

English/Béchar Dialectal Arabic Code switching in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract :

Code-switching is the use of more than one language or variety within the same speech or conversation. It is frequent in communities with two or more languages or dialects. The issue of its uses in the classroom by the teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) is a subject of debate for many years. This research investigates the reasons behind the use of the local dialect of Bécharian the EFL classrooms, it seeks to discover in which contexts does an EFL teacher code switch to the local dialect? The sample of population of this study is the first year English students and teachers at Tahri Mohammed University of Bechar, both questionnaires and classroom observation were trusted as data collection tools. The results show that the majority of teachers use the local dialect in their lectures, mostly to establish a friendly atmosphere or to express anger, the use of the local dialect for explaining lessons was rarely observed, students, in general have a positive attitude towards this kind of code switching.

Key Words: code-switching, English as foreign language, dialectal Arabic, education, Arabic Dialect of Bechar.

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Introduction:

Teaching a second or foreign language may be very challenging; the difficulty varies depending on the sociolinguistic position of the foreign language in the target speech community. English nowadays is one of the most learnt languages at schools and universities around the world. Different methods and techniques are provided by experts to make the teaching / learning process easier, yet the other languages, generally the learners' first or mother tongue, are widely used in the EFL classrooms. It is not commonly argued whether to consider this phenomenon as positive supporting teachers' methods, or negative creating an unstable learning atmosphere. In the Algerian speech community, classical Arabic or precisely Modern Standard Arabic, is officially the first language or the standard form of most of the existing dialects. English, on the other hand, is officially the second foreign language, however when it comes to teaching contexts , EFL teachers prefer to code switch to French which is the first foreign language. This kind of code switching is very effective in cities and towns where people's French is good at a certain extent, yet in some regions like Béchar people's mastery or at least familiarity with French isn't common between all the speakers and so most of the times when code switching occurs, it is English/ Dialectal Arabic.

The use of these two languages in the same conversation refers to code-switching (CS).CS can be widely defined as the mixing of more than one language or dialect into the same conversation. It can occur within one sentence or between sentences. This research investigates the use of Béchar dialectal Arabic in EFL classrooms, at TAHRI Mohammed University , it seeks to discover when and why do teachers codeswitch while teaching ? And is it beneficial in teaching/learning process?

I. Reviewing the literature :

The term code switching has been studied in different sides by researchers; so, it may have different definitions . (muyesken.p, ٢٠٠٠) argues that code switching is all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence (muyesken.p, ٢٠٠٠).Earlier, in a simpler definition, the common question of does code switching occur between language and dialect?, (Gumperz.J, ١٩٨٢)clarifies the definition by stating that code switching is the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems (Gumperz.J, ١٩٨٢). The use of two languages or dialects in one conversation is considered by many researchers as a skill. It is a difficult task to choose the language appropriately according to the converser, the situational context, the topic of conversation; it is considered as a skill also as the

speaker alters codes within an interactional categorization in accordance with sociolinguistic rules and without violating definite grammatical limits.

Switches between varieties are divided into two types in the “Cambridge handbook of linguistic about code-switching” (Almeida, ٢٠٠٩). The first type is situational code switching, and it occurs when different languages or varieties are linked with changes in the speaker’s situation, which meaning is seen as being conveyed through the back-and-forth of two differentially noticeable languages. The second type is conversational code switching, which occurs when there are changes in language or variety without any peripheral motivation. Such a switching is also called metaphorical when the purpose of introducing a particular variety into the conversation is to evoke the connotations, the metaphorical “world” of that variety (Almeida, ٢٠٠٩).

II. Data collection

To collect data for this research, two tools were trusted, classroom observation, and questionnaire for both teachers and students. The sample of population contains fifty students from the first year at the department of English, TAHRI Mohammed University of Béchar, and ten teachers from the same department.

