

HPEN 7006 Assignment 1

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A.

My View on the Value and Purpose of Code-switching in Bilingualism

In the readable work written by Colin Baker (2014), many real-life critical issues on bilingual education are responded with practical and straightforward answers from Baker with his great expertise and experience in bilingualism. Among those questions, whether code-switching has value and purpose or not and if yes, its value and purpose are what I am concerned about most. Since as an EFL practitioner and a type of bilingual parent who always supports and encourages early foreign language learning, the act of code-switching is confusing to be and controversial to the public to date. Therefore, the present essay aims to reexamine the question and the answer from the book and comment on it based on my experience and relevance.

1. The definition of bilingualism and code-switching

Although bilingualism has different definitions, the definition from Valdes suits different situations, ‘Bilingual/multilingual individuals share one key characteristic: they have more than one language competence. They are able to function (i.e., speak, understand, read, or write) even to an extremely limited degree in more than one language (2015, p. 38).’ In addition, there is a minimal one called incipient bilingualism (Diebold, 1964), which allows people with minimal competence in a second language to squeeze into the bilingual category, such as tourists. Based on these definitions, both second language and foreign language learners, even with short-time exposure to second language, can be regarded as bilinguals.

As defined by Baker (2017, p. 98), code-switching refers to ‘any switches between languages that occur within or across sentences during the same conversation or discourse.’ Although it is normal for an individual to switch languages, on purpose or not, to accommodate meaningful communication with other interlocutors. This mixed use of languages is quite common for bilingual learners but is controversially regarded negatively by parents and teachers, worrying that it will harm the fluency and purity of each language and prevent the young learners from being a proficient bilingual. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore its value and purpose.

2. The answers from Colin Baker

In the book, there are four interrelated questions scattered in different chapters of the book to answer these questions, contributing together to forming the general conclusions. To make these answers concise and visible, a table is as follows.

Section/ page	Questions	Answers from Baker in summary
B/73	My child mixes their two languages. Is this normal?	1) mixing is normal and sees code-switching from a positive perspective since it is efficient in maximizing mutual understanding. 2) switching between languages could be seen as fairly typical and effective child communication to show that a child is using all the language resources available to convey meaning.
B/73	Does switching between languages have any value or purpose?	1) when both or all participants in a conversation understand both languages, switching has a purpose. 2) a list of the major 10 uses of code-switching. 3) regard code-switching as a valuable and purposeful communication strategy. 4) code-switching is not just linguistic; it indicates important social and power relationships.
C/89	My child mixes the two languages. What should I do?	1) moving between two languages is very normal in bilingual children and adults. 2) regard language mixing as something that helps the message to be communicated and understood, seeing language as a vehicle to help move along the road of information exchange and social communication. 3) parents can also ensure that language boundaries are mostly kept. By one parent-one language strategy or each parent speaks a different language to the child or use languages in different contexts.
E/203	How should two languages be distributed in a bilingual classroom?	1) two languages used in the classroom are compartmentalized. 2) the separation will ensure the minority language dominates 3) where a majority language is introduced as a new language, the majority of (or all) curriculum will initially be through that new language.

Table 1: a summary of the key points related to code-switching in the book

3. My Thoughts regarding above Code-switching related Answers

To be honest, the assigned two books written by Colin Baker (2014, 2017) inspire me a lot. One of the linguistic concepts and pedagogical terms, code-switching, along with a more recently popular term, translanguaging, has had a significant impact on my philosophy as an EFL teacher and a bilingual parent. Here I would like to discuss it based on my experience and my reading.

3.1 To reflect as an EFL teacher

I used to be an English-only believer and practitioner in my class in the Chinese Tertiary Context because I think mixing L1 will ruin the atmosphere of target language learning and weaken my credibility as a EFL teacher. Both the school authority and the students hold the myth of regarding the teacher's mixed use of L1 and L2 in class as incompetence or disqualification. I also maintained the English-only policy in my class, considering mixing the languages as a compromise of L2 speaking, decreasing the fluency of target language. Similarly, the facts were found that there is constant strong opposition from the those who favored language separation and worry about the 'cross-contamination' of two languages (J.MacSwan, and C. Faltis , 2019, p. 28).

