

# A Study of Chinese Second-year English Majors' Code Switching Phenomenon in Comprehensive English Course from the Perspective of Interlanguage

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**Abstract**—The paper analyzes functions and influencing factors of second-year English majors' code switching in Comprehensive English Course on the basis of the interlanguage theory and other SLA (second language acquisition) models, i.e. Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis.

**Index Terms**—interlanguage, SLA, learners' code switching in EFL classroom, functions, influencing factors

## I. INTRODUCTION

Code is a neutral form, and it refers to the linguistic sign of any type. As Hudson states, code switching is to switch lingual varieties in bilingual or multilingual contexts. And learners' code switching in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) class is the phenomenon that learners insert phonetic forms, vocabulary, phrases, sentences of MT (Mother Tongue) into English-dominated expressions or the activity that learners consciously or unconsciously inlay speech segments of MT into the grammatical system of English in the conversion between the two languages.

There are many features of previous learners' code switching in EFL class. Firstly, current classroom code switching studies are mostly conducted in primary schools, middle schools and non-English majors' EFL classes in universities. And merely a few of them concentrate on code switching phenomenon in the specified courses for English majors. Therefore, it is of necessity to analyze code switching conditions in English majors' Comprehensive English Course (CEC). Secondly, a large percentage of scholars detect classroom code switching by the lights of pragmatic theories: Vershueren's Adaptation Theory (Verchueren, 1999), Sperber & Wilson's Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 2001), and Richard Dawkin's Memetics Theory (Dawkin, 1976) and their derivative models: Yu Guodong's Adaptation Model (Yu, 2004), Yangping's Relevance-adaptation Model (Yang, 2001), Memetics-adaptation Model, Zhuyan's Relevance-adaptation-memetics Model (Zhu, 2013) etc.. And current pragmatic researches of classroom code switching are rarely based on interlanguage theory. Thus, it is of significance to build the theoretical basis of interlanguage theory for classroom code switching analysis. And the thesis conducts analysis on functions, and causes of English majors' code switching in CEC based on the theoretical framework of interlanguage theory and four hypothesis models (Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis and Affection Filter Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypothesis) of SLA (second language acquisition) theory.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The thesis detects learners' code switching in CEC based on the theoretical foundation of interlanguage theory and four hypotheses of SLA. Through classroom observation and qualitative analysis, the thesis explores functions, and causes of English majors' code switching condition. On the basis of Zhang Xiaofang's Interlanguage—SLA model (2012), the thesis makes some alteration, and the renewed theoretical model is as follows:

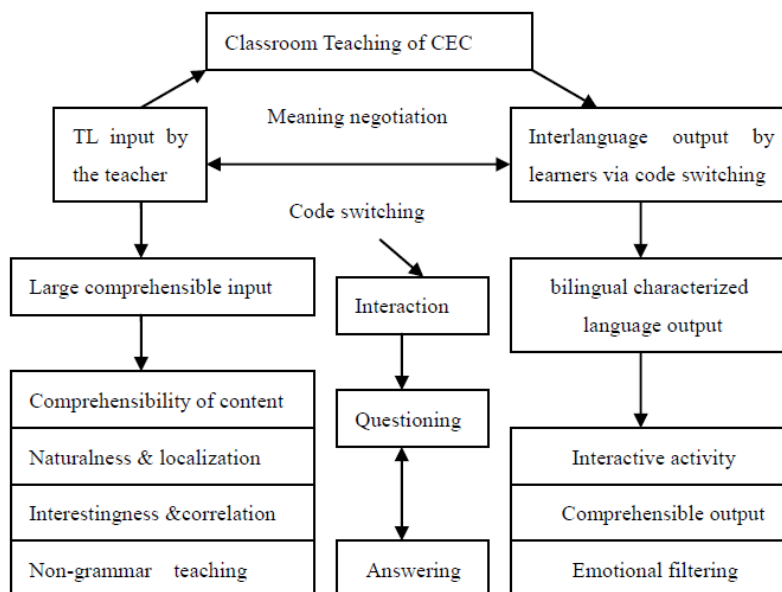


Diagram 1: Interlanguage-SLA Model

SLA originates from 1960s and 1970s. And four hypotheses are included: Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, Affective Filter Hypothesis and Interaction Hypothesis.

In 1980s, American linguist Krashen puts forth the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, which stresses that teachers' comprehensible TL (Target Language) input is irreplaceable in learners' SLA. For learners, current language level is "i", and the advisable TL input should be of "i+1" level, which is a bit more difficult than their present language competence. When learners acquire "i+1" leveled TL input, they could automatically form the new interlanguage linguistic structure based on the thorough understanding of TL input's meanings. Thus, teachers' TL input should be of a bit more difficulty than learners' present learning competence. Teachers are supposed to make their classroom English expressions natural and idiomatic. Their teaching doesn't have to follow the traditional grammar-oriented teaching procedure, and their teaching content must be aimed at interestingness and correlation.