١. **The students’ questionnaire** is composed of eight questions, between multiple choice, yes/ no, and open-ended ones. The most important ones seek to know the context of code switching and the students’ perspective of its use, the second question (٢) discovers the frequency of teachers’ code switching to Béchar dialectal Arabic in the EFL classrooms,

- How often does your teacher use the dialect when speaking in EFL classroom?

Sometimes Always Rarely Never

Question (٣) seeks to know exactly when teachers codeswitch. Students were provided by some choices and were requested to add other options if any:

- In which context does your teacher use Béchar dialect :

To manage the class

To explain the lecture

To translate vocabulary

To talk about social facts

Others

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

Question (٤) investigates students’ perspective about their teachers’ use of Béchar dialect

- Does teachers’ use of Béchar dialect in your EFL classroom make you feel involved in the lesson?

Yes

No

٢. **Teachers’ questionnaire:** This questionnaire consists of five questions; the questions below are the ones which directly investigate the reasons and contexts of code switching, and since the informants are teachers an open-

ended question was a better choice, it doesn't limit the teacher to some provided choices:

- Question (٢): How long have you been teaching EFL?

Less than five years to ١٠ years more than ١٠

- Question (٣): In which contexts do you code-switch in your EFL classroom?

- Question (٤) : Do you think you reach the objectives you have when switching to the local dialect in EFL classroom?

Yes

No

٣. **classroom observation** : Besides the questionnaires, classroom observation is the second data collection tool. the same sample of population was observed (first year English graduation) for six lectures of different teachers, most of the observations were non- participant, which doesn't require the interaction of the researcher while observing or taking notes, the target task of the observation wasn't explicitly declared to the teachers, not to affect their real behavior including mainly, the use of the local dialect .

III. Results of the questionnaires: In the present investigation, both qualitative and quantitative data have been gathered. The analysis of close-ended questions was done with a computer program; the results of the most related questions to the hypothesis are presented in the diagrams below.

١. Students' questionnaire

١,١. Question (٣)

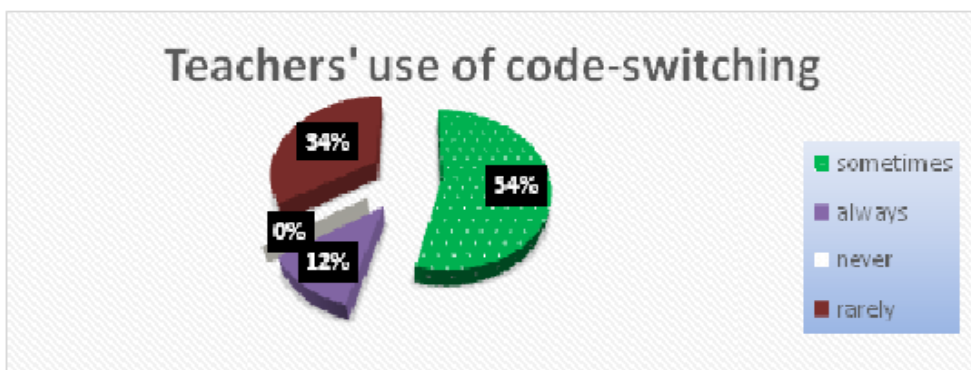


Figure (١): Teachers' Use of Code-Switching

Like presented in the pie chart above, approximately, more than half of the informants (٥٤%) declared that their teachers sometimes switch to the local dialect; (٣٤%) of them considered their teachers' code switching as rare, while (١٢%) declared that their teachers code switch always to the local dialect; none of the teachers, according to the informants, never uses Béchar Arabic.

