

A Study on the Functions of Code-switching in Higher Vocational English Classroom

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Abstract: The phenomenon of code switching in bilingual classrooms has been around for a long time, and scholars and linguists both at home and abroad have studied it from linguistics, pragmatics, and psychology and so on. At the same time, the debate over code switching has never stopped. Previous studies have conducted a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of code switching, and there are few empirical studies on its role in ESP teaching in higher vocational colleges. This paper attempts to apply code switching in high vocational English teaching and explore its functions from an empirical point of view.

1. Introduction

1.1 Basic requirements of English teaching in higher vocational colleges

With the rapid development of higher vocational education, in order to meet the needs of economic development for students' foreign language ability, the ministry of education has formulated and promulgated the basic requirements for English Teaching in higher vocational colleges in 2000. The specific requirements are as follows:

Students should master the basic knowledge of English phonetics and grammar, recognize 1000-1600 English words and receive preliminary training in listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating, etc.

1.2 The teaching situations of English for specific purposes

Influenced by CET, many vocational students consider it important to pass the CET 4 and CET 6, but ignore the ESP which is closely related to their major. At present, ESP teaching in many vocational colleges is still in a scattered and spontaneous state. Students can't keep up with the steps of teachers in the English class, so they do not have any interest in ESP learning. In summary, teachers need to pay attention to the methods and skills of language teaching in the design and arrangement of classroom activities in ESP classrooms. The teachers should not only require students to possess basic language skills, but also to master related professional knowledge, which is the ultimate goal of ESP teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges.

2. Significance of the research

Code switching is a common phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual language contact. Most of the previous researches on code switching have focused on college English. Code switching research in ESP teaching in higher vocational colleges is a new and undeveloped field. To understand and study the code switching in ESP classroom teaching is of great theoretical significance and practical guiding value.

2.1 Theoretical significance of the research

The industry English teaching environment is an important background and basis for code switching research in ESP classrooms. Because the research on code switching at home and abroad is mostly confined to the teaching environment of college English, this study is different from the previous research. Through the empirical study of code switching in ESP teaching, this paper summarizes the important role of classroom code switching in higher vocational ESP teaching. The

study of code switching in ESP classroom teaching is not only in line with the basic requirements of English Syllabus in higher vocational colleges, but also a good complement to previous studies, thus filling the gaps in the study of code switching in this field.

2.2 Practical significance of the research

With the rapid development of higher vocational education, each major has different requirements for students' English ability. ESP teaching not only raises the students' basic foreign language ability, but also enables them to master English knowledge related to their major. On the basis of empirical research, this study examines ESP code switching from two aspects: linguistic and non-linguistic elements, and summarizes the influencing factors and functions of code switching. The study also plays a guiding role in ESP classroom teaching in higher vocational colleges.

3. Literature review

3.1 Previous research on classroom code switching abroad

The study of code switching has been going on for a long time, and the study of code switching in classroom began in the late 60s of the United States. With the development of bilingual classrooms in the late 60s of last century, classroom code switching became a hot topic among researchers. Code switching has been hotly discussed in many countries, such as Canada, the United States, Spain and some African countries. This study summarizes the foreign research on classroom code switching, which can be divided into three cases: Some scholars support code switching, some hold objections, and others remain neutral.

Researchers who support code switching include Widdowson, 1979; Atkinson, 1987; Cook, 1991 and Macaro, 1997. They think classroom code switching is an effective teaching strategy. For foreign language teaching, the use of mother tongue is unavoidable, which contributes to the learning of the second language. Widdowson, Atkinson, Cook and Macaro think that using the mother tongue to guide the classroom teaching can effectively manage the classroom and promote the communication between teachers and students. Atkinson first proposed the use of code switching in classroom communication, and demonstrated the advantages of the mother tongue. He believes that the proper use of native language can enhance students' self-confidence and stimulate their interest in learning. In addition, such researchers as Milk (1981) and Guthrie (1984) have done some empirical studies to demonstrate the role of code switching in classroom teaching. Milk conducted an observational study on an American teacher of Mexico nationality. In addition, Mehan (1981) and Zentella (1981) studied classroom code switching from the aspect of teacher-student communication. Merritt (1992) studied code switching in three schools in Kenya and found that the factor that caused code switching was that teachers wanted to communicate better with students.

Some researchers also object to code switching, such as Krashen, Terrel, Ellis, and, Duff Polio, etc. They oppose the use of the first language in bilingual teaching. They believe that the use of mother tongue in foreign language teaching hinders the input and effective mastery of the target language by the students. Ellis argues that in bilingual teaching, second language should be used only, and the use of mother tongue is strictly forbidden. Excessive use of mother tongue will hinder students' learning of target language and hinder the teaching process. Some researchers, such as Littlewood, 1984, Krashen, 1985 and Macdonald, 1993 think that in foreign language teaching, learners do not need to fully understand the teacher's foreign language. The teacher's change from a foreign language to a mother tongue will hinder students' foreign language learning process, which is not conducive to the input of the target language for them.

