On attitudes towards code-switching among English Philology students

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse attitudes towards, and reasons for, code-switching among English Philology students. The authors show the evolution in the perception of code-switching by linguists. In the past it was seen as a violation of the linguistic norm, whereas today it is often perceived as an indispensable tool in the process of communication among bi- and multilingual speakers. The attitudes of linguists have been compared with those of students and laypeople. It appears that code-switching may be both a valuable linguistic tool which enlarges one's linguistic repertoire and a sign of linguistic incompetence, which is reflected in the mixed attitudes towards this phenomenon among English Philology students, who usually present a high level of linguistic awareness.

Key words

Stosunek do przełączania kodu językowego
wśród studentów filologii angielskiej

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest opis i analiza stosunku studentów filologii angielskiej do przełączania kodu językowego oraz motywacji dla jego użycia. Autorzy przedstawiają ewolucję w postrzeganiu go przez językoznawców: w przeszłości jako rażącego łamania normy językowej, dziś zaś jako często niezastąpionego narzędzia w procesie komunikacji w sytuacji dwu- i wielojęzyczności. Postawy językoznawców porównane zostały z postawami laików oraz studentów. Wydaje się, że przełączanie kodów może być zarówno cennym narzędziem lingwistycznym, które poszerza repertuar językowy, jak i znakiem braku kompetencji, co znajduje odzwierciedlenie w niejednoznacznych postawach wobec tego zjawiska wśród studentów filologii angielskiej, którzy zazwyczaj wykazują wysoką świadomość lingwistyczną.

Słowa kluczowe

przełączanie kodu językowego, postawy, polscy studenci, niemieccy studenci, filologia angielska

1.   Introduction

Bilingual and multilingual speakers are known for their ability to interchangeably use words, phrases, sentences or blocks of sentences from two (or more) different languages or language varieties in the course of one conversation. This ability is referred to as *code-switching* by linguists.[1] This paper will use

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[1] Usually this term refers to any switch within the course of a single conversation, whether at the word or sentence level or at the level of blocks of speech. It is sometimes used in a broader sense and includes switching at a situational level i.e. applying different codes depending on situation, even if no switches in the course of one conversation occur. Some linguists also use the term code-mixing, e.g. McArthur differentiates between code-switching and code-mixing by claiming that "the term code-mixing emphasises hybridization, and the term code-switching emphasises movement from one langua-

the definition provided by *A Dictionary of Sociolinguistics* (2004):

> code-switching refers to instances when speakers switch between codes (languages, or language varieties) in the course of conversation. Switches may involve different amounts of speech and different linguistic units – from several consecutive utterances to individual words and morphemes (Swann et al. 2004: 40).

Code-switching has been the object of numerous linguistic studies in recent years, including descriptions of the linguistic behaviour of English Philology students in Poland (Niżegorodcew 2000, Gabryś-Barker 2007, Golubiewski 2012, Dąbrowska 2013).

The aim of this paper is to present the attitudes towards code-switching (CS) among English Philology students and to confront these attitudes with the views of linguists and laypeople. It seems worthwhile to have a closer look at this aspect of CS, since it has not received proper attention so far. Moreover, motivations for using code-switching will be analyzed. The examples and opinions have been collected from English Philology students, both at the University of Gdańsk in Poland and at the University of Koblenz-Landau in Germany (campus Landau),[2] who are proficient in both their mother-tongue and in English, i.e. they "can produce monolingual well-formed sentences in either language, even if they show more ability in one language than the other" (Myers-Scotton 1995: 73). At

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ge to another" (McArthur 1992: 228). Code-mixing is sometimes treated as a synonymous term to intra-sentential code-switching (e.g. Muysken 2000: 1).

[2] The statements concerning CS practices among English Philology students at the University of Gdańsk are based on observations from two different perspectives: a member of the students' community in the years 2006-2010 and 2013-2015 (Marta Noińska) and a lecturer in the English Department (Michał Golubiewski), as well as interviews with students, examples collected by students in the years 2010-2017 and surveys conducted in 2010 (50 surveys). The statements concerning CS practices at the University of Koblenz-Landau are based on observations made by Marta Noińska during her studies in Landau in 2009-2010 and surveys conducted in 2010 (50 surveys).

both universities all of the lectures and classes are conducted in English, therefore the students use both English and their mother tongue on a daily basis. The vast majority of students fall into the category of the so-called *elite* bilinguals who acquired the second language with the help of teachers' instruction and decided to learn it for personal or professional gain.