١,٢. Question (٥)

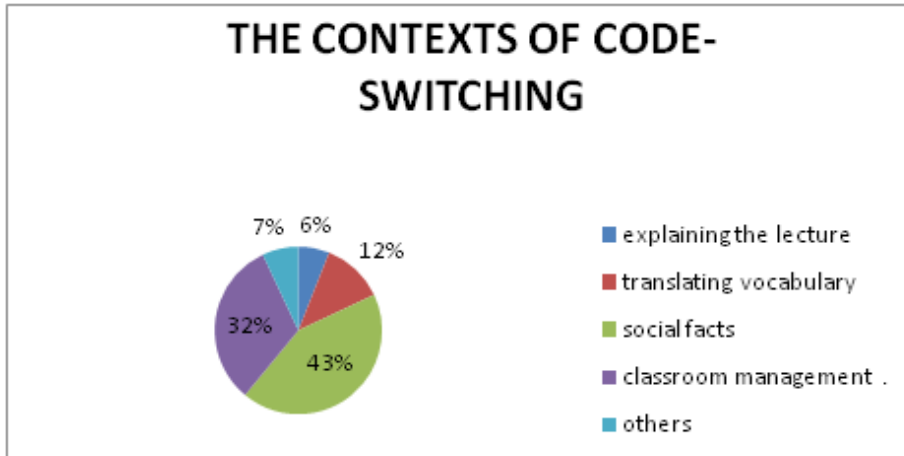


Figure (٢): The Contexts of Code-Switching

Teachers may use the local dialect in EFL classrooms in various contexts. Almost ٤٣% of the students determined that the teachers codeswitch to dialectal Arabic to talk about things related to society like actualities or local social events. Whereas ٣٢% of the informants declared that their teachers use it for classroom management. Only (١٢%) of the students admitted that teachers use the local dialect to explain the meaning of new words by translating them directly. The proposal of using code switching to the local dialect while explaining the lecture was picked by (٦%) of the informants, the remaining (٧%) think that teachers code switch for other contexts.

١,٣. Question (٧) :

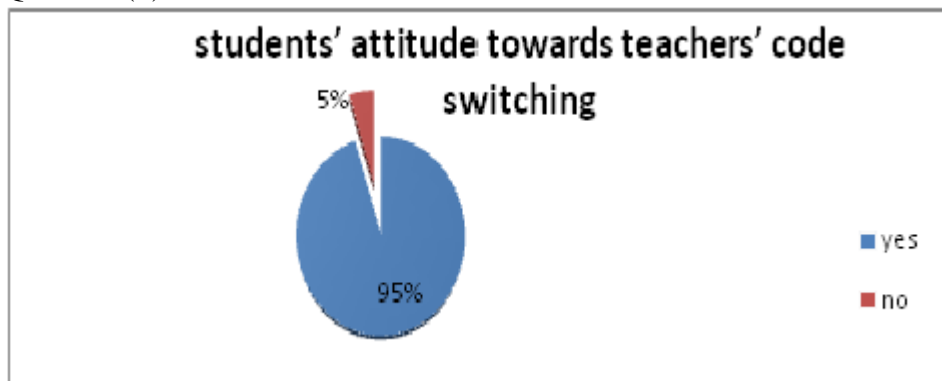


Figure (٣): Students' Attitude towards Teachers' Code Switching

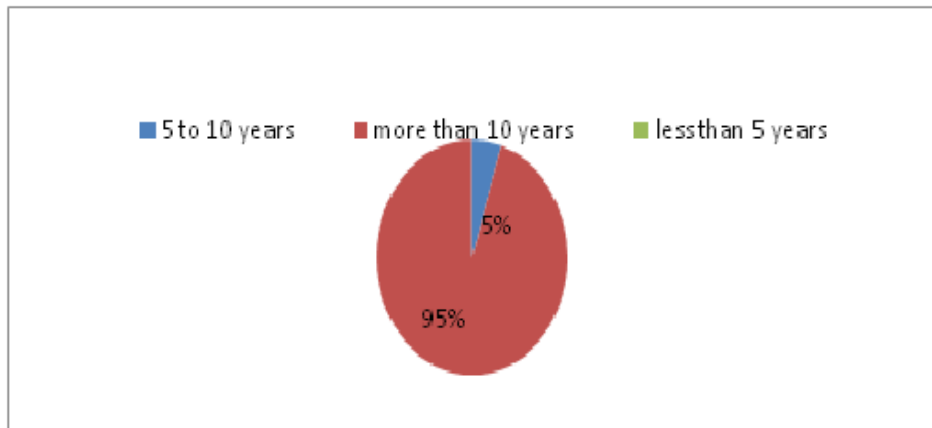
The majority of informants (٩٥%) have a positive attitude towards their teachers' use of the local dialect in class; they agree that this code-switching helps them to get more involved in the lecture.

