CODE SWITCHING:
A TOOL TO BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE FILIPINO LEARNERS AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

by:
Karl Angelo R. Tabernero

Philippines has been known as one of the countries that offer language varieties. Different language vernaculars can be highly observed. Likewise, it has been also influenced by the power of the global languages – one is the English language, which has been also considered as country’s lingua franca even up to date. Thus, English has started to dominate business, media, and education as well.

The domination of English to our society where there has been already an established first language, usually Filipino or Tagalog, has led to bilingualism among Filipinos which later result to the concept of “code switching.” Basically, code switching will be easily associated to a situation where a person may shift from one language to another in a certain conversation which may be considered as an unconscious activity (Moghadam, Samad, & Shahraki, 2012). Having this definition, we can really say that the presence of both L1 and L2 in our society can make code switching possible to happen where a speaker may switch from native language to English or vice versa in his daily conversation.

From this, the widespread use of code switching has been noticeable where it has even reached the four corners of each classroom setting – a place where young native speakers can be found. Well, the presence of code switching in a classroom is just an ordinary event since it is expected to happen yet it is still an extra ordinary issue for
teachers, language experts and for the whole institution of our education. A lot of questions can still be asked, such as if we should really permit code switching in acquiring better teaching-learning process or the other way around in bridging the gap between our Filipino learners and the English language.

Many linguists have published different studies which will answer the above mentioned question. Well, these researchers will testify the contribution that code switching can render to the learners so as to have better understanding and learning. According to Ovando & Carols (2012), by allowing students to learn new words, phrases or terms while feeling that their previous knowledge in their mother tongue is valuable and is a part of them can help them to succeed in a the new environment. Hence, English language learners will learn best since their needs are met. On the other hand, Becker (2001) states that code switching in story telling will provide students the opportunity to gain experience with the linguistic, psycholinguistic, and social-communicative aspects of two languages. From this, bilingual students will enhance their verbal skills and reading development. In addition, Moghadam, Samad, & Shahraki (2012) stress that code switching can be a useful technique in classroom interaction, especially if the goal is to clarify and convey the information to students in an efficient way. Thus, we should always bear in mind that in the case of language, first we develop understanding and then we develop language. Lastly, Gonzales (1996) – one of the prominent Filipino linguists shows that children learn most efficiently if the medium of instruction is the language used at home. Furthermore, he adds that learners learn more when they do not have to struggle with the language used in learning. Hence, code switching is a good teaching strategy to attain maximum learning effects.

From the ideas presented above, it is clearly to say that code switching can be a better tool in achieving language learning. But, this will only be possible if the prime
agent – the teachers will allow it inside the classroom. Once the teacher has permitted code switching, it will imply that he will be the general speaker who will guide the bilingual learners and he will also use the switching of language from one to another most especially when the situation has required him. Well, a teacher may use code switching for some situations such as: 1) for translation, 2) for giving procedures and directions, and 3) for clarifications especially when introducing new vocabulary words (Hughes, Shaunessy, Brice, Ratliff, & McHatton, 2006). Consequently, using code switching can help students to acquire learning in a less stressful way.

Furthermore, teachers should know that code switching is for the development of the students in the learning process and should not be taken for granted. Overall, it does not show their competence or lack of competence in L2. Code switching should rather be seen and used as a tool that serves to several functions that facilitate both learning and teaching.

To sum up, supporting code-switching in the classroom as a tool to acquire a second language enables teachers to increase those “teachable moments” in students. Therefore, code switching should not be discouraged in classrooms but should be encouraged as an effective and transitional language learning strategy.

References:

http://dspace.mah.se/bitstream/handle/2043/9650/Filipino-English.pdf

http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1401&context=ehd_theses