2.   Attitudes towards CS – an outline

It is interesting to analyze attitudes towards code-switching due to its controversial status – it is considered to be a sign of high linguistic competence by numerous linguists, but it is discouraged and viewed as a violation of linguistic norms by others, especially language purists (compare: Bullock and Toribio 2012: 1).

Uriel Weinreich, a pioneer of bilingualism studies, in his book *Languages in Contact* describes code-switching within one linguistic unit as a "deviation from the norms" resulting from poor linguistic upbringing. He labels it as interference and accepts switches only in the case of a change of the interlocutor or a change of situation, and never within the same sentence (Weinrech 1953: 72). Even though the perception of CS by linguists has become increasingly positive over the years, both mono- and multilingual speakers' attitudes towards this phenomenon are still rather negative and resemble Weinreich's views. CS is often perceived as a sign of laziness, linguistic incompetence and impurity (Edwards 1995: 75, Bullock and Toribio 2012: 11).

Jan-Petter Blom and John Joseph Gumperz's paper (1972) *Social meaning in linguistic structures* contributed to the change in opinions concerning CS. Blom and Gumperz not only distinguished between situational and metaphorical code-switching, but also introduced the notions of *we-code/they-code* and listed code-switching functions.[3] Thanks to this pub-

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[3] Situational switching is switching triggered by a change of situation and is employed by bilingual speakers in order to maintain the appropriateness

lication, CS became the focus of interest for a great number of researchers (Auer 1998: 1).

Considering the varied purposes it might serve, a significant number of contemporary sociolinguists perceive code-switching as "a valuable linguistic tool, which very often has its purpose and logic" (Baker 2006: 109). It can be used as a means of expressing identity or reflecting a *we-code – they-code* opposition. For instance, "to gain acceptance or status, a person may deliberately and consciously use a minority language as a form of affiliation or belonging to a group" (Baker 2006: 7). One can also use a more prestigious language to express identification with a higher strata of society, or in order to underline a new identity (e.g. in the case of emigrants). McArthur also notices that CS serves a number of social functions, such as marking ethnic and group boundaries, expressing speakers' attitudes towards what is being said or showing knowledge of the out-group/ dominant language with higher status (McArthur 1992: 229).

Bernard Spolsky underlines the linguistic possibilities that switching between languages gives to bilingual speakers:

> The election of a language by a bilingual, especially when speaking to another bilingual, carries a wealth of social meaning. Each language becomes a virtual guise for the bilingual speaker, who can change identity as easily as changing a hat, and can use language choice as a way of negotiating social relations with an interlocutor (Spolsky 1998: 50).

McCormick points out that proficient bilingual speakers "are able to draw on a bigger linguistic pool than they would be if they and their interlocutors were monolingual" (McCormick 2001: 453). Carol Myers-Scotton and Janice Jake note that it

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of a conversation. Metaphorical switching, by contrast, reveals a special communicative intent; for instance, it can signal a change in relationship role. *We-code* is a minority language used to mark the in-group, informal, and personalized activities, while *they-code* is employed to speak about out-group, more formal, and distant events (McArthur 1992: 229).

is possible to search for organizing principles in CS within the Matrix Language Frame and propose "a set of principled predictions" about "what does and does not occur in CS" (Myers-Scotton and Jake 2012: 336-357). This is very important, since CS has often been misunderstood and seen as an "uncontrolled speech form" where languages are randomly mixed (Bullock and Toribio 2012:13).