٢. Teachers' questionnaire

٢,١. Question (٢):

The graph below shows a high percentage of experienced teachers, the majority of them (٩٥%) are teaching for at least ten years, while only one of them (٥%) is teaching for seven years, none of the first year English teachers has less than five years of experience.

This question was important, as generally switching to the local dialect, is considered as a weakness or lack of capacity of the teacher, the new ministry of higher education recommendations impose on the department to give the responsibility of teaching first year students to the most experienced teachers, the results of this question help to avoid this situation, which relates the use of dialectal Arabic only to the incapacity of the teacher.



Figure(٤): Teachers' years of Experience

٢,٢. Question (٣):

For the teachers of the first year in particular, the use of the local dialect; is sometimes required, according to them, the following situations needs code-switching:

- ✓ to give important instructions
- ✓ to ensure students' understanding
- ✓ to explain some issues in the target language
- ✓ for classroom management

✓ to create a friendly atmosphere

٢,٣. Question (٤):

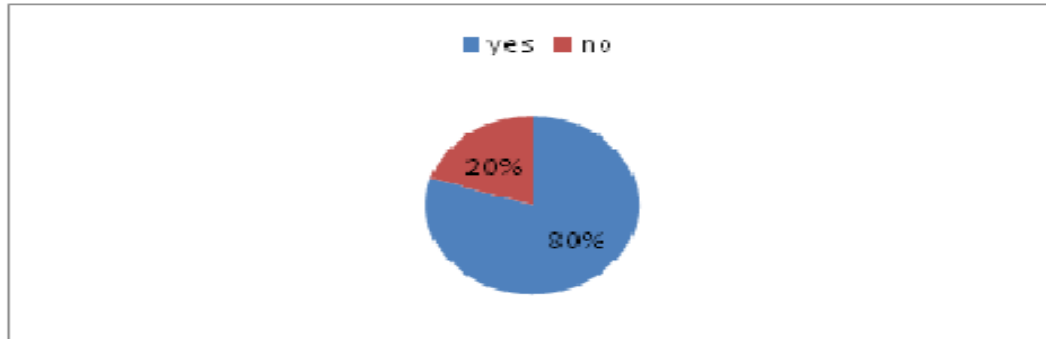


Figure (٥): Reaching Code-Switching Objectives

It may be easy to switch but to ensure its function is something else. Diagram (٥) shows that ٨٠٪ of the teachers know its functions, and they accomplish their aims when they use the local dialect. Only ٢٠ % believe that they do not achieve their objectives in case they switch. They blame the students of being unmotivated for learning and that they are not making any effort to improve their level “even if we explain only in dialectal Arabic”.

٣. Classroom observation:

As mentioned in the methodology, observation is a process of observing the sample of population in their natural state and collect relevant qualitative information to the study; six different teachers were observed with the students of first year English. The aspect observed, was the use of the local dialect at least once by all teachers except one; a particular importance was given to the exact context of the code switching.

IV. Interpretation of the results:

The sample of population in this research represents a main factor in the results. First year students, unlike advanced learners at the department of English, need a particular care, not only at the academic level, but at the administrative one also, they need to be introduced to the new ways of learning, and different methods of evaluation and assessment, they have to be introduced also to the importance of the presence, the exclusion from a module and other new concepts for them as new students, literally, this is not the teacher's role, yet most of the first year teachers are volunteers to help the administration and accompany the students for a better performance in their new environment of learning.

