A Critique of Mehmet Celik's article'Teaching Vocabulary through code-mixing'

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Abstract: The article attempted to explore into the concept of code-mixing by criticizing an article by Mehmet Celik from the research methodology and its findings, and drew a different conclusion.
Keywords: Code-mixing; Methodology; Findings

Code-mixing is a widespread phenomenon in bilingual or immigrant communities where speakers use their native tongue and their second language in certain different domains. It is believed that selective, principled use of L1 due to its practicality and efficiency can stimulate the learners' progress in the EFL classes.

1. Topic and context of the research study

In order to explore how code-mixing can be applied to vocabulary teaching and learning in EFL classes, the author conducts a small-scale experiment in his research. The participants are 19 Turkish first year university EFL teacher trainees, who are at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels in one class. The author acts both as teacher and researcher in the study. In order to explore the effect of using code-mixing in EFL classes, the author firstly defines code-mixing as a phenomenon in which a word or an expression from one language is used in a group of words whose structure belongs to another distinct language and then the author uses a connectionist model which is a useful explanation of how linguistic information is encoded to explain how new vocabulary is learnt by establishing a meaning connection through the use of a native vocabulary item couched in a string of English words. Finally, the author cites Schmidt[1]'s theory about conscious learning to introduce the teaching strategy of storytelling in code-mixing to generate and make connections among ideas, in addition to vocabulary and grammatical structures associated with those ideas[1].

2. A descriptive account of the research design and process

To clarify the questions, the author conducts a small-scale experiment with 19 participants. However, since it lacks a control group. The independent variable in this experiment is the way of using storytelling with code-mixing to teach the vocabulary in EFL class and the dependent variable is how well the learner can learn the vocabulary with that method. The author also sets up an explicit task with three procedures: listening task, oral task and written task. The data are collected from the oral task and written task through observation[2]and elicitation. The author collected the written samples in the qualitative form and then converted them into the quantitative form[2].

The finding of this study is the learner can learn the vocabulary in an effective way by the means of storytelling with code-mixing. Data in this research are collected in two methods and analyzed separately to investigate the effectiveness of code-mixing to teach and learn vocabulary in EFL classes. From the data of the 19 students' output in oral task, though there is lots of doubt about the systematicity of the observation here, the author attempts to use what he observed to indicate the learner has learnt the target items. The data of the 19 students' output in written task are used by the author in two ways: written samples and target lexis table. The samples show the ways how the learners use the words and the number of the words uses by the learners are then put into a table with two categories[3]. Since there is no L1 use in the table and most the uses by the learners are related uses and right uses, which can be seen as successful encoding learning of new vocabulary in input. The author asserts that using code-mixing to selectively utilize L1 words in teaching L2 vocabulary items does not negatively affect the acquisition of new vocabulary[3]. From all the written samples, the author finds some of the misuses come from the syntactic functions, which is based on the learner's existing morphosyntactic knowledge to use the new vocabulary for other syntactic function; and some of the misuses are from the misspelling, the reason of which is not analyzed by the author. Consequently, the author asserts again that using code-mixing with storytelling is an effective way to teach the target vocabulary though some minor spelling problems may exist[4].

3. An evaluative commentary on the findings and conclusion.

Before the experiment, the author assumed the successful application of code-switching in EFL class may indicate of the satisfactory result of using code-mixing in EFL class as well. Code-switching and code-mixing are referred to the same concept in some

literatures, for example Oxford[4] defines 'code-switching' a way for speaking L2 involving using the mother tongue for an expression and Marasigan[5] explains code-mixing and code-switching share the same meaning and same sociological function. The author, however, made a different definition of code-switching and code-mixing in his research, and he recognizes them as two different concepts. In addition, the author did not explain the relationship between code-mixing and code-switching especially their linguistic function in language. Hence, the reference to the study of code-switching in EFL class is not tightly linked with the author's study of code-mixing applied in EFL class.

The author chose 19 Turkish first year university EFL teacher trainees as the participants, who were at intermediate and upper-intermediate levels in one class. However, the author did not explain the reason he chose this particular group of learners. The 19 learners are selected in the same class and same country; the sampling is not random and its generalization [2] is doubtful. 2) the level of the learners who were at intermediate and upper-intermediate may not be applied to the study of another situation. The internal validity is doubtful. 3) the number of the participants is 19, the experiment is not based on a large-enough scale to incorporate all the design features which control[5].

Since there is no control group in this experiment, we might develop rival hypotheses[6] that the superior performance of the learner was due to the reason that they might have stronger motivation or high aptitude to learn. As a result, the internal validity of the study is not convincing. Without pretest is another factor to threaten the validity of the experiment. Therefore, we may not know whether the leaner have leant the words or not before the experiment.

Related uses are recognized as the most important evidence to support the author's hypothesis; however, he seemed to analyze it in a simplistic way. He claimed that related use reveals that participants comprehended the concept signified by the word and this is an indication that this word was accurately linked or connected to other words in the same semantic field. However, since semantic field concerned with the analysis of the meaning of the words, his claim is more focused on the meaning of the words not the form. In addition, Nation emphasized[7] that the strength of the connection between the form and its meaning will determine how readily the learner can retrieve the meaning when seeing or hearing the word form, or retrieve the word form when wishing to express the meaning. The learner cannot make the connection between the written form and meaning of the word, since there is no input of written form of the word in the task. This may also explain the reason the learners are more likely to use the related uses instead of the target items in their written samples. From this point of view, the related uses can be seen as the lack of written form input, which may influence the learners' better internalization of vocabulary[6].

The author claimed that code-mixing does not require additional material and a simple story is sufficient context to present target lexis and provide sufficient input for the learners. However, he mentioned paradoxically in the drawback of his research that due to the absence of visual support of input, further remedial spelling sessions could be included in follow-on lessons. The author mentioned the learner regardless of level can find this sufficient input. For those beginners, who have little knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, the listening task may contain too much unfamiliar information, which might cause the listening overload[7].

The author considered storytelling in code-mixing required less time and its preparation and implementation required minimal time. There is, however, no control group to use another teaching method to make the comparison. The author claimed preparation of this technique required minimal time, however, he also mentioned if the teacher does not share the same L1 with the students, more time may be required to make the preparation. Lastly, the implementation of the story required some time as well. The context should be suitably picked out; the content should be carefully chosen.

4. Conclusion

The research study investigates the application of code-mixing in vocabulary learning and teaching in EFL class. Although there are some flaws in the research, the study shows that careful and judicious use of code-mixing can lead to appropriate successful teaching and learning of new vocabulary in EFL class, and some areas may demand further exploration.

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