Barbara E. Bullock and Almeida Jacqueline Toribio express views typical of representatives of American descriptivism, and juxtapose the descriptive linguists' approach towards CS and the prescriptive approach of laypeople:

> While CS is viewed as an index of bilingual proficiency among linguists, it is more commonly perceived by the general public as indicative of language degradation. This disparity can be best understood by reference to notions of grammar. Most laypeople define grammar as a set of statements about how we should correctly use our language. Such an understanding of grammar is properly called *prescriptive*, because it attempts to mandate or prescribe the language should be used. Linguists, who study language objectively, are more interested in descriptive grammars, which represent speakers' unconscious knowledge of their languages as manifested in their actual linguistic behaviour. (Bullock and Toribio 2012:1)

Most research on code-switching thus far has been based on analyses of the linguistic material collected in multilingual communities outside of Europe as well as communities of immigrants in Europe and the US, where code-switching is often associated with insufficient linguistic competence. Attitudes towards CS within such communities are generally negative, which does not change the fact that their members inadvertently deploy it (Bullock and Toribio 2012: 11). McArthur points out that:

> Some communities have special names, often pejorative or facetious, or both, for a hybrid variety: in India, *Hindlish* and *Hinglish* are used for the widespread mixing of Hindi and English; in Nige-

ria, *amulumala* (verbalsalad) is used for English and Yoruba mixing and switching; in the Philippines, the continuum of possibilities is covered by the terms *Tagalog—Engalog—Taglish—English,* in Quebec, by *français—franglais—Frenglish—English* (McArthur 1992: 229).

The reasons for such a situation may be found in both language ideology and in the educational process of foreign language acquisition. Even though multilingualism is present in most communities around the world, it is monolingualism that is often seen as more natural. This is due to the prevalent monolingualist language ideology according to which "each ethnic group has a language of its own and by virtue of this difference deserves political autonomy" (Gal 2007:149). Such a view of language implies that multilingualism is connected with political unreliability or mixed loyalty. In recent years this ideology has been partly undermined by the creation and extension of the European Union, as well as by increasing globalization. This is especially the case with English as a global language of business, scholarship and diplomacy (Gal 2007: 153). Speaking English in addition to one's mother tongue is seen as advantageous and modern. Yet, as Susan Gal remarks, multilingual migrants are often stigmatized for using more than one language, particularly for code-switching, which is usually considered insufficiently "pure" (Gal 2007: 153).

In numerous cases, CS is perceived as an instance of transfer in a foreign language classroom. Students who do not know, or forget, a given word often insert a word from their mother tongue and expect the teacher to provide them with the right lexeme in English. This can be viewed as an instance of insufficient linguistic competence, however such a scenario is by far not the only case in which CS is used.[4] Barbara E. Bullock and Almeida Jacqueline Toribio note that:

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[4] Some researchers would not label such instances as CS. For instance, Carol Myers-Scotton defines CS more narrowly and draws a line between L1/L2 interference and CS (Myers-Scotton 1995: 73).

[...] particularly in the early stages of acquisition, CS results from an inability to produce a target form. Due to temporary or permanent lapses in knowledge, learners may switch to the native language, a process referred to as *crutching*. But as their proficiency develops, CS among second language learners and folk bilinguals, if attested, will resemble that of more fluent bilinguals.

The lack of mother-tongue insertions is associated with higher linguistic competence, which tends to shape negative attitudes towards transfer.

3.   Code-switching among English Philology students

CS is a constant practice at the University of Gdańsk and at the University of Koblenz-Landau among both students and lecturers of English Philology. The teachers usually use their mother tongue when talking about organizational issues and switch to English when they start the lecture proper. They will also employ their L1 to repeat difficult pieces of information in order to facilitate understanding, or to achieve a comic effect. The students also code-switch frequently during classes, for instance, when asked to work in groups they insert English literary or grammar terms from books and articles into sentences in their mother tongue. It is also common for students to forget a word in English and switch to German or Polish.

Outside of the lecture-halls, students' code-switching has a different character. It is mostly tag-switching in their mother tongue. English words are used mainly as means of emphasis or as humorous elements, making the style of speaking more vivid. Moreover, it serves as a group identification marker, since CS is characteristic of most English Philology students' idiolects.

The respondents of the survey were asked to write down the foreign inclusions they and their fellow students used most frequently. Table 1 shows the most commonly used words (noted by at least 3 respondents).