However, the reality is that the absolute English-only policy does not guarantee the effectiveness of English learning, especially for the EMI classroom. I used to explain in detail the abstract concepts, such as critical thinking, intercultural communicative competence, some imported terms in English to my students during English Public Speaking course. It turns out to be fruitless when most students did a poor job in testing how they understand these concepts. Baker (2017) mentions fourteen overlapping functions of code-switching. Among them, code-switching can be used for dealing with emphasis, clarification, and concepts without equivalence. In education or pedagogy, translanguaging is a more frequently used word. What is more, code-switching tends to focus more on the code (i.e., the language itself), whereas translanguaging focuses on bilingual speakers and the ways in which they use their various linguistic resources (O. Garcia and Li Wei, 2014). Whatever the term, the practical use of language mixing is found and researched. Those who advocate code-switching are found widely. As proposed by J.MacSwan, and C. Faltis (2019, p. 28), 'New Concurrent Approach'¹ advocated code-switching as an instructional strategy,

¹ I proposed and promoted by Jacobson and Faltis (1990) , which is regarded as an extraordinary pedagogy based on community code-switching practices.

providing detailed descriptions of how teachers should use it most effectively in classrooms. What is more, more empirical work on code-switching has been and continues to be incredibly important to education (J. MacSwan, and C. Faltis, 2019, p. 47).

In all, I agree with Baker's thought of code-switching being regarded as code-switching as a valuable and purposeful communication strategy and could be accepted and used by teachers as a controlled and restricted way.

3.2 To reflect as a bilingual parent

As a bilingual parent who strongly supports early development of bilingualism, I turn to a more tolerant view towards code-switching among children, though it should be used with limits or boundaries. Firstly, as listed by Baker (2017, pp. 101-103), code-switching has purposes of problem-solving, interjections, ease tension, identity, imitation, etc. Therefore, the purposeful use of code-switching among children can help construct and demonstrate the child's competence of communication and form a sense of holistic linguistic repertoire. However, parents should set boundaries to code-switching and adapt relevant strategies in real life practices, such as the use of one parent-one language or one language-one context strategy. Secondly, no matter code-switching occur either in simultaneous bilingualism—the concurrent acquisition of two native languages – or in sequential bilingualism—the achievement of native-like fluency after another language has already been mastered (Hoff, 2005), parents should allow their children to use code-switching, since 'the linguistic contrast arising with the code-switching may enhance second speakers' chances to acquire the floor (Cromdal, 2001, p. 421)'.

Above all, code-switching does have its values and purposes in bilingual communication and classroom settings due to its essence in communication competence. Parents or teachers should be tolerant and allow its scientific and limited use in bilingual education.

B.

My Humble Advice on the Most Important Factors in Raising a Bilingual Child

Bilingualism is such an important topic within fields such as linguistics and education. To inherit and maintain the identity of a particular ethnic or national community, such as Bilingualism in Wales or to embrace the diversities of an unfamiliar environment, such as Chinese overseas students and their family abroad, bilingual education is prevalent in the world to a great degree. It is true that there are different bilingual situations, being it additive bilingualism or subtractive bilingualism (Baker, 2014, p. xxi), but there are some common principles for teachers and parents involved to understand and follow. The following report will be based on the relevant information of the two books from Colin Baker (2014, 2017) and my personal advice as a multilingual believer and supporter will be followed in the end.

1. The Most Important Factors in Baker's Mind

Before offering my personal advice, it is worthwhile to read Baker's answer (2014, pp 37-38) first. To make it simple, I summarized these key factors into the following three points:

1.1 Developing a Pleasure, a Positive and Enjoyable Experience

In Baker's mind, children are born to become bilinguals and multilinguals. Instead of worrying about the correctness of grammar, accuracy of vocabulary, anxiety or pressure when learning two languages, parents should be open-minded to see the advantages of bilingualism, encourage their children to be bilingual continuously. It needs the parents' openness and wisdom to realize that language is the essence of a medium of communication and identity expression and support their children to learn languages in a positive and pleasant way.

1.2 Adequate Exposure to Both Languages

Baker believes that children need a constant, continuous, and enriching exposure to both languages to achieve competence. 'Adequate' means strengthening the exposure of minority language speakers, at least 30% of exposure to 'weaker' language. It is important to amplify that the minority language rather than majority language, especially in the early years. It is understandable that without substantial amount of minority language exposure, children are not able to develop equal

bilingual system, so it is the parents' key model role to foster the children's habit of using the minority language.

1.3 The language that surrounds language.

Creatively, Baker compares a bilingual child learning process as a plant growing. As plant gardeners, parents should provide stimulating soil, light, water, and careful tending – a variety of pleasurable environments for language growth and conditions for the language to grow. Bear in mind that parents cannot control the growth of language. For parents in this metaphor, too much 'pruning' will have a negative effect.

As shown above, three factors are seen as the basic key principles of raising a bilingual child, namely, learning happily, exposing substantially, and growing naturally.

2. More about Bilingualism Most Important Factors in Baker's Mind

In another repetitively reprinted book by Baker (2017), *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* which presents a panoramic array of bilingual studies, I get more inspirations about what is important in bilingual education. Bilingualism should be considered from a broader perspective.

Firstly, communicative competence and language socialization should be emphasized. Different from Chomsky's cognitive theory of language focusing on grammatically correct sentences, Hymes (1972), one of the leading founders of sociolinguistics, argued that language proficiency considerations must include the types of knowledge speakers need to communicate competently with others in each specific speech community. Therefore parents should be aware of the importance of socialization of second language and parents should motivate their children to be their interpreters or brokers to their parents or relatives, 'rather than just transmit information, children act as cultural mediators, often ensuring the message are socially and culturally translated (p. 104)'.

Secondly, in terms of the age factor, parents should stay calm, instead of being anxious forcing their children to learn at a very tender age, parents should be confident that second language acquisition could be achieved within any life time with the right path, since Baker pointed that 'younger second language learners are

neither globally more nor less efficient and successful than older learners in second language acquisition (p. 117)?

Thirdly, parents should realize and respect the individual characteristics of their children, as individual differences such as attitudes, motivation, and aptitude do exist and make a difference (p. 121). Any so-called laws or rules of raising bilingual children should be only applied and adapted to specific children in specific situation.

3. My Advice as an EFL English Teacher and Bilingual Parent

Before presenting my personal humble advice for parents of bilingual children, let me share one of the true stories of my daughter.

In 2019, invited by my cousin in America, I visited California, America with my 7-year-old daughter. During the brief time slot, I enrolled my daughter for two local summer camps. Since she just started to learn English at her primary school, she got a tough time there. She told me later that she could hardly understand anything except very occasional translations from her campmate, my cousin's daughter. Instead of immersing herself enjoyably into English context, she was frustrated for a while and did not attain a noteworthy progress in her English learning.

My daughter's experience taught me, a seemingly well-intentioned parent, a 'good' lesson. I realize immersing into the target language context is good, but such immersion should be in accordance with the children's cognitive and language level. Before throwing them into the swimming pool, parents should get them ready with sufficient 'scaffolding,' equipping them with basic socio-cultural knowledge, affective preparedness, and communicative competence in advance, to guarantee that their immersion is more effective and children themselves feel better.

Based on my reflection and prior reading summary, here comes my personal advice as for the most factors in raising a bilingual child.

Firstly, **stay involved**. Parents should keep staying involved with the bilingual process of their children. Like what a gardener is to a plant, parents should provide the right environment, nutrients, and handy support. You cannot count on the total self-planning, self-managing, and self-adaptation of the children at such a tender age. Parents should play the role of caregiver. If the language does not develop as expected, an intervention should be made. Only if parents stay involved, can they know their children well and the possible tailor-made intervention are more like to take effect. Only if parents stay involved, can they have more quality bilingual interactions with

their children, such as playing games, reading books, and singing, etc. with both languages. Only if parents stay involved, can they be more likely to be the role model to demonstrate and motivate their children to learn.

Secondly, **stay process oriented**. We cannot deny the benefits of being proficient bilingual for those learners with instrumental motivation or integrative one. However, everyone reaches different level of bilingual proficiency due to varied social circumstances and individual factors. Parents should avoid that mentality that the bilingual learning process must bring their children a bright future, or even thinking that his or her child is born to own the talent as a successful bilingual learner. The more constructive and rational mentality is to regard bilingual learning process as well as being bilingual as something to help each child to explore the unknown, to challenge the difficult, to carry on unyieldingly and finally to grow as a member of human society.

Last but not least, **stay interconnected**. As John Donne said, no man is an island, so as bilingualism. The decision to be bilingual is usually driven by societal and social reasons. To be a bilingual means to obtain harmony with different language communities, to develop multi-cultural awareness, and to build more connections with the different societies, cultures and people. Therefore, there is no reason to learn a second language alone, without meaningful communications and interactions with other peers, families and communities. If your child feels anxious, isolated and helpless in learning a second language, why not connect with a bigger world and gain power from genuine human contact?

The above is my personal advice. As an EFL teacher and bilingual parent, I am more than happy to have further discussions with all the parents.

Thanks for your attention.

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