Reflecting on the Use of Code-Switching in Philippine Education Today

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Editorial Commentary

Code-switching (CS) in classroom instruction has recently received much attention among Filipino scholars. More specifically, there is this move to view CS as a resource for teaching and learning, and this proposal was initiated and espoused by Bernardo in 2005. He said:

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 Borlongan (2009), Borlongan, Lim, and Roxas (in this issue), and Martin (2006a, 2006b). And even in my ongoing project to develop a typology of the functions of CS in English language classes in the Philippines, it seems that, based on the analysis of the functions of CS in English language classes, it is important to stress that CS does not necessarily mean lack of competence in English. It is used with a purpose, and could even be used as a resource in the teaching and learning of English in the Philippines.

And so, this suggestion on language-in-education policy and policy-making is given by Bernardo (2005):

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 points out that multilingualism should not be considered problem in teaching and learning but must actually be used as a resource by teachers and students in facilitating the learning process. 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.

Thus said, discourses on CS suggest some reflecting on current implementing policy: Do they still reflect the psycho-sociolinguistic reality of multilingualism in the Philippines? More importantly, do these language-in-education policies aid in teaching and learning in schools? Or
they hinder teaching and learning instead? These policies should definitely be rephrased, guided by the current perspectives in applied linguistics.

Of course, reviewing these policies may take time, and all the burden at the moment will fall on the shoulders of the classroom teachers. They should therefore be made aware, perhaps through teacher training, both pre- and in-service, of how to negotiate between adherence to the implementing policies and sensitivity to the psycho-sociolinguistic reality of multilingualism in the Philippines. CS should be accorded the entitlement it deserves, as long as it does not hinder learning and teaching, most especially that of English language.

CS should not be frowned upon by educational policy-makers, educational managers, and, quite importantly in the Philippines, accrediting agencies of schools. But this is not to say that a policy must be implemented to make legal the use of CS in Philippine classroom. What is suggested here is that it is compelling to, in the words of Bernardo (2005), “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” (p. 165). The existing policies need not be changed. However, views on language in education and languages of instruction must be open to the changing times; such policies exist in the context of the sociolinguistic and multilingual realities of the Filipino society. Therefore, the use of CS is not necessarily language deficiency but actually a strategic use of the various linguistic resources available to both the teacher and the student to achieve their ultimate goal and that is learning.

References


About the Author

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