Table 1

Respondents				Respondents' colleagues			
Polish		German		Polish		German	
research	12	*cool*	6	*fuck*	9	*fuck*	9
fuck	10	*whatever*	5	*whatever*	8	*shit*	8
whatever	8	*please*	4	*research*	7	*sorry*	7
ok	7	*damn*	3	*ok*	6	*cool*	6
sorry	7	*honey*	3	*oh my god*	4	*whatever*	5
WTF (*what the fuck*)	5	*party*	3	*dude*	3		
hello	4	*people*	3	*WTF* (*what the fuck*)	3		
Jesus	4	*thanks*	3				
cool	3						
handout	3						
indeed	3						
oh my god	3						
speech	3						

Analyzing English Philology students' linguistic behaviour shows that CS is a natural phenomenon among multilingual speakers, not only among immigrants or in multilingual countries, but also among people who simply use two (or more) languages frequently. This analysis confirms that CS is not necessarily connected with linguistic incompetence, since the students are without a doubt proficient in their L1.

3.1. Attitudes towards code-switching among English Philology students

Generally, the attitudes of English Philology students towards CS are more positive (especially among German students) than

those of immigrants, which reflects the high status ascribed to the English language.

42% of the German students and 54% of the Polish students expressed a neutral attitude or mixed feelings towards CS, marking it as positive as long as it is not used too frequently or in order to show off. Only 8% of the German students perceived it as negative. They gave the following reasons:

– *Sometimes it sounds weird and you get the impression that people want to seem cool.*
– *I feel angry about it because the quality of the German language becomes bad.*

24% of the Polish students considered code-switching to be a negative phenomenon producing insufficiently "pure" language. They mentioned the following reasons for such a perception of CS:

– *We should use our native language.*
– *We should speak proper Polish.*
– *It's silly and proves you don't speak your own language correctly.*
– *It's a sign of laziness and clumsiness of language - people don't try to be accurate.*
– *Our native language is so beautiful that we shouldn't trash it with borrowing.*
– *It doesn't sound natural when you speak Polish and suddenly you use an English word.*
– *You forget Polish words.*
– *Students who code-switch sometimes seem to boast about their knowledge of English.*

Such statements show that many Polish students regard CS as impure and detrimental. Negative attitudes among the German students are not as common, even though they are also present. The German students surveyed usually considered CS to be a neutral phenomenon ubiquitous in the English Department. The reason for a more positive attitude towards CS is

that the English language and code-switching are very popular in Germany, not only among students of English, but also on TV, on the radio and in newspapers. It is usually perceived as modern and fashionable. 50% of the German survey respondents considered it to be a positive phenomenon, compared with only 22% of the Polish respondents. One of the German students wrote:

- *It is positive because it is a sign of globalization and open-mindedness.*

Some Polish students also expressed positive attitudes towards CS and noticed the linguistic possibilities that it gives them:

- *CS is positive and funny. Utterances are more vivid.*
- *It is positive because people who code-switch have a broader spectrum of phrases to choose from and they are able to directly convey their message.*
- *It is positive because it demands more involvement and knowledge from the interlocutor.*

The attitudes of the students resemble a general trend in the perception of CS. Disregarded as impure by some, it is also admired as a sign of "linguistic virtuosity" and seen as a creative process (Bullock and Toribio 2012:11).

3.2. Reasons for code-switching among English Philology students

At this point, it seems worthwhile to have a closer look at the reasons for using CS named by the students themselves, since these reasons reflect the students' attitudes towards this phenomenon.

Anna Niżegorodcew (2000: 154-155) mentions naming new reality connected with studies and playing with language as the main reasons for code-switching among English Philology students. She also notices that students often code-switch

without any obvious reason or use English grammatical structures in Polish. Danuta Gabryś-Barker points out that the latter could be a sign of language attrition, however this idea requires further investigation (Gabryś-Barker 2007: 301).

Gabryś-Barker (2007), following Baker (1997), analyses CS functions at the semantic and sociocultural levels. Among probable reasons for students' CS she lists: faster lexical access, manifesting group-identity, inability to find a synonymous expression in the other language and linguistic sloppiness (Gabryś-Barker 2007: 304).

