Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical review of several aspects concerning the linguistic phenomenon of code-switching. The review includes some terms which stand at the basis of communication: code-switching; its existence as a bilingual and multilingual phenomenon; the multilingual reality in Israel, and lastly, code-switching in the FL classroom. The methodology chapter presents the future research, which aims to examine code-switching between Hebrew-English and Hebrew-Arabic among bilinguals in Israel. The research will include three groups of Hebrew-English and Hebrew-Arabic speakers during discourses at different environments, in order to understand the perspectives involved in code-switching, its patterns and its circumstances.

Keywords: code-switching; discourse; speech act; code; bilingualism; multilingualism; FL classroom.

1. Introduction

This paper presents some issues concerning the linguistic phenomenon of code-switching, which will be the focus of a future research that will examine the phenomenon in Israel, a multilingual country. In addition to the theoretical part, the second chapter presents the methodological aspects of the future research.

The terms described in the first sub-chapter are: discourse, speech act and code. As it seems, these notions are crucial to understand when trying to examine the human communication in general, and code-switching in particular. Discourse is defined as the form of language we use when we speak or write (Gee, 2005); a speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication, containing between one word and several sentences (CARLA,
and a code can be defined as a system used for communication between two or more parties used on any occasions (Wardhaugh, 2010). In the present paper, as well as in the future research, this 'system used for communication' will be taken as language.

The sequential sub-chapters elaborate on code-switching and different issues concerning it. Code-switching has raised great scholarly interest during the last twenty years and has been given different definitions. One of the definitions sets that it is the practice of moving back and forth between two languages or between two dialects or registers of the same language. It has also been found to occur far more often in conversation than in writing (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

Various aspects are involved in the phenomenon of code-switching, but the most prominent ones are the sociolinguistic and the grammatical aspects, where the former try to account for different reasons for using this speech style, and also for factors like language choice and language proficiency (Cantone, 2007). However, after having been mostly analyzed according to sociolinguistic norms, since the 1960s, a huge interest in the grammaticality of mixed utterances has developed.

Naturally, since code-switching is the practice of moving back and forth between two languages, it is a widespread phenomenon in bilingual speech, and it is therefore not surprising that a great proportion of research on bilingualism focuses on this topic (Riehl, 2005). It was found that code-switching is a quite normal form of bilingual interaction, requiring a great deal of bilingual competence (Muysken, 1995). Most researchers in language research use the term 'bilingual' for users of two languages, and 'multilingual' for three or more (e.g. McArthur, 1998). However, the future research will use the term 'bilingual' to relate to speakers of two or more languages.

As an immigrant society, Israel includes a large percentage of native speakers of a variety of other languages, whose share in the population periodically increases due to waves of mass immigration from various parts of the world (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999). Legally, both Hebrew and Arabic have a status of official language in Israel (Yizhaki, 2008). Nevertheless, within the complex linguistic situation in Israel, English has a special place, being the mother tongue of a negligible portion of the population. Its presence in Israel is surpassed only by the presence of Hebrew, and it is the language of wider communication, used as a default option whenever the use of Hebrew is not possible (Reshef, 2003).

The knowledge of English is shared by all graduates of the Israeli school system. Since it is one of the compulsory subjects in all state schools in Israel, it should be noted that in the 1980s, code-switching received attention as a specific phenomenon and strategy of foreign language teachers. Since then, there has been a debate whether switching back and forth between the target language (TL) and the native language (L1) in the foreign language learning (EFL) classroom is helpful or impeding (Jingxia, 2010). Arguments for and against switching languages in the EFL classroom are presented in the last sub-chapter of the theoretical chapter.

The second chapter of this paper deals with the methodology of the future research, which will be conducted in the quantitative method in general, and according to discourse analysis in particular. Since the present research aims to examine the phenomenon of code-switching among Israeli bilingual speakers of Hebrew, English and Arabic, the participants will be of three groups of study: a staff of bilingual English teachers in a high school, a bilingual family – speakers of English and Hebrew and a group of bilingual construction workers – speakers of Hebrew and Arabic.

The data will be collected by observations of all three groups, recording of their discourses, transcribing the parts containing code-switching and, lastly, interviews of some of the research participants, in order to gain some deeper impression about their need to code switch.

