

CONSCIOUS USE OF CODE-SWITCHING TO IMPROVE FLUENCY IN SPOKEN ENGLISH OF BANGLADESHI STUDENTS

Ehatasham Ul Hoque Eiten^{1*}, M Hasan Parvez², Kaish Q Khan³

¹Research Scholar, School of Humanities, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar-751024, Odisha, India and Lecturer, Department of English, Daffodil International University, Bangladesh, ²Research Scholar, School of Management, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar-751024, Odisha, India and Sr. Officer, Daffodil International University, Bangladesh, ³Assistant Professor, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar-751024, Odisha, India.

Email: ^{1*}eiten.somoy@gmail.com, ²mhasanparvez@gmail.com

Article History: Received on 27th September 2019, Revised on 30th October 2019, Published on 20th November 2019

Abstract

Purpose: Present-day English language teaching in Bangladesh, despite adopting Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), focuses more on accuracy (i.e. grammar) than fluency which is proved as a weak strategy. Fluency acquisition in speaking includes pronunciation, but focusing on pronunciation first, slows down the process of becoming a fluent speaker.

Methodology: As code-switching exists at the tertiary level in Bangladesh and because of the tremendous fascination of Bangladeshi students towards Bengali, code-switching can be utilized as a tool to improve fluency in spoken English. Thus, this research proposes an alternative to existing approaches.

Result: Once desired fluency is achieved; grammar and pronunciation will be emphasized respectively to attain proper speaking skills. The success of this process can be studied in three phases. In the first phase, it examines whether allowing code-switching while speaking English helps Bengali students achieve fluency or not.

Applications: This research can be used for universities, teachers, and students.

Novelty/Originality: In this research, the model of the Conscious Use of Code-Switching to Improve Fluency in Spoken English of Bangladeshi Students is presented in a comprehensive and complete manner.

Keywords: Code-switching, CLT, Fluency, Bengali, Grammar, Pronunciation.

INTRODUCTION

In a country like Bangladesh where English is a foreign language, it is often found that students face difficulties while speaking English or using English as a medium of communication. To improve the situation CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) was adopted by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in late 1990s as a method to be followed by the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. It overthrew GTM (Grammar Translation Method) which was proven ineffective in terms of developing communicative competence in English, especially speaking skills. A recent study shows that most of the students have below-average proficiency in spoken English when they enter higher education (Jahan, 2008; Akkuzova et al, 2018). Various theories, approaches, and methods have been applied by different institutions and the government, but still any noticeable development is yet to be observed. Keeping students, who are from an English medium background and a very minor portion of huge student community, aside, there is a clear disappointment alive in terms of speaking skills in rest of the students. Since students have a fascination towards their mother tongue (Bengali) because of its glorious history (Language Movement, 21st February 1952, Declared as International Mother Language Day by UNESCO) and strong relationship with the Independence (1971) of the country, code-switching can play a crucial role to achieve fluency in spoken English. To produce competent speakers, Shumin, wants the instructors of EFL to figure out the factors that affect adult EFL learners' verbal communication skills, the elements that increase speaking ability effectively, and the way that helps improve speaking proficiency of EFL learners. There are two well-known approaches available in this field- Accuracy based Approach and Fluency based Approach. Stern claims that the first approach has got negative review from the EFL teachers. On the other hand, Kumar asserts that the second one is supported by many EFL teachers. This research takes fluency-based approach as standard as it is supported by many EFL teachers (Kumar, J, 2013) and studies the status of fluency in only English situations based on time is taken, fillers used and pauses occurred while speaking. Then it examines the status of fluency in a situation where code-switching is allowed based on time is taken, fillers used and pauses occurred while speaking. Depending on the result after a deep dive into the sorted and bucketed data, and after presenting and analyzing evidence in a conventional academic style including tables and charts followed by a vivid discussion, a conclusion is made.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shumin figures out that when it comes to speaking a foreign language, learning its grammatical and semantic rules is not enough; the ability to apply the language in social interactions makes oral communication effective. One of the main concerns in learning a foreign language has always been 'fluency in speaking' and for English language learners there is no exception. What makes us think twice about the contemporary techniques in the field is when Shumin, further goes on stating that the factors that assist the production of spoken language have not received enough importance and the proficiency of EFL learners regarding fluency is relatively low.

However, the term 'Fluency' or 'Fluently' is used widely in various fields of applied linguistics. Fillmore, C. J. (1979), in one of the early researches on fluency, states that fluency comes with imagination and creativity while using the language which can be suitable for L1 speakers but for L2 speakers, it is not acceptable. Pawley comes up with their definition of fluency for L2 speakers saying, "The native speaker's ability to produce fluent stretches of discourse". Sajavaara defines fluency as "the communicative acceptability of the speech act or communicative fit". However, Chambers, F. (1997) claims that there is no consensus that clarifies exactly what fluency means.

A more difficult task for researchers in this field has been the measurement of 'fluency'. Most of the researchers prefer 'Speech Rate' as the best predictors of fluency (Freed, B. 2000). Another good predictor can be the 'Phonation-time ratio' - the percentage of time spent speaking as a percentage proportion of the time taken to produce the speech sample. Kormos, J., & Dénes, M. (2004) suggest a two-phased measurement-

1. Low-order fluency (measured by temporal variables);
2. High-order fluency (accuracy and lexical diversity);

Some researchers tried to investigate 'variables contribute to perceptions of fluency' taking Riggenbach, famous work as the basis, but ended up with several methodological shortcomings (e.g. Ejzenberg, R. 2000; Freed, B. 1995). van Gelderen, A.'s widely accepted measurement instrument is on L1, hence it cannot be applicable for L2. This research aims to measure 'fluency' by measuring 'Disfluency Markers' that includes number of pauses, fillers and time taken by the individuals (more pauses- less fluent/ more fillers- less fluent/ more time taken- less fluent) which are proved to be better predictors than others in research of Cucchiari, C., Strik, H., & Boves, L. (2000), Freed, B. (2000), Haghsheenas et al. (2015).

In Bangladesh, the 'Communicative Approach' was blended with existing approach in the 1970s but the success, especially in spoken English, is not noteworthy (Kabir, U. S. 2014). Focusing on speaking skills with importance has not been done so far in Bangladesh, even though it is discussed in the education policy and the experts are yet to figure out why students are not achieving expected proficiency despite the fact that the policies have been made and implemented - she adds. Selim, confirms that the government introduced CLT in 1998-1999 but it failed to fulfill its purpose because of the unwelcoming attitude of traditional teachers. Billah, M. (2012) found out that the government introduced 80 speaking focused lessons in class VI, 74 in class VII, 69 in class VII, and 63 in IX-X. But this textbook-based approach failed miserably in terms of improving basic speaking skills of the students. Salahuddin showed that whatever method is applied, teaching speaking is still traditional hence no improvement whatsoever is visible. However, private universities are way ahead in terms of focusing on English speaking skills of the students as they put special emphasis on English focusing on the importance of it in job market (Alam, F. 2005). But the overall scenario is not satisfactory.

Since existing measures taken to improve speaking skill (fluency) have somehow failed, this research offers an alternative approach- 'Conscious Use of Code-switching'. Code-switching refers to - "the use of more than one language, variety, or style by a speaker within an utterance or discourse, or between different interlocutors or situations". Though there are different opinions whether code-switching helps or hinders learning L2, Hall, G., & Cook, G. (2012) states that the bias towards restricting L1 in the classroom has been questioned greatly and a new positive approach towards using L1 has emerged. According to Kao, M., & Hsu, T. (1998, p.3) - "the usefulness of L1, or code-switching, in the ELT classroom has recently been recognized, as some studies report that code-switching not only facilitates classroom management and transmission of lesson content, but it also prepares students for their sociolinguistic life beyond the classroom". Cook, V. (2001, p.413) says, "Students find classroom interaction more natural and easy when code-switching is allowed". Thus, research on the effectiveness of code-switching in improving fluency in a country like Bangladesh where English is given immense importance is already overdue.

METHODOLOGY

This is experimental research where there were independent and dependent variables comparing different items of which would lead to a credible result and help examine the hypothesis- using code-switching as a conscious tool accelerates fluency. Fifty students irrespective of their sex, academic and non-academic background, social class, region and current discipline of higher study, from five private universities (medium of instruction is English) in Bangladesh were selected for the experiment. They were given common topics to speak and recorded without any influence or instruction to get dependent variables in the first round. In the second round, they were given the same topics again to speak and recorded after giving instructions and to get independent variables. The same students worked as controlled group in the first round and experimental group in the second. Participants responded willingly to be a part of the research and gave their consent prior to the research. They were informed about the recording and assured privacy. Data analysis was done after transcribing the recordings. Graphs and tables were used to explain data and findings.

DATA COLLECTION

Participants were given a minimum 1 minute to maximum 2 minutes to talk about simple topics like your university, your city, your daily life, etc. They were not influenced to talk about any particular topic. They had full freedom to talk about any of the topics they like.

First Round: They spoke about the topic they like in English in a separate room where no one was allowed to enter. They spoke before an audio recorder. Only up to 2 minutes of speech was counted as data.

Second Round: They spoke about the same topic as the first round. They were instructed to use Bengali when they slow down or find it difficult to speak a certain word, phrase or part of the sentence in English. In addition, they were encouraged to keep their content same as the previous one. The time limit was same as the first round. Every participant talked in second round right after finishing the first round.

DATA ANALYSIS

Based on the transcribed data from recordings, this study calculated three things to get the result.

1. Timing
2. Use of fillers
3. Long pauses

Firstly, it was tested whether the speech without code-switching took more time on average than with code-switching or not. To do this, the average timing of the first round was sorted out according to the data from recording timer using general mathematical equation (Table 1) –

$$A = \frac{1}{n} * \sum_{i=1}^n x_i$$

A = average
n = the number of terms
x₁ = the value of each individual item in the list of numbers being averaged

Mathematical Equation Average Timing

The average timing of the second round also sorted out using same technique (Table 1). Comparing two means of data, status of fluency based on timing was drawn in the findings section. Secondly, students' use of fillers was counted. Generally, more fillers are used when the fluency is low. This happened because of the scarcity of vocabulary of the target language in the speaker's store (there can be other minor reasons like nervousness, confusion, etc.). Thus, the more filler are used, the lower fluency they have. The average use of fillers was sorted out (Table 1) and status of fluency based on the use fillers was drawn in the findings section. Thirdly, long pauses in the speech were also counted. Fluency rate can also be examined by counting pauses. The more the pauses, the lower the fluency. For this research, only long pauses were counted because when this paper was presented in a conference, experts pointed out that sometimes short pauses occurred due to psychological and physical (breathing problem) malfunction. After a discussion session, only long pauses were finalized to be eligible for this research.

Table 1: Average use of fillers

Participants	Time R1	Time R2	Fillers R1	Fillers R2	Pauses R1	Pause R2
1	1.47 m	1.10 m	10	03	11	04
2	1.31 m	1.00 m	11	04	20	05
3	1.20 m	1.00 m	07	15	13	10
4	1.36 m	1.32 m	10	02	11	08
5	1.32 m	1.17 m	12	02	10	04
6	1.23 m	1.50 m	09	11	16	09
7	1.23 m	1.13 m	06	03	09	07
8	1.28 m	1.22 m	13	06	11	03
9	1.37 m	1.23 m	06	10	14	10
10	1.36 m	1.38 m	08	03	08	06
11	1.38 m	1.17 m	14	05	11	04

12	1.35 m	1.27 m	2	04	06	06
13	1.38 m	1.38 m	11	03	13	05
14	1.34 m	1.48 m	10	02	13	07
15	1.31 m	1.29 m	07	02	10	07
16	1.55 m	1.33 m	13	07	11	03
17	1.47 m	1.35 m	12	09	12	10
18	1.32 m	1.20 m	10	03	09	04
19	1.50 m	1.44 m	14	08	12	02
20	1.47 m	1.31 m	09	03	17	08
21	1.31 m	1.57 m	11	11	09	04
22	1.20 m	1.51 m	11	05	12	03
23	1.32 m	1.10 m	10	09	11	04
24	1.50 m	1.42 m	03	02	07	03
25	1.37 m	1.52 m	11	11	11	10
26	1.23 m	1.00 m	10	06	11	06
27	1.58 m	1.35 m	13	06	13	11
28	1.44 m	1.40 m	08	08	12	04
29	1.52 m	1.18 m	12	11	17	10
30	2.00 m	1.22 m	10	03	11	07
31	1.55 m	1.30 m	06	03	09	02
32	1.21 m	1.00 m	13	01	07	10
33	1.39 m	1.23 m	11	04	09	06
34	2.00 m	1.34 m	09	03	10	04
35	1.10 m	1.50 m	02	07	05	11
36	1.44 m	1.13 m	11	02	09	06
37	1.37 m	1.20 m	05	07	10	04
38	1.27 m	1.16 m	11	06	10	07
39	1.52 m	1.10 m	11	07	12	06
40	1.45 m	1.00 m	10	07	11	10
41	2.00 m	1.31 m	11	10	09	05
42	1.41 m	1.12 m	09	03	10	07
43	1.57 m	1.24 m	13	11	13	05

44	1.55 m	1.10 m	13	06	11	05
45	1.44 m	1.07 m	10	09	11	10
46	1.37 m	1.26 m	11	05	10	04
47	1.18 m	1.00 m	03	02	07	02
48	1.57 m	1.09 m	10	02	06	03
49	1.37 m	1.57 m	02	07	05	07
50	1.40 m	1.53 m	08	02	10	03

Table 2: Final Result Average Timing

Items	CS not allowed	CS allowed	Difference
Time (average)	1.42 min	1.25 min	17 sec
Fillers Used (average)	9.44 times	5.60 times	3.84 times
Pauses Used (average)	10.7 times	6.2 times	4.5 times

SAMPLE DATA

Instruction: Tell something about anything you like in English (L2).

I'm a student of Daffodil International University in department of English. Now I'm reading in 2nd year. Sorry 3rd year. ehhhh.... Daffodil is over all a good university. Day by day it's improving its position. And if you think about the position of Daffodil International University right now..... as I have seen in internet that eehhhhh.... its position right now in number. ehehhh..... in overall.....mmm...if we compare the public university and private university Daffodil International University is in top 20. So.... itsgreat....there is.... there are a lot of faculties. ahhhh.... there are lot of ...ehhh.... department in Daffodil...for this....reason....students are getting....ahhhahhh... pleasure....students are getting pleasure really. And Bangladesh is not very rich country....so middle class people is middle class people are lot of in Bangladesh. So daffodil is really suitable for middle class people middle class students there is some lacking also in aaaaaa.... in daffodil but.. aaaaa... I hope... it will cover.....as soon as possible.....and as a student of Daffodil...I think....aaa...mmmmm.....daffodil is a good university.

Duration: 1.47 Minute **Fluency:** Low
Fillers: 10 times. **Pause:** 11 times

Instruction: Use Bengali (L1) when you slow down.

Ami....aaaa.... I'm a student of English literature..... in 3rd year in Daffodil International University. I think Daffodil is a good university because..... day by day it's improving its position. I have seen in internet Daffodil *er* position 9. If we compare public and private *miliye* , daffodil *er* position 20 *er moddhe*. **ar hocche** Bangladesh is mainly ... not really rich country. *mane* in Bangladesh middle class people and middle class students most of them . So ...ehhhh.. *moddhobitto srenir* student *der jonno* Daffodil is really good.mmmmm.. Daffodil has some problem. But I hope *je* it will cover as soon as possible. **ar jeta hocche** Daffodil International University has many..... departments and many faculties. For this reason *eta* student *der jonno* good.

