

# University Students' Attitudes towards English-Tagalog Code-Switching in Classroom Instruction

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## Abstract

The present study looks into attitudes of university students towards the use of Tagalog- English code switching in classroom instruction. The study involved 96 student respondents that took a questionnaire survey and a matched-guse test.

*Keywords:* Code-switching, language of instruction, language and learning

## The Study and Its Background

A typical Filipino (those not living in a Tagalog-using area) grows up to at least speak three languages: (1) the vernacular for the home and wider community, (2) English for education, commerce, science and technology, and wider communication (both intra- and international), and (3) Filipino (which masks Tagalog) primarily as a symbol for national unity and linguistic identity (Gonzalez, 1998). Thus, as with all bilingual and multilingual situations, code-switching (CS) is an inevitable consequence, “a salient phenomenon and experience to most Filipinos” (Bautista, 1991, p. 28). CS is a bilingual’s ability to alternate between two languages in an unchanged setting usually within the same utterance (Bullock & Toribio, 2009). It may take various forms, from insertion of single lexical items to the merging of bigger syntactic and discourse patterns. It is produced by bilinguals of varying degrees of proficiency and their also of varying degrees of alternation. CS is usually exploited to fill linguistic gaps, express ethnolinguistic identity, and achieve particular discursive aims.

CS as a linguistic phenomenon among bilinguals has actually caught the attention of scholars (primarily those in linguistics and sociolinguistics) and non-scholars alike in the Philippines (and other countries as well). Earlier studies on CS in the Philippines have been summarized by Bautista in a 1991 state-of-the-art paper, studies which have primarily dealt on the linguistics (most especially grammar) of English-Tagalog code-switching (ETCS). The more recent studies have actually been more involved with pedagogical implications of CS for education and language teaching. This was primarily motivated by Bernardo’s (2005) proposal to use CS as a resource in teaching and learning:

code-switching can be a legitimate and potent resource for learning and teaching for bilingual students and teachers, and that we [Filipinos in general and stakeholders in Philippine education in particular] should relax our language prescription in formal school environments to allow students and teachers to benefit from the use of this *efficacious* resource of developing knowledge and understanding. [emphasis added] (p. 163)

Bernardo's (2005) proposal has been supported with empirical evidences by Martin (2006a, 2006b), who examined classroom discourse (written) of tertiary-level students. She gathered her data (audio- and video-taped) from two respective classes and from two private, non-sectarian universities in Manila, the Philippines, where general education science was taught to freshmen students. The recorded data was transcribed and the analysis showed that CS does not hinder students to achieve fluency in English nor did it hinder the learning experience of Science course. She has claimed from her data that CS is not only useful in the learning experience of the students, but also in teaching. The analysis showed that CS actually have had some critical impacts on the part of the learner such as motivation in participation, in group solidarity. It also promotes shared meaning, indirectly but naturally be able to monitor student's level of comprehension, and maintains teacher narrative.

Meanwhile, ETCS practices of teachers and students in English language classes in Metro Manila primary schools in the Philippines have been the focus of Borlongan (2009b). A total of 14 English language classes whose discourses have been transcribed were analyzed to determine how frequent teachers and students code-switch in those classes and bring to light the forms and functions of the code-switches of both the teachers and students. He found that most English language teachers in the sample (11 out of 14 or 78.57%) code-switch. That means that they "violate" the implementing speak-English-only policy. They code-switch in around less than 5 to almost fifty utterances or a little less than fifteen, at the average, in the entire class session. students also have their share of CS in class sessions. CS occurs in all classes, even at least once. However, though the instances of CS could be claimed to be significant, one's tendency to code-switch is more of an individual-specific trait. Smooth-code-switch is the most common form of ETCS in English language classes, followed by constituent insertion. There are very few instances of nonce borrowings and non-smooth switches.

Thus, Bernardo (in press) makes this suggestion as regards language-in-education policy:

what is needed in multilingual educational communities is a *creative and pragmatic* approach to defining how language could be used in facilitating student learning and achievement. The approach may need to allow the various agents in the learning process to *flexibly* negotiate how the various proficiencies could be best appropriated in specific learning episodes and contexts. [emphases added] (p. 8-9)

He said that multilingualism is not a problem in teaching and learning. In fact, he emphasizes that it must actually be used as a resource to help increase student achievement. He borrows it from the paradigm of pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000), Bernardo (2007) predicts that a holistic understanding of the socio-psycholinguistic reality of multilingualism in the Philippines should make teaching and learning in Philippine schools, colleges, and universities empowering in terms of efficient use of language in communication on the part of the students.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be confidently said that the phenomenon of ETCS has been a particularly perplexing one. More so, the role it must take in classroom teaching

and learning process has been a puzzling issue to language-in-education policy-makers, educational leaders and managers, classroom teachers, and educational researchers as well as parents, the students themselves, and the wider community. One interesting and important question can be asked: What are the attitudes of students towards ETCS? It is this question on ETCS that the present study has been compelled to answer in the context of the university through a methodology involving a questionnaire survey and a matched-guise test.

## Methodology

Answering the question posed above involves a methodology of two parts: (1) The use of a questionnaire survey that asks behavioral questions of various question formats and (2) the implementation of a matched-guise test.

### The Instruments

**Questionnaire Survey.** Attitudes of the students towards the use of ETCS in classroom instruction were openly and overtly determined through a questionnaire given to the students. It asks direct attitudinal questions as regards the phenomenon in question. Needless to say, this part is an explicit ascertaining of student attitudes towards ETCS.