2. Key concepts

This first chapter of this paper presents some key concepts, which stand at the basis of the future research and will be widely found in it. The first paragraph deals with discourse, speech act and code, as an introduction to the phenomenon of code-switching. The successive paragraphs present various issues concerning code-switching: what code-switching is; code-switching as a bilingual and multilingual phenomenon; multilingual reality in Israel and code-switching in the FL classroom.

2.1. Discourse, speech act and code

When we speak or write, we design what we have to say to fit the situation in which we are communicating.
However, at the same time, how we speak or write creates that very situation. It turns out that in this magical circle, we fit our language to a situation that our language, in turn, helps to create in the first place. The form of language we use is called discourse, and one may find different definitions of the term, but all share the idea that this is a who and what matter (Gee, 2005).

Various aspects are involved in the notion of discourse, such as linguistic, semantic, stylistic, and recently, also social. The new approach focuses on the social dimension of what we do when we produce a meaningful utterance in some context; in other words, the accomplishment of a speech act.

A speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication, which might contain just one word, as in "Leave!" to perform an order, or several words or sentences, as in "I am asking you to leave the room!" to perform a request (CARLA, 2014). Searle (1969) claimed that in a typical speech situation involving a speaker, a hearer and an utterance by the speaker, there are many kinds of acts associated with the speaker's utterance. Speech acts are acts of communication, so they intend to express a certain attitude, and the type of speech act being performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed.

We continually and actively build and rebuild our worlds not just through language but through language used in tandem with actions, interactions, non-linguistic symbol systems, objects, tools, technologies and other distinctive ways of thinking, valuing, feeling and believing (Gee, 2005). All means of communications are codes.

The concept of code was put forward by Bernstein (1971) and was defined as any system of signals (e.g. numbers, words, signs) which carries concrete meaning. Wardhaugh (2010) pointed out that the term code is a neutral term rather than terms such as dialect, language, style, and pidgin which may arouse emotions. Code can be used to refer to “any kind of system that two or more people employ for communication” (p.86).

Wardhaugh (2010) claimed that a code can be defined as a system used for communication between two or more parties used on any occasions. When two or more people communicate with each other in speech, the system of communication that they employ is a code. Therefore, whenever people speak to each other, they are required to select a particular code, and they may also decide to switch from one code to another or to mix codes, sometimes in very short utterances.

2.2. Code-switching

During the last twenty years, there has been a sharp rise of scientific interest in phenomena of bilingual speech, and especially in code-switching (Auer, 2013).

Code-switching is defined as the practice of moving back and forth between two languages or between two dialects or registers of the same language and it occurs far more often in conversation than in writing (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

Meisel (1994) explained the term code-switching by pointing out the competence of the speaker in both pragmatic and grammatical aspects of the languages involved. He also stated that code-switching demonstrates the ability of the speaker to select the language according to the interlocutor, the situational context, the topic of conversation, and more. In addition, he claimed, code-switching expresses the speaker's ability to change languages within an interactional sequence in accordance with sociolinguistic rules and without violating specific grammatical constraints.

There are common terms that are related to code-switching, and sometimes are even used alternatively, relating to the same phenomenon. Some of these are transfer, borrowing and code-mixing. In the present paper, the term 'code-switching' will be used as a general term to cover all aspects of code alternation between two different languages.

In addition, the scholarly literature offers different kinds of code-switching, but the most prominent ones are the inter-sentential and the intra-sentential code-switching, where the one which occurs during a conversation from sentence to sentence is called inter-sentential, and the other which occurs within a sentence and is called intra-sentential. 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.

Since code-switching is a natural phenomenon in bilingualism, multilingualism and language contact, scholars and experts in the field argue that it mainly falls into two categories, one of which is studying the structure or structural characteristics of code-switching from a linguistic perspective, and the other is studying the
functions and motivation of/for code-switching from a sociolinguistic perspective. There are also other approaches that are used to study code-switching, such as psycholinguistic approach, pragmatic approach and functional linguistic approach (Shen, 2010).

Sociolinguistic aspects of code-switching try to account for different reasons for using this speech style, and also for factors like language choice and language proficiency (Cantone, 2007). However, after having been mostly analyzed according to sociolinguistic norms, since the 1960s, a huge interest in the grammaticality of mixed utterances has developed. Several studies on adult code-switching in the last three decades (e.g. Timm, 1975; Poplack, 1980) have shown that this linguistic behavior is indeed constrained by grammatical principles, and is not just the random mixing of two languages (Cantone, 2007). According to this approach, several constraints have been formulated (e.g. the Equivalence Constraint, the Free Morpheme Constraint), in order to regulate code-switching from a grammatical point of view.