First year English at Tahri Mohammed University of Béchar presents an extremely heterogeneous classroom, which varies between students with a very good to excellent level in English and other with very limited capacities and significant problems of understanding.

This situation leads many teachers, at least at the beginning of the academic year, to switch to the local dialect, not necessarily to explain the lessons, but sometimes to give them some comforting and encouraging messages.

Linguistically speaking, French is considered closer to the English, and so, people think that it is preferable for teachers to switch to French than to English however, if we consider the students' level of French without generalizing the concept of Algerians as good French speakers, which is not the case for all the regions especially the southern ones, switching to French while explaining could be even more complicated, and not understandable by the majority. At the sociolinguistic level, and according to many students, French language representation is more negative, students' attitude towards teacher's use of French when code switching is more considered as showing off or looking down at them, than supporting or helping them. Dialect keeps the best choice for showing collaboration and creating comfortable and friendly atmosphere for the students.

١. Students' questionnaire:

According to students' answers, teachers code switch to Béchar dialect most to talk about social facts, here are some students' answers: *"discuss an important event which took place in our town, yesterday was about the student who wrote swear words on the wall"*, *"he talked about the importance of motivation for learning, when an old man from our classmates declared that he is very weak in the language but wanted to rise the challenge"*, for classroom management, students agreed that teachers use Béchar dialectal Arabic when they are angry or unsatisfied; they explained that: *"She started shouting at the students who didn't do the home work in English at first then when she started getting really nervous she switched to dialectal Arabic"*, *"He never uses Arabic, that day many of us came very late we waited until we all set then started blaming us in dialectal Arabic, that day we knew he was very angry"*.

Explaining a lecture which could be difficult sometimes and holding new concepts is more complicated by using another language (a second foreign language in the case of our research). In a linguistic lecture, as an example, the teacher needs great efforts, as it is not only about explaining the difference between performance and competence, but on being successful in it while using a foreign language, and choosing the appropriate terms and words for the students level. Students answers show that teachers rarely use dialectal Arabic to explain the lesson; it is only when the lesson is so difficult that the majority of the students didn't understand, one of the students stated that *"that day he explained for more than four times only three of us understood, then he started explaining in English but switched to dialectal Arabic many times, by doing it we all got involved into the lesson"*.

In the previous situation, translation could be an effective option; if the teacher doesn't like to explain in the local dialect whatever the complexity of the situation is, they can translate the key word or the most important element to dialectal Arabic, students declared that some teachers, and only when nobody understands, translate one word or two to dialectal Arabic trying to help us understand and save time to move to the next part of the lesson.

From the results obtained, almost all the participants believe that their teachers' use of dialectal Arabic helps them get more involved in the lecture, some said that: *"it is not only for understanding that I like my teachers to use our local dialect, but just to give me a comfortable feeling that we, like our teachers, aren't native speakers"*, another student explained that: *"she gave me the impression that the understanding of all of us is very important to her, I think she is comprehensive as we are 1st year students we are not very familiar with the English language and she explains very well using or mixing languages"*. The majority agreed that their teachers are well educated, and their English level is very high, their goal behind this code switching is to make sure everyone is involved in the lesson.

Even if all the students seem to be satisfied about their teachers' use of dialectal Arabic, there are still some of them representing the minority that have a negative attitude towards it. These students are likely good in English; they believe that it's necessary for some students to understand. One of them said: *"I'm against it because the teachers are supposed to help us learn how to express ourselves in English"*; another student stated: *"Personally, I prefer only the use of English the language I'm studying, if some have a problem to understand they have to solve it by other means and not by code switching to dialectal Arabic"*.

٢. Teachers' questionnaire:

The main use of other languages in a language classroom is due to some difficulties such as students misunderstanding and the teachers' lack of appropriate terms at the moment of explanation. In the results collected from the teachers themselves, one of them noted that she never uses other languages in her EFL classroom". For the others who confirmed their use of, other languages and dialectal Arabic in particular, the common contexts stated are as follows:

- while explaining meaning of key words
- when comparing English with other language
- when wanting to add some sense of humor
- when giving sever instructions
- when getting nervous

It is not that easy for a teacher to deny the importance of the students' first language interference in the teaching process of another language. But suggesting its use in teaching in general is something else. One of the participants suggested that:

“it is used in the context of teaching in general” But the same participant argued that it must be the last option also to be used in teaching or when the students are very bad. This idea of leaving other languages for the last option has been supported indirectly by another participant (a teacher) when she says that *“I do my best to minimize the use of other languages in teaching 1st year students”*. Even though, the level of many first- year students is not good, this teacher believes that it is better to minimize the interference of other languages in teaching them.

Since there is a general debate on the phenomenon of code-switching itself, the matter of its use in language classes may not have a unique agreement. The result in this study shows different views from the teachers. Some teachers believe that its use is necessary to some extent whereas others are seeing it as a bad habit.

EFL classes, besides modules of language skills contains other modules where new concepts are introduced, like in linguistics, civilization or literature students are not tough the language basis but a completely innovative knowledge, *“it is like when you teach mathematics in dialectal Arabic, you need them to understand the matter whatever is the language used”*, explains one of the very experienced teachers.

The heterogeneous classrooms, need a particular care from teachers, the first impression from the silent classroom doesn't mean always the students understand, the courageous ones to answer and declare that everything is clear are the best in the language.

In one the students' answers, the teacher's level as a reason for code switching was raised, *“sometimes, they forget the word in English and so they combine languages to communicate ideas”*, as university teachers, with first year English students, the problem of expression is literally impossible to occur, even the external factor of stress and anxiety is rare to affect the teacher, one of teachers said *“Teachers are experienced enough to find the alternative for a word at the needed moment”*, *“at this level(first year) students may not recognize teacher's mistake of style or of a wrong choice of vocabulary”*.

Based on these answers we can say that the use of dialectal Arabic by the teachers is conscious, and for the student's benefit.

٣. classroom observation:

The non- participant observation doesn't require the researcher's participation or interference in the observed lecture, (Fishman, ١٩٦٥) highlights that group membership can have an influence on the language selection and can be associated with the linguistic choices that speakers make based on the people they talk to. although informing the teacher that the task is about code switching to Béchar local dialect will affect their behavior, hiding the fact that the researcher's presence in the classroom is not for an academic observation is unfair; to make the teaching process as real as possible, teachers were told the observation is about teaching methods and not exactly code switching.

After six classroom observations with different teachers, contexts of code switching can be summarized in the following categories:

- motivation:

This was the most used context for code switching; the lesson of the day may sometimes be boring or very difficult for the students so teachers use some dialectal expressions as an “ice breaking”. In this case it is a way to make students enthusiastic to listen and participate. During observation this case was found in some classrooms where the teacher chose to switch and have fun in order to bring harmony in the learning environment. One example was of the literature teacher, she wanted to explain the rhyme in poetry, she gave a title of local folk song in dialectal Arabic to say “it’s somehow like this” It was successful; because, it made the students laugh and they started participating in the lesson massively.

- Scaffolding:

One of the primary uses of code switching is for helping students to understand difficult things in the lesson. During the sessions of observation, some teachers used it for this reason. In the process of helping the learner to understand or to learn what he/she did not know before, it is a kind of “repair done as a by-the-way occurrence in the context of a conversational move, which in this case is a move of agreement and confirmation” (Johnson, ١٩٩٥). The teacher can use it to explain more the instructions or a difficult word and so forth. Some examples observed in the classrooms are as follow:

The student asked: what is the meaning of contagious? The teacher first switched to French: like in French, contagieux!, the student showed with a facial expression that he didn’t understand she gave a name of a dermatological contagious sickness with a kind of funny name in Arabic , and the students started laughing and said “now it’s very clear”

- Affection:

Affection is the emotion or the feeling for someone or something. It can be positive as well as negative. The teacher may switch into the learners’ mother tongue to express a friendly rapport or their anger caused by the learner. (Holmes, ٢٠١٣) believes that “A speaker may similarly switch to another language as a signal of group membership and shared ethnicity within an addressee. Even speakers who are not very proficient in a second language may use brief phrases and words for this purpose.” It is not easy sometimes to voice exactly what we feel emotionally in a foreign language. Some of the switches found through the observation were clearly expressing anger or friendly rapport building.

In the case of the positive side, many times teachers gave some compliments in Béchar dialect, especially to some shy low grade students, to comfort them and mainly, telling them indirectly that they are like all the other students, concerned with everything happening during the lecture.

In one of the cases, as an example, the teacher asked a question; many students raised their hands and some were picked to answer, the teacher picked one girl who seemed giving attention but not understanding, she looked at the teacher and was over stressed, the teacher said “no answer”, the girl kept silent and blocked the teacher

told her in the local dialect that she was pretty with a beautiful voice and she needs only to speak English to be complete". It is obvious that the teacher knows how to say it in English, and there is a high possibility that the student understands it in English also, but the reason behind is to show some sympathy and that the teacher isn't interested only in good students.

Anger as the negative side, is one of the main reasons behind teachers' code switching to dialectal Arabic. Psychologically speaking, people tend to express better their anger in their mother tongue; they find the exact and appropriate term for the situation, while observing, this happens many times especially when the students are late or when they don't do the given homework.

Whatever are the reasons behind using dialectal Arabic in EFL class, it, most of the times, brings a positive outcome to the lecture, it could be a perfect explanation, a friendly message of collaboration, or a serious advice or warning for the benefit of the learner.

V. Conclusion:

Code-switching, which is the alternation of two or more, languages or dialects in a single conversation, occurs at many social dimensions. Teaching foreign languages, is considered as one of the most important factors for code switching analysis, although a foreign language teacher isn't supposed to encourage the mother tongue interference in his teaching process, the use of the mother tongue could have positive effects on the learner.

This research investigated the contexts where the English language teachers at Tahri Mohammed University of Béchar, code switch to the local dialect (Béchar Arabic), and the reasons behind this use. For collecting data, both qualitative and quantitative research were conducted, the tools used are the questionnaire for students and teachers, with a classroom observation. The questions seek first to find the percentage of code switching to the local dialect among teachers, and to discover the exact context where teacher code switch, and if there are common uses, or the local dialect use depends on the situation. At the end the informants (teachers, students) are asked if this kind of code switching is beneficial, and has a positive impact on the learner, or the learning process in general.

The main results of this research show that the majority of the first- year teachers, at the department of English, code switch to the local dialect, for three main context, motivation, scaffolding, and affection; in spite of some negative attitudes of some students towards dialect's use in EFL classroom, teachers still believe that it is sometimes very useful and effective to use it.

Code switching while explaining a lecture, occurs rarely in the EFL classroom, at the extreme cases and when none of the students understands, the teacher explains a key word or a specific concept, generally, to make sure all the students get a clear idea about the lesson on the other hand, some comment compliments or short stories in the local dialect are used at the beginning of the lecture as brain storming, or as an expression of sympathy towards students.

Anger is one of the most common contexts where teachers code switch to the local dialect. Teachers declared that the best language to express their feelings especially anger, is the local dialect, it reflects perfectly the exact situation for the students, to severely advice and warn them about something negatively affecting their learning process.

Recommendations:

Here are some suggestions for the teachers to take into account when using code-switching in their EFL classrooms:

- Teachers should make sure that they switch in a language that all of the students in the classroom speak.
- Teachers shouldn't rely only on the use of other languages as their only method of dealing with difficult situations.
- Teachers should use other languages only when necessary for the outcomes of the teaching learning process.
- Teachers should make sure that their students will not reply to their switches by switching in their turn.

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