In addition, many researchers such as Harbord and Turnbull have maintained a neutral attitude towards code switching. Harbord (1992) recognizes the use of code switching, but applies it only in the classroom. Turnbull (2001) believes that excessive use of the mother tongue should be severely restricted. Foreign language learning can only use mother tongue when necessary, and if the mother

tongue is overused, it will have a lot of negative effects.

3.2 Previous research on classroom code switching at home

The study of code switching began in 1980s in China. It was first proposed by Wang Dexing (1987). Wang analyzed the common methods of code switching based on sociolinguistics, pragmatics and structural linguistics. Over the past thirty years, many researchers have studied code switching from different aspects. Li Shufen (1990) analyzed code switching in two aspects of driven and static. Yang Jian (1996) carried out an empirical study on code switching at Tsinghua University, and summarized the characteristics of students' code switching. Yu Guodong (2000, 2004) analyzed the code switching from the pragmatic point of view, and used the adaptation theory to sum up and evaluates the model of code switching. Huang Donghua (2004) studied the relationship between code switching and foreign language teaching. Lu Rong (2003, 2004) explained code switching from the perspective of functional linguistics and conversational analysis. Some scholars have carried out the empirical study of code switching. For example, Liu Quanguo (2007) and Liu Yonghou (2008) investigated the code switching phenomenon in Ethnic Minority Areas. Other scholars, for example, Liu Zhengguang (2000), Chen Liping (2004), Wang Jin (2007, 2011) and others have also studied code switching from a couple of different perspectives, and no more statements here.

4. The functions of code-switching in higher vocational English classes

4.1 The functions of classroom code switching

Halliday (1978) refers to the meta functional and textual functions of language, which is the theoretical framework of ideational function and interpersonal functional grammar. In the early 1990s, influenced by functional linguistics, the researchers of code switching began to pay attention to language proficiency, language preferences of communicative objects, and the importance of communicative intention. In 1990, according to the function of code switching, Auer proposed the functional dichotomy about code switching: text-based code switching and communication-based code switching. This functional dichotomy describes code switching as a communicative event that takes on specific communicative functions, and lays the theoretical foundation for the study of functional linguistics in code switching. Knowledge transfer and cultural acquisition are the two functions of classroom teaching, and the way to realize the two functions is classroom communication between teachers and students by means of teaching materials. At the same time, classroom communicative activities have some particularity, such as the certainty of communication place, the procedural content of communication and the difference of power and position between the two sides of communication. The study of classroom code switching is inseparable from the communicative function of this phenomenon. The dichotomy of communicative function in code switching involves the textual and environmental factors in code switching, which is in line with the functional features of classroom communicative activities, this study uses the classification method of all to describe the functional attributes of classroom code switching. It should be pointed out that the code switching based on text mainly refers to the conversion of teacher from student talk to curriculum discourse, while the code switching based on the communicator mainly refers to the transition from the teacher's discourse to the student's discourse. As mentioned earlier, the function is to investigate the characteristics of code switching in the classroom communication environment and to describe the important dimensions of it. The functional school of language holds that the functional use of a language cannot be determined solely by analyzing the syntactic structure of the sentence, but should investigate the ways in which individuals acquire language and how to use language in their social environment to communicate with others. Therefore, the description of code switching in this part is limited to the description and interpretation of the two functional forms themselves. The communicative function of code switching is also beneficial to the communication between teachers and students. For example, proper code switching can help the interaction between teachers and students, create a good classroom atmosphere, and stimulate students' interest

in learning. At the same time, the use of code switching to ask questions can also help guide students to answer questions and think for themselves, so as to strengthen the understanding of the content of teaching.

4.2 The application of code switching to the three-stage English teaching

The application of code switching in English class is divided into three stages: the preparatory stage before application, the stage of application and the post application stage. The application of code switching in English teaching is a long process. This chapter mainly summarizes the specific learning process and learning evaluation criteria in the foreign language classroom with code switching, which provides effective practical support for the research conclusions.

4.2.1 The preparatory stage before application of code switching

The preparatory stage before the start of the study includes the following aspects:

A. Introducing the curriculum background and international environment

With the vigorous development of logistics industry under the current economic situations, the society needs more staff with rich knowledge of logistics. In order to cultivate the talents needed, the higher vocational colleges set up corresponding courses and arrange the teaching process after the full investigation into social and economic situations. At present, the international logistics industry is developing fast, which requires more skilled personnel engaged in the international logistics industry. This kind of talented person not only needs to have abundant logistics knowledge, but also possess good communication skills in English. Therefore, the opening of the course *Logistics English* becomes necessary.

B. Preparing textbook and other teaching materials

The teacher in EC chose *Freight Matters* by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press as the textbook. The courseware, teaching files and other materials had also been well prepared. The teacher introduced himself to the students at the first class and also presented the content of course. Then he made an introduction about the teaching objectives and methods for this course. Finally, the teacher introduced the evaluation methods, which is a combination of procedural and summative assessment.

4.2.2 The stage of application of code switching in logistics English teaching

The application of code switching in the Logistics English class is embodied in two aspects, namely, the application of code switching in teachers' teaching and students' learning. Specific details of applications are described in the following sections.

A. Applying code switching to promote Logistics English Teaching

The role of code switching in Logistics English teaching has been described in previous chapters. Its functions can be summarized as the following two aspects:

(1). The application of code switching in classroom teaching

The role of code switching in Logistics English class teaching consists of four aspects, which include showing topics, connecting context, emphasizing key points, and interpreting meanings.

(2). The application of code switching in classroom management

The role of code switching in classroom management consists of three aspects, which include managing classroom, assisting exercises and showing teachers' authority and status. In classroom teaching, teachers utilize the functions of code switching mentioned above to teach and explain the vocabulary, phrases, sentences and paragraphs of Logistics English.

B. Applying code switching to help students' learning

(1). Applying code switching to help students enlarge vocabulary and increase reading ability

In Logistics English class, teacher B uses code switching to help students understand and grasp the meanings of various terms, which can help them memorize the words and phrases better. Different from ordinary English words, most logistics terms appear in the form of phrases, and have practical meanings. Students need to remember meanings of the words instead of learning the way they are used in sentences. Students can enlarge their vocabulary so as to read professional articles without difficulty, while grammar requirements are not necessary for them. For this reason, code

switching can be very helpful to enlarge students' vocabulary, and can also help them improve their reading ability.

(2). Applying code switching to help students make and get familiar with international logistics documents

International logistics document is an important part in Logistics English teaching. At present, the shipping industry is well developed, and the people who are competent for international logistics work are in short supply. Therefore, one of the teaching objectives of Logistics English is to know how to make international documents in addition to mastering logistics theories. The columns in the documents are described in English, and students need to fill in them with the guidance of teacher. Teaching in English is not suitable for this kind of practical activity. In this case, the teacher should use Chinese as a guide. Therefore, code switching plays an important role in the studying international logistics documents.

4.2.3 The post application stage of code switching

The post application stage of code switching is mainly about evaluation. The assessment of Logistics English adopts a diversified evaluation system, emphasizing the process assessment and focusing on assessing students' vocational ability. In order to evaluate the role of code switching in Logistics English teaching effectively and objectively, this study applies the combination of formative evaluation and summative evaluation.

A. Formative evaluation

The content for evaluation includes vocabulary, sentence structure and reading comprehension. The teacher checks students' learning by accomplishing tasks so as to measure the influence of code switching on students' English learning. Evaluation is carried out in three aspects, and the separate distribution is as follows: the group members' evaluation accounts for 25% of total; peer evaluation in group accounts for 25%; the teachers' evaluation accounts for 50%.

B. Summative evaluation

Summative assessment is carried out by means of examination. Through the process evaluation and summative evaluation, we can judge the role of code switching in English teaching, which provides an effective evaluation method for the study.

5. Findings of the study

Based on the results of the data analysis, we can find that students in EC have made greater progress after the experiment, which are embodied in the following aspects:

1) After the application of code switching in English teaching, the attitudes of students towards code switching have changed a lot. Most students think code switching is an effective way to improve their English proficiency. Code switching can not only help students increase English learning interest but also assist teachers with classroom teaching.

2) After the final test, the students scored high marks. This shows that code switching is very useful for the improvement of students' English proficiency, which is embodied in such aspects as grasping more English vocabulary and phrases as well as basic sentence structures.

To sum up, code switching is of great significance in Logistics English teaching. In view of this, the application of code switching contributes to ESP teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges. The foreign language teaching for non English-majored students in vocational colleges is a complex process. At present, the overall English level of vocational college students is not high, so the use of code switching in ESP teaching is one of the important teaching strategies. Of course, it is necessary to use code switching reasonably and scientifically.

6. Conclusion

This study is an empirical study carried out in Rizhao Polytechnic, which provides some research results, but there are still some limitations. The author's theoretical level may lead to distortion and loss of information, which has a certain impact on the design and construction of this study.

This study has a good reference to the ESP teaching for non English-majored students in higher vocational colleges. The study of code switching in ESP teaching is still in the initial stage, and some theoretical and deep-seated problems are not involved. Therefore, this study can be used as a long-term research project, and more research samples should be selected to obtain more objective results. Code switching is a strong interdisciplinary phenomenon, and experts on linguistics, psychology, anthropology and education have shown great interest in it. The study for code switching also derives such branches as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, grammar, conversation analysis and pragmatics. The research of these subjects is based on the bilingual corpus, so the research of code switching can be more extensive and thorough. In a word, apart from continuing to study the application of code switching in English teaching, more researches need to be done to find more effective ways for improving students' English ability.

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