2.3. Code-switching as a bilingual and multilingual phenomenon

Most researchers in language research use the term 'bilingual' for users of two languages, and 'multilingual' for three or more (e.g. McArthur, 1998). In their view, 'bilinguals' are described as persons who use two languages, and bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages or the habitual use of two languages colloquially (Fabbro, 1999). A multilingual is a person who has the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of mixing, and the term 'polyglot' is sometimes used to describe multilingual individuals.

Other researchers (e.g. Wei, 2013) define bilingualism and multilingualism very similarly. They claim that both phenomena refer to the coexistence, contact and interaction of different languages in society or in an individual. Accordingly, a bilingual is defined as knowing two or more languages, so that bilingualism and multilingualism are used alternatively, as will be used in the present paper. Code-switching is a widespread phenomenon in bilingual speech, and it is therefore not surprising that a great proportion of research on bilingualism focuses on this topic (Riehhl, 2005). It was found that code-switching is a quite normal form of bilingual interaction, requiring a great deal of bilingual competence (Muysken, 1995).

In the last decades, developments such as massive population shifts through migration, the expansion of educational provision to many more levels of society, and technical advances in large communities have emphasized the existence of a visibly and audibly multilingual modern world (Milroy & Muysken, 1995). The ownership of two or more languages is increasingly seen as an asset as the "communication world" gets smaller. As immediate communication by phone and computer across the world has become a reality, and as air travel has brought people and countries closer together, so the importance of those who can operate in two or more languages has been highlighted (Baker, 2011).

It is a fact that bilingualism is present in practically every country of the world, in all classes of society and in all age groups. Moreover, it is difficult to find a society that is genuinely monolingual, since bilingualism is a phenomenon that has existed since a very early stage of human history, and the history of languages is full of examples of language contact leading to some form of bilingualism (Grosjean, 2001).

2.4. Multilingual reality in Israel

As an immigrant society, Israel includes a large percentage of native speakers of a variety of other languages, whose share in the population periodically increases due to waves of mass immigration from various parts of the world (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999).

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2014), in the year 2013, 16,884 new immigrants arrived in Israel, most of them from Russia (4,026), France (2,904), the United States of America (2,186) Ukraine (1,917) and Ethiopia (1,355). Apart from this, 35,600 foreign citizens with work permits entered Israel in the same year.

Legally, both Hebrew and Arabic have a status of official language in Israel, and the fundamental document which had established this goes back to the period of Mandatory Palestine (Yizhaki, 2008). Nevertheless, English is given precedence over Arabic in many contexts. Moreover, it is a compulsory subject of study from elementary school through graduation, and an essential subject in the matriculation exam. In the Jewish sector, it is the only foreign language studied by all for an extended period of time, and in the Arab sector it has been a second foreign language, after Hebrew.

Within the complex linguistic situation in Israel, English has a special place, being the mother tongue of a negligible portion of the population. Its presence in Israel is surpassed only by the presence of Hebrew; it is the language of wider communication, used as a default option whenever the use of Hebrew is not possible; it enjoys a
prestigious status; its knowledge is shared by all graduates of the Israeli school system; the exposure to it is high, and it plays a significant role in the professional and cultural life of larger portions of the population, especially among the affluent and educated parts of society (Reshef, 2003).

2.5. Is code-switching a matter of competence or performance?

The issue of competence versus performance of language has been widely addressed in the domain of language testing (Shohamy, 2004). When teaching students a language, teachers use different types of assessments to evaluate whether the students have learnt it properly. However, how can teachers know if the students will actually be able to use this language in real-life, or in other words, if students are competent in the target language? One way to assess this competency is through students' performance, though the teacher should be certain that this performance is an accurate measure of what students actually know.

Chomsky (1965) distinguished between competence and performance pointing out that competence is the knowledge of language, and performance is the actual use of language in concrete situations. According to this distinction, competence refers to the product, rather than the process, and is explained as the underlying knowledge of an idealized native speaker of a language in the area of grammar. Performance, on the other hand, is the language use, which may be flawed because of memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention or interest and other psychological factors. As a result, it is very difficult to assess competence without assessing performance; nevertheless, as Chomsky himself claimed, (1965, p.10): "investigation of performance will proceed only so far as understanding of underlying competence permits".

Examining the phenomenon of code-switching in the FL classroom raises the question whether it is a matter of bad performance, poor competence or neither. As it will be explained in the following paragraphs, there are different functions both from the teachers' and from the students' points of view, which lead them to switch codes in the FL classroom.

2.6. Code-switching in the FL classroom

In the 1980s, code-switching received attention as a specific phenomenon and strategy of foreign language teachers. Since then, there has been a debate whether switching back and forth between the target language (TL) and the native language (L1) in the foreign language learning classroom is helpful or impeding (Jingxia, 2010).

Some of the scholars (e.g. Chaudron, 1988; Lightbown, 2001) argued that the TL should be taught exclusively and teachers should focus on creating a pure foreign language environment, as they are the sole linguistic models for the students. In addition, they claimed, it is not necessary for learners to understand everything that is said to them by the teacher, and code-switching might result in negative transfer in foreign language learning. In their opinion, switching to L1 undermines the process of learning, whereas teaching entirely through the TL has numerous benefits such as making the language real and allowing learners to experience unpredictability. Wong-Fillmore (1985), for example, thought that learners who are used to hearing their teacher use the L1 tend to ignore the TL and, hence, do not fully benefit from valuable TL input.

From the teachers' point of view, code switching is not always performed consciously, so teachers are not always aware of the functions and outcomes of the code switching process. Whether the teacher switches codes consciously or not, it necessarily serves some basic functions, which may be beneficial in language learning environments. These functions are listed by Mattsson and Burenhult-Mattsson (1999) as topic switch, affective functions and repetitive functions, as explained hereinafter.

In topic switch cases, teachers alter their language according to the topic that is under discussion. This type of switching is mostly observed in grammar instruction, namely, when teachers shift language to the mother tongue of the students in dealing with particular grammar points taught at that moment. The students’ attention is directed to the new knowledge by making use of code switching and accordingly making use of native tongue. In fact, by code-switching, teachers construct a bridge from known (native language) to unknown (new foreign language content) in order to transfer the new content and meaning (Sert, 2005). Cole (1998) explained this situation as follows: “a teacher can exploit students’ previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2”.

Code switching also carries affective functions that serve for expressing emotions. For example, code switching is used by the teacher to build solidarity and intimate relations with the students, or to create a supportive language environment in the classroom. Modupeola (2013) claimed that code switching helps learners to enjoy their learning due to their ability to comprehend the teachers' input. Understanding what is being said constitutes psychological
support for the learners, allows them to feel less stressful and anxious, and makes TL more comfortable to learn. At that state, learners can focus and take part in classroom activities in a more successful way.

In respect of the repetitive function of code-switching, the teacher uses code switching in order to transfer the necessary knowledge in further clarity. Following the instruction in target language, the teacher code switches to native language, clarifies meaning and stresses importance on the foreign language content for efficient comprehension. However, this repetition may lead to loss of interest on the part of students, as they get used to hearing instructions in their native language right after the instructions in the foreign language. The academic consequences in such cases are negative, as the students are exposed to foreign language discourse limitedly (Sert, 2005). Similarly, Modupeola (2013) found that a situation where a teacher gives an instruction in one language and repeats it in another language within the same period of time will slow down the rate of learning of the TL. This unwanted result is derived from the fact that the learners have mastered this pattern of teaching and, therefore, may not take seriously what is being taught since they know for certain that the same message will be delivered in L1.

As opposed to this view, others (e.g. Levine, 2003) supported code-switching in the foreign language teaching, arguing that L1 can promote the learning of TL. They claimed that code-switching is a good strategy of efficiency in FL teaching and that the L1 should have a place in this classroom.

As it is the case for teachers’ code switching, the students also are not always aware of the reasons, functions and outcomes of code-switching. The functions mentioned by Eldridge (1996) are: equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration, and conflict control.

Regarding the function of equivalence, the student makes use of the native equivalent of a certain lexical item in target language and code switches to the native tongue. In other words, the student uses the native lexical item when he/she does not have the competence for using the target language equivalent for a particular lexical item. Therefore, equivalence functions as a defensive mechanism for students as it gives the student the opportunity to continue communication by bridging the gaps resulting from foreign language incompetence.