Comprehensible output is of equal importance. Comprehensible Output Hypothesis, listed by Swain in 1985, states that learners have to acquire large quantities of comprehensible TL input and to output bilingual characterized interlanguage codes through code switching. The output process is actually an interactive activity, namely, learners offer their TL hypothesis, collect feedbacks for testing the accuracy and comprehensibility of their own interlanguage grammatical system, and then improve their current interlanguage competence.

Learners' output process is also the process of emotional filtering. As Krashen points in Affective Filter Hypothesis, from time to time, learners have to filter teachers' input emotionally. If the filter is higher than the average level, it will be more difficult to internalize TL input; if the filter is lower, it will be easier for learners' input internalization.

Moreover, meaning negotiation plays a vital role in Long's Interaction Hypothesis. Meaning negotiation is the adaptation of strategies like repeating, rearranging, clarifying, checking, verifying for the sake of avoiding and mending communication interruption. And meaning negotiation makes the bidirectional communication in SLA possible. That is, learners fail to absorb the relatively complicated TL input by teachers, they would tell their teachers randomly to accelerate teachers' input modification and learners' knowledge assimilation. Also, the lingual forms of two sides are major concerns for learners, who try their best to narrow the gap between their own produced interlanguage system and TL system.

### III. INFLUENCE OF IL ON LEARNERS' CODE SWITCHING

The intermediate state in children's language learning and learners' SLA is a kind of reasonable lingual system, which is called interlanguage by modern applied linguistics. The concept of interlanguage is firstly proposed by American linguist Larry Selinker in the thesis of Language transfer in 1969. And in the Interlanguage thesis of 1972, he further expounds the definition of interlanguage and reinforces the essential role of interlanguage in SLA. Interlanguage is not only a kind of transitional language which perfectly combines MT and TL in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, sentence structure, context coherence, cultural communication and so on, but also refers to the whole dynamically changed interlanguage system, namely, interlanguage continuum. It is a language system with dynamism and non-continuity, and it is definitely adaptation to new hypothesis of TL by gradually altering the transitional lingual system. Through lingual subsystem of MT, learners build linguistic forms of TL within their own interlanguage system; at the same stage, learners' interlanguage proficiency basically agrees with the main difference in their learning experience; learners change linguistic system of interlanguage gradually to apt to new hypothesis of TL.

It is applicable to employ interlanguage in classroom code switching researches. Firstly, interlanguage derives from SLA theory, and could be used to guide SLA. The code switching phenomenon in EFL class is that learners switch lingual codes (languages, dialects, styles, registers etc.) in the specified SLA process. Secondly, learners' output in class is definitely a type of interlanguage. Learners imbed vocabulary, sentences and paragraphs of MT into English dominated expressions for sake of adaptation to lingual reality, social conventions and psychological consideration. And their bilingually characterized output is a kind of interlanguage with both MT feature and TL character. Thirdly, excessive code switching in long periods would probably lead to interlanguage fossilization. If learners largely rely on classroom code switching, their fossilization state would possibly arrive earlier. Owing to too much code switching, learners' lexical and grammatical system shape into incorrect form, which stops the TL approaching process. Fourthly, both the classroom code switching and interlanguage are of characteristics of sustainability, permanency and expansibility. Firstly, interlanguage is the unavoidable and dynamic language continuum in SLA for learners can hardly obtain the same TL level as native speakers. Therefore, learners' interlanguage system approach TL subsystem incessantly. Code switching, one category of interlanguage, is also consistently developing and changing. With learners' TL skills improved, frequency and types of their classroom code switching would be greatly reduced. All in all, interlanguage and code switching are closely linked and deeply permeated.

#### IV. EMPIRICAL STUDY OF ENGLISH MAJORS' CODE SWITCHING IN CEC

To collect data for analysis on functions and causes of learners' code switching, an empirical study is conducted in the thesis. The thesis chooses 55 English sophomores from Foreign Language Department of Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology. Of the 55 students, 26 are from Traveling English class and 29 from Normal English class. All the students are English sophomores who are going to participate in TEM4 (Test for English Majors) in April, 2015. Thus their English level has been sharply raised owing to preparations for the coming test. The researcher is about to conduct classroom observation of the two classes by means of tape recording and table filling. The researcher records CEC of the two classes by audio-recording pen. To ensure the authenticity of recorded data, none of CEC has been pre-informed. Meanwhile, the researcher would observe frequency and categories of code switching through notice taking, which is very helpful to remedy the unclear records in the latter record transcription. In all, the research intends to investigate functions and reasons of code switching in CEC through qualitative analysis.

#### V. FUNCTION ANALYSIS OF LