When the idea of globalization spread out, a global lingua franca that will enable people to communicate with one another has been pointed out – English. Since then, the necessity to learn English, either as a Foreign Language (EFL), or English as a Second Language (ESL), has been put forward into language teaching. These two approaches to English language teaching are sub-categories of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP, as defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), is a learner-centered approach to language teaching with the great consideration of the learners’ needs and purposes in learning English.

ESL and EFL instructional approaches differ in significant ways. ESL is based on the premise that English is the language of the community and the school and that students have access to English models. EFL is usually learned in environments where the language of the community and the school is not English (Gunderson, 2009).

In the Philippines, English is recognized and taught as a second language. Given that English is not the country’s native language and is just one among many languages and dialects existing in the country, multiple challenges are faced by the Filipinos learning the language despite the recognition the country has received. Philippines is recognized as one of the top 15 countries with the best non-native English speakers in the world as a result of English Proficiency Index (EPI) ranking in 2015.

Likewise, in the poll conducted by Social Weather Station (SWS) in 2008, three-fourths of Filipino adults (76 percent) say they understand spoken English; 75 percent say they read English; three out of five (61 percent) say they’re comfortable writing in English; close to half (46 percent) say they speak English; about two-fifths (38 percent) say they think in English; while 8 percent say they are not competent in any way when it comes to the English language (Pinaroc & Calimag, 2008).
Even with the growing number of Filipinos speaking English, challenges in learning the language are still something to take a closer look at. Filipino, which is the country’s native language, interferes with the optimum acquisition of the English language, hence the concept of Native Language Interference. Dulay et. al. (1982) define interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the second language. In this case, a learner tends to rely on their native language.

This is unarguably one of the reasons why learners code-switch in an English language classroom. Their schema on their first language (L1) still plays an active role in acquiring their target language to the extent that it appears in their discourse when speaking in the target language.

Code-switching is the practice of alternating two or more languages in a conversation. “It is used to enhance or to complement communication to bilingual speakers. It does not speak to reproduce what already been said, but to enhance what is being said. Code-switching takes advantage of a larger bilingual vocabulary, playing on subtle differences between the two languages in connotative, denotative, or sociolinguistic meaning” (Malakoff and Hakuta, 1991).

Valerio (2005) had observed that code-switching, referred to in popular parlance as the use of Taglish, is often blamed for deterioration of language skills of Filipinos. And more than that, certain sectors of the Philippine scholarly community perceived language mixing as a less than ideal language. One objection against code-switching was that of Sibayan (1985) when he expressed his lamentation due to Filipino and English being not separated in schools. This indicates the negative attitude towards code-switching. Another observation furthered by Malakoff and Hakuta (1991) is that code-switching is treated as demonstration of lack of differentiation and an unintentional and unconscious activity which indicates lack of linguistic control.

However, these arguments and assumptions were reviewed and re-evaluated by Valerio (2005) in her study where she proposed to the Philippine scholarly community to
consider code-switching not as a compromise or fallback option, but as a positive option for language in education. She stressed that code-switching is an important part of the Filipino bilingual’s language competencies.

It is a rule-governed, linguistically complex, and functionally specific language behaviour that can be applied to attain various types of communicative, social, personal, and even cognitive goals within the bilingual community (Valerio, 2005, p. 161). She also concluded that code-switching may be a viable and even potent medium which student learners and teacher facilitators can use as they collaborate towards developing and constructing knowledge in the different domains of learning, particularly as both teachers and students are bilinguals.

In a nut shell, given the positive and negative upshots code-switching brings in the classroom, it is still not something to be frowned upon. Language teachers must reconsider the phenomenon as something that can help the learners in achieving optimum linguistic competence.

Reference:


Philippine Primer (2016). Philippines rank 13th in the English Proficiency Index (EPI) worldwide