Stern (1992) noted that since the learner inevitably works from an L1 reference base, it would be helpful for him to “orient himself in the L2 through the L1 medium or by relating L2 phenomena to their equivalents in L1” (p.285). Similarly, Cook (2001) claimed that letting the students use their L1 allows them to say what they genuinely wish to say. He also argued that regarding the students’ L1 as a resource instead of a barrier to successful learning would help to create more authentic users of the TL.

Floor-holding is another function of students' code-switching. While conducting a conversation in the target language, the students fill the gaps with native language use, as a mechanism to avoid deficiency in communication. Code-switching deriving from the need to hold the floor indicates lack of fluency in target language or inability to recall the appropriate target language structure or lexicon.

According to Eldridge (1996), reiteration, the third consideration in students' code-switching, is a situation where “messages are reinforced, emphasized, or clarified where the message has already been transmitted in one code, but not understood” (Ibid, p.306). In this case, the student repeats the message in native tongue, either because they may not have transferred the meaning exactly in target language' or because they think that it is more appropriate to code switch in order to indicate the teacher that the content is clearly understood by them.

The last function of students’ code switching to be introduced here is conflict control. The student uses code-switching in order to avoid a misunderstanding, as a strategy to transfer the intended meaning whenever there is a lack of some culturally equivalent lexis among the native language and target language. In this case, there may be violation of the transference of intended meaning, which may result in code-switching for conflict control; therefore, possible misunderstandings are avoided.

Since there is no consent among researchers regarding code-switching in the FL classroom, it may be more acceptable to claim that code-switching should be allowed whenever necessary with some learners in specific situations (Dash, 2002). In addition, code-switching should be regarded as a careful strategy employed by the teachers, which has some positive and facilitating functions approved by both the teachers and learners, such as explaining grammar and new vocabulary, reducing learners’ stress, clarifying instructions and establishing a relationship with learners.

3. Methodology

The future research aims to examine instances of code-switching done by bilingual speakers in Israel between
the languages English-Hebrew and Hebrew-Arabic from various perspectives, as mentioned previously, such as sociolinguistic and grammatical ones.

The research method chosen for this type of examination is the qualitative one. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, namely, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009). According to that interest, qualitative research uses methods such as participant observation or case studies, which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011). Denzin & Lincoln (2005) explained that qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible, transform the world, and turn it into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. Due to all aforementioned characteristics of qualitative method, it was found suitable for the purpose of the future research.

Within the qualitative method, the research will embrace the discourse analysis, which studies 'naturally' occurring language, as opposed to text resulting from more 'artificial' contexts, and it aims to extract social and cultural meanings and phenomena from the discourse studied (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013).

3.1. Research participants

Since the present research aims to examine the phenomenon of code-switching among Israeli bilingual speakers of Hebrew, English and Arabic, the participants will be of three groups of study as follows.

1) The first group of participants consists of nine high school English teachers, all of them are bilingual, but the matrix language (i.e. the dominant language) varies between them.
2) The second group consists of 5 family members. The mother is an American English speaker, the father is an Israeli Hebrew speaker. The couple has two daughters: the elder one is 29 years old, married to an American English speaker, and the younger one is 25 years old. All family members speak English and Hebrew alternatively.
3) The third group consists of nine construction workers who work at a construction site in Tel-Aviv, Israel. The workers are all bilingual men, speakers of Hebrew and Arabic.

3.2. Research questions

The research targets to answer the following questions:

1. What patterns of code-switching can be identified within Israeli society as a multi-lingual reality?
2. In what circumstances do people in Israel code-switch?
3. What grammatical/cultural/psychological/educational factors are involved in code-switching between Hebrew-English and Hebrew-Arabic?
4. What are the causes of code-switching (e.g. idleness / family composition / convenience / schooling)?

3.3. Research tools

Within the framework of the discourse analysis, the research will include several tools: participant observations and nonparticipant observations of all 3 groups, which will be recorded, and transcribing of the parts including code-switching for the purpose of using them in the dissertation as examples for analysis. In addition, the research will include semi-structured interviews of some of the participants, in order to get some deeper impression about their need to code switch.

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