The most common cause for CS which was mentioned by the surveyed and interviewed students is forgetting or not knowing a given word in the other language (not necessarily in the L2). Here, switching is the result of either a linguistic incompetence (especially when a word in the L2 is not known) or a sign that someone uses the other language more often while talking about certain topics.

Another reason very frequently mentioned by both Polish and German students is that a foreign expression better matches a given context as there is no exact equivalent in the other language. As the respondents expressed it:

- – *Because it sounds better sometimes.*
- – *If a word sounds better in English than in German.*

An inserted word seems to sound better because it can fully express the message that the speaker wants to convey, e.g.

- – *– Chcesz obejrzeć jakiś horror?*
  *– Dzięki, nie. Ten ostatni film był taki **creepy**, że nie mam ochoty na więcej.*
- – *OK, **drama queen**, przestań wreszcie płakać.*
- – *To nie będzie **student-friendly** sesja.*

Students at both universities code-switch back into their mother-tongue in order to make a statement clear, to explain

what they meant. This is also the technique used by lecturers for explaining complicated notions or difficult tasks.

Many of the Polish students wrote that they code-switch for humorous reasons. It seems that a comic effect can be achieved thanks to Polish being a highly inflectional language, e.g.

- *Przyniosłeś mi piwo? Ale **słitaśnie** (= sweet)*.
- *Mam nadzieję, że wieczór masz wolny, bo idziemy **densić** (= dance) na Pokład.*
- *Co powiesz na mały **plażing** dziś wieczorem?*

Laziness is another reason mentioned only by the Polish students. It is probably caused by the fact that, as mentioned in the previous section, the attitudes of many Polish students towards code-switching are rather negative (unlike the German students).

By contrast, the German students claim that they code-switch to sound more modern and because it is fashionable. There were no similar statements among the surveyed Poles.

The students at both universities noticed that they code-switch mostly while talking to friends or to their fellow students, which is consistent with the linguists' observation of the bilingual speakers' linguistic behaviours.[5] Both the German and the Polish survey respondents mentioned that their emotions influence their code-switching, as evidenced in the following situations: *when I talk about something emotionally important; when I'm very excited about a subject; when I am nervous.*

CS can be used to make the utterance more vivid and emotional, e.g.

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[5] Weinreich (1953) noticed that when bilingual speakers talk to each other switching occurs very often, whereas when they talk to monolingual speakers the number of "interferences" is much smaller. This observation has been developed in Francois Grosjean's theory of bilingual modes of speech (compare: Grosjean 2006: 37).

  – *Co za **fail**. Zapomniałam zrobić pracę domową.*
  – *Byłam na nartach. Było **awesome**.*
  – *Dobra, to moja wina. **Guilty as fuck**.*

The respondents were also asked about the reasons why their fellow students code-switch. The most frequently mentioned causes, beginning with the most frequent, were: forgetting words/ lack of vocabulary, linguistic economy, accuracy, comic effect, showing off, sounding cool, laziness, habit, expressing group identity, adding emphasis, and making the conversation more interesting.

Most of the answers mentioned above overlap with the answers given to explain self-code-switching. Predictably, the students gave a few more reasons than in the case of their own code-switching, such as showing off or sounding cool. Another interesting observation is that the Polish survey respondents mentioned comic effect much more frequently than the German ones.

4.   Conclusion

It appears that code-switching may be both a valuable linguistic tool which enlarges one's linguistic repertoire and a sign of linguistic incompetence. It can be used as a means of achieving greater accuracy, linguistic economy, for emphasis, or in order to make one's utterance humorous. Bilingual speakers often code-switch in order to express a concept that has no equivalent in the culture of the other language or when the other language contains the more accurate term (Gardner-Chloros 2009:32). In the case of a lack of a given term in the matrix language, code-switching can be seen as the first stage of borrowing.

It is important to note that even though many switches are purposeful, some seem to be merely a byproduct of bilingual communication or simple instances of transfer since they are not a sign of linguistic creativity or accuracy, nor do they serve any specific conversational purpose. The vast majority of stu-

dents code-switch when they forget a word in the other language. The amount of the "unwanted" switches may be reduced by expanding vocabulary in both languages. This helps to explain the mixed attitudes towards this phenomenon among English Philology students, who usually present a high level of linguistic awareness.

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