**Matched-Guise Test.** An implicit measure of attitudes would be the second part of the test, which is a matched-guise test. A matched-guise test is a sociolinguistic experiment technique developed by Lambert in 1967. A recording was made from one instructor making an utterance in ETCS and another in English of roughly two minutes in length. The recording was used as a linguistic stimulus presented to the students and they were asked to describe the owner of the voice using a semantic-differential bipolar adjective scale (e.g. intelligent vs. unintelligent, pleasant vs. unpleasant, successful vs. unsuccessful) without them knowing that the speaker is just one and the same (hence, the term *matched-guise*).

### The Respondents

The study involved 96 students registered and enrolled in a distinguished private university in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. The university is among the top universities of the country and would usually belong to the lists of top universities in Asia (and the Pacific) and the world. More specifically, the students belong to a science and technology college. It has to be mentioned here that the official medium of instruction of the university is English except in courses where Filipino, the national language, is the designated medium of instruction. However, as is typical in most Philippine educational institutions and in the science and technology courses where the policy is English-as-medium-of-instruction, CS inevitably takes place for various reasons, not only because of lack of proficiency but also because of explanatory adequacy of content lectures and discussions.

These students are, as with most Filipinos (cf. earlier discussion), at least bilingual and they are, quite expectedly, bilingual in English and Tagalog. Because the university attracts a sizeable number of Chinese Filipinos, some of them speak at least one Chinese language learned from the home or from their Chinese-medium high school of origin. There are also students who come from the countryside, and they may also speak the vernacular of their origin.

## Findings

### Explicit Attitudes

Attitudes towards code-switching are distinguished as explicit and implicit. Explicit attitudes were derived from the seven-item test given to the students that directly asked them of their position towards the use of ETCS in the university in general and classroom instruction in particular. Out of seven points in total, the sample had an average of 5.67, which means that ETCS is rated favorably. Of the 96 students who participated in the study, 58 or 60.4% unanimously agreed to all attitude statements in the questionnaire.

Table 1 displays the statements on the use of ETCS in the university presented to the students together with the frequency of students who responded positively to the statements:

Table 1

*Students who explicitly signified positive attitude towards ETCS (n=96)*

Statement	<i>f</i>	%
comfortable with my instructor using ETCS in his/her lectures.	86	89.6
1 better understanding of lectures when my instructor uses ETCS.	76	79.2
in favor of my instructor using ETCS in his/her lectures.	73	76.0
lieve that instructors should be allowed to use ETCS inside the classroom.	80	83.3
ieve that students should be allowed to use ETCS inside the classroom.	72	75.0
ieve that instructors should use ETCS in their lectures to help students gain better understanding of their lectures.	79	82.3
ieve that the use of ETCS inside the classroom facilitates learning.	77	80.2

Based on the survey, out of the three questions that are basically concerned on the instructor and his/her use of ETCS, 83.3% of the respondents believe that ETCS for instructors should be *allowed*. Second, 82.3% also believe that the use of ETCS by instructors can *help students gain better understanding*. Third, 80.2% express that they are *in favor* of instructor's use of ETCS in his or her lectures. Looking at the results of the three questions alone, most of the students have signified their ease and acceptance with their instructor's use of ETCS in his/her lectures. The students also signified their strong belief that instructors should be allowed to use ETCS when teaching.

Looking at the four questions that are concerned with the student's personal beliefs and perceived effects of ETCS on their learning, 89.6% stated that they are *comfortable* with ETCS as the mode of instruction. Second, 80.2% of the respondents believe that ETCS *facilitates* learning inside the classroom. Third, 79.2% believe that they *gain better understanding* when his/her instructor uses ETCS. Lastly, 75.0% believe that students themselves should also be *allowed* to use ETCS inside the classroom.

A surprising finding that this attitude survey points out is that students would want to allow instructors to use ETCS but not the students themselves. When asked further, the students said they would want the students to use ETCS for understanding but they would not want for them to use ETCS because they want to learn how to use English more fluently. Thus, the classroom is also seen as a training ground in using "good English".

## Implicit Attitudes

Implicit measures of attitude derived from the matched-guise test though show lesser prestige associated with ETCS as compared to English. The matched-guise test yielded the average score of 4.57 out of the possible 7 for ETCS and 4.74 for English. Therefore, there is a difference of 0.17 between the two scores. A t-test was implemented to find out if there is a significant difference between the prestige associated with ETCS and with English; no significant difference was found. This lower score for ETCS in the matched-guise test may simply be residual effects of the archaic stigma associated with the use of ETCS, though Borlongan (2009a) and also the findings of this study suggest a possible over-turning of this stigma in the coming generations as the younger generation are becoming more and more identified with this linguistic phenomenon.

## Conclusion

The present study has attempted to look into one issue regarding the use of ETCS in the university in general and tertiary-level instruction in particular, more specifically, the attitudes of students towards the use of ETCS in the university. Students are generally in favor of using ETCS in the university and even inside the classroom as they are of the belief that the use of ETCS will make them better understand topics of discussion.

The bigger project where this study is located found that students' learning are not hindered by the use of ETCS in lectures. Additionally and more fascinatingly, students may even perform better in a language they are more comfortable with. Unfortunately, at present, educational policy-makers, educational managers, classroom teachers, and even accrediting agencies of schools are still not yet prepared to accept the reality of multilingualism in the Philippines, that not only do students have positive attitudes towards CS but CS also fosters learning.

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