bilinguals is often assumed happens unconsciously. Some linguists came with their theories of switching-code, e.g Meuter & Allport (I999) who assumed that bilingual and multilingual people can switch their language rapidly from one language to another language in their life. They can switch from one language to another language easily and unconsciously. This is related to repertoire ability that people have to control their languages.

However, in another line, the code switching has also been related to the cost, many initial studies found that bilinguals cost longer time in switching the codes. Poplack (n.d.) came with his theory that some various problems will be appeared when people combine languages intra-sententially, especially it is derived from the using of word order different. Then, in performing the code switching, sometimes people find a challenge to process the words; they need time to switch the words from one language to another language because they are thinking while producing the words. Furthermore, Macnamara & Kushnir (1971 as cited in Moreno, et al, 2002), in their initial study found that bilingual read the mixed passage slower than read the single-passage.

This cost of code switching highly associated with the English language proficiency. It has often been assumed that English language proficiency influences the bilinguals to switch the code faster or slower. As it

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stated by Meisel (1994 as cited in Shay, 2015) that the code switching involves the speaker's competence in both pragmatic and grammatical aspects of language. People who have better ability in English were assumed to perfom the code switching better that people who have lower ability in English.

Regarding to those issues, this current study focuses on the effect of English language proficiency on code switching performed by the students in English Department, STKIP Muhammadiyah Bungo. This study was conducted to answer the question is there any effect of English language proficiency on the code switching skill? Furthermore, to answer the question of this study, the writer determined following hypotheses:

H_0 There is significant different time used in task performing

H_1 There is significant effect of English language proficiency on the tasks performances

If Ftable < Fcounting (3,81< 6,48)

Method

In order to answer the research question and to prove the hypotheses, **22** students were involved as the participants in this current research; they are Indonesian native speakers learning English as a foreign language. These participants are doing their bachelor in English Department, STKIP Muhammadiyah Bungo. They are studying in the different level; some of the students are studying in their second semester and some of them are in the sixth semester.

Their language background was measured by using an online tool, Language History Questionnaire, LHQ 2.0. This online questionnaire consists of 23 questions about their language history and background, language proficiency in each of their languages, length of exposure to the language, and experience of living abroad. In this questionnaire, the participants got their participants' ID to fill in the questionnaire and the answers were directly transferred to my research account. Based on their English proficiency, these participants were divided into two groups, upper group and lower group. The students who have English proficiency at the range good, very good, and excellent were categorized in the upper group, while the students who have English proficiency at range very poor, poor, limited, and average were categorized in the lower group.

Furthermore, lexical task was used in this research to see the cost of code switching and the effect of English language proficiency on the code switching. The participants were asked to read four groups of words displayed on the screen. Each group consists of 80 words from noun classification. Initially, they had to read a group of Monolingual Indonesian (L1) words. Then, in the second task, the participants should read a group of monolingual English words as it is their second language. After that, they had to read the mixed group Indonesian-English words, but the Indonesian (L1) was dominance in this group. Then, for the last task, the participants read a mixed English-Indonesian group of words which English (L2) dominated the group. While reading each group of words, the usage of time was counted and noticed. Furthermore, to find the results, time usage was analyzed and compared by using SPPS program to see the effect of English proficiency was also measured to see the effect of language skill toward the performances (Task 2, task 3, and task 4).

Results and Discussion

As it was explained before, the linguistic background of participants were measured by using an online tool, Language History Questionnaire 2.0. The results contained of the participants' language history, including English proficiency, language exposure, living abroad experience. Regarding to English proficiency, most of participants have average ability of English, noone is in native-like range, one of them is very good, five participants are in good category, six participants have functional ability, three participants have poor Englih, and one participant is poor. This following figure displays the data average of English proficiency.
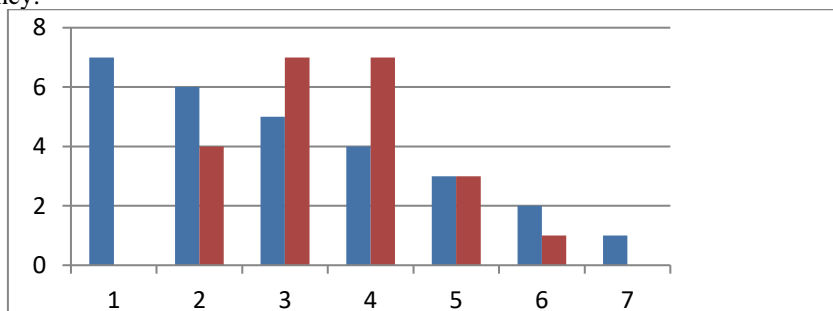

Figure 1. English language proficiency

All of the participants acquire English as their second languages. From those 22 participants, none of them has experience to live abroad or to stay in other countries for more than two months. Moreover, they started learning English at various age, as it is displayed in this following figure, some participants started learning English at the various age of 10 years old, some others at 4 years old, 13 years old, and 14 years old.
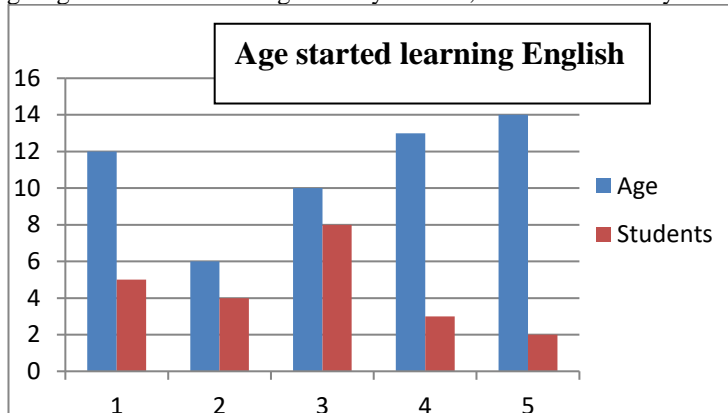

Figure 2. Participants' age started learning English

Moeover, the lexical tasks were conducted to find the cost of code switching. This following table shows the time used by the participants in read four groups of words, monolingual Indonesian (L1), monolingual English (L2), bilingual L1 dominance, and bilingual L2 dominance.