(Bold face words are in Bengali)

Duration: 0.8 Minute **Fluency:** Medium
Fillers: 3 times. **Pause:** 4 times.

FINDINGS

Analysis of data shows that fluency is less interrupted and more accelerated when code-switching was allowed. When it

took 1.42 min (average) to talk about the same topic without allowing code-switching, it took 1.25 min (average) allowing code-switching. It clearly shows that in terms of long talk code-switching definitely influences fluency. For instance, if it's an 8-minute speech, the difference will be $17\text{-sec} \times 4 = 68\text{ sec}$ (1 min 8 sec). Also learners used 3.84 times less fillers on average while code-switching was allowed than when it was not allowed. This is a definite sign of fluency increase. In addition, learners took less pauses (long ones) when they were permitted to switch between their mother tongue and the target language. Data analysis shows the difference is no less than 4.5 times on average. Long pauses are considered to be one of the indicators of low fluency. Data analysis portrayed in graph- Chart 1

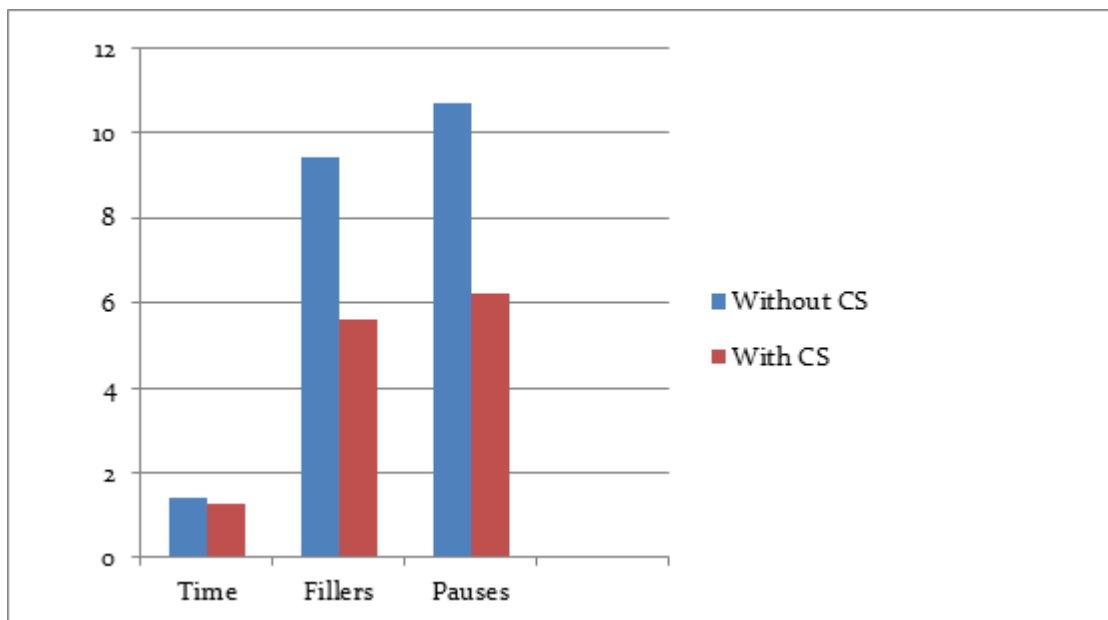


Chart 1: Result of Without CS vs with CS

However, among fifty participants only ten took more time while using code-switching in their speech which is 20% of the total population. On the other hand, 80% of them performed the opposite. Thus in 80% cases, fluency is noted to be increased and decreased in rest of the cases. In terms of using fillers in the speech, only five participants used more fillers when code-switching was allowed which is 10% of the total population. One interesting fact has been found that three of them performed equally in both cases, meaning- no change has been found in 6% of the cases. When it comes to long pauses, only two used less pauses while speaking in L2 which is 4% of the total population when rest of them took more pauses than that of while mixing L1 and L2. Data analysis is displayed in graph- Chart 2

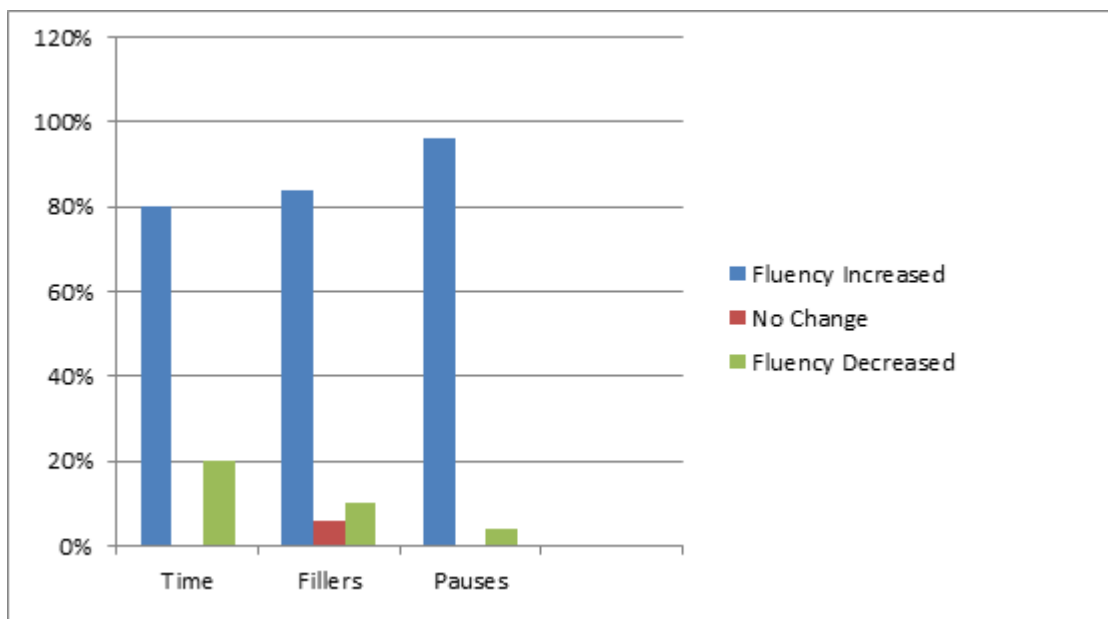


Chart 2: Result Of Fluency Change

DISCUSSION

From all three aspects, it is proven that the conscious use of code-switching can help increase fluency in target language.

Participants found it interesting and accepted that they never tried such approach before. Normally in their day to day life conversation they switch from Bengali to English but never English to Bengali. This very fact influences further application of this strategy in larger scale. After discussion, a minority of the participants who came up with different result from that of majority participants, some important facts were revealed which will be very helpful when the proposed strategy is applied. They asserted some reasons for what they slowed down even when they had option to switch to their mother tongue. That are-

1. Difficulties in understanding the task.
2. Trying to use standard phrases of L1.
3. Trying to use standard words of L1.
4. Doing such activity for the first time.
5. Used the same words of L1 twice- 1st colloquial; 2nd standard.

The points mentioned above have to be seriously taken care of while implementing code-switching as a conscious tool to improve fluency in Bengali students of the English language.

CONCLUSION

The alternation between mother tongue and target language is a reality in EFL classroom. Taking the present scenario into consideration, it's very crucial to rethink existing techniques or approaches to enhance fluency in spoken English in Bangladesh. The proposed strategy 'using code-switching as a conscious way' has been proven effective. This can open a new window in the field of ELT. Though more research is required as this paper mentioned earlier, it can be applied as an add-on along with other conventional teaching techniques. It will, however, take properly tested material, teaching plan, and course outline before implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author confirms that the data do not contain any conflict of interest.

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