Table 1. Time of Performing the Tasks

Participants	Time			
	Monolingual L1	**Monolingual L2**	**Bilingual L1 Dominant**	**Bilingual L2 Dominant**
1	39.21	39.66	32.63	35.9
2	30.4	41.27	34.9	36.12
3	38.12	47.1	40.62	40.88
4	28	30	26	28.66
5	30.4	37.51	35.96	33.9
6	25.89	44.39	34.53	48.55
7	27.38	29.97	26.21	27.37
8	28.02	27.5	27.74	25.94
9	27.9	45.41	30.23	35.98
10	38.85	51	34.1	37.74
11	35.01	48.43	34.97	39.25
12	34.2	40.41	36.5	36.66
13	30.49	44.34	34.11	35.6
14	38	44.69	38.65	39.15
15	33.9	51.62	36.27	41.52
16	37.75	60.02	44.56	53.93
17	35.59	60.03	39	46
18	28	27.66	28	28.50
19	25	28	29	30
20	26	28.55	30	32
21	29	28	30	33
22	28	29	30	31

Based on the task performances, the results found contrastly from some initial studies which found that doing code-switching is difficult. It costs longer time when people are switching from one language to another language, because they need to think some words from other languages. As it is stated by Poplack (n.d.) that some various problems will be appeared when people combine languages intra-sententially, especially it is derived from the using of word order different. Therefore, sometime people encounters challenges to process the words, they need time to switch the words from one language to another language.

The same theory found in Macnamara & Kushnir (1971 as cited in Moreno, et al, 2002), in their previous study, that bilingual read the mixed passage slower than read the single-passage.

Eventhought the table shows there is slightly difference time used by each participant in performing the tasks. However, when we run regression test to see the different time usage in performing the tasks, it was found there was no significant different time used by the participants in performing each task $F(0,05)=$ .354, $p>.05$. This result showed that it can be concluded that there is no affection of monolingual tasks and bilingual tasks in task performances. No result reflected that people took longer time in reading mixed-groups of words than single-groups of words. They could switch the codes easily without facing any problems as they did in a single group of works. Even though some initial studies found that the participants read the bilingual passages slower rather than monolingual passage, but this current study found different phenomenon. The participants could read the mixed-words group (whether L1 is dominance or L2 is dominance) as they did on the non-mixed words group.

It is assumed that they have ability to switch the codes rapidly because they have mastered both first language and second language. They were able to use those languages at the same time as their natural communication, without taking more time in producing any codes. As stated by Meuter & Allport (1999) assumed that bilingual people can switch their language rapidly. Sometimes, this process is happened unconsciously. Besides, people do the code switching, because they forget the meaning of words and they cannot find the appropriate word that they want to say. Therefore, they use the other words from the other language to help them in their communication. Moreover, with a great competence of bilingual, the code switching is found as a quiet normal form in conversation (Muysken, 1995). It was assumed that this code switching cost happened because of the students have great English ability, so they can perform the bilingual tasks as easy as the monolingual ones.

Not only that, Poplack (1980) noted that code-switching behavior may be used to measure bilingual ability in such a way where intra-sentential switches indicate a greater degree of competence in the two grammars involved, whereas inter-sentential switches do not generally require grammatical competence in both languages. Sometimes, people encounters challenges to process the words, they need time to switch the words from one language to another language, so they need to have great competence to switch the codes.

However, regarding to the English language ability, to prove whether the language Proficiency affects the cost of code switching, we ran the Annova test. This test was focused on the bilingual task English dominant and bilingual task with Indonesian dominant. Before going to the annova test, we did the normality test to prove that the population of this research is in normal distribution. The statistic result showed that $p=$ 0,097 with $p> \alpha=0,05$ means the result of dominant Indonesian bilingual task task was in normal distribution. Moreover, the same normal distribution is also found in the dominant English bilingual task, $p=$ 0,299 with $p> \alpha=0,05$. After that, the homogeneity test was conducted using *Levene's* test to see whether the data were homogenous or not. Based on the result, the data were homogenous, because the significant was found $>0,05$.

The statistic results showed that there was no significant effect of English language proficiency on the tasks bilingual with Indonesian was dominance, it is $F(0,05) = 0,190$, $p>0,05$; Moreover, as it was in the bilingual dominant Indonesian, the same results found in English was dominance, English proficiency did not give any effect on the time usage in the task performance. It was found $F(0,05) = 0,069$, $p> 0,05)$. The results did not approve hypothesis H_0, There is significant effect of English language proficiency on the tasks performance.

Based on the results found in this study, it can be concluded that the bilinguals can switch from one code to another code as easy as they produce one code only. It does not matter whether they master both languages or not, because the language proficiency does not give any effect on the code switching performance.

Conclusion

This current research found very different results from the initial researches. The results proved that the bilingual participants could switch the code easily and rapidly, they showed it while doing the tasks, they could read bilingual group of words as well as they read monolingual group of words. There was no significant different time used in performing all the task, monolingual tasks and bilingual tasks. Moreover, the results of this study broke the hypotheses' of the researchers that there is significant effect of English language proficiency on code swiching, because the statistic showed that there was no effect of English language proficiency on the bilingual tasks, neither Indonesian was dominant or English was dominant. It seems that the participants could switch the code naturally in their communication.

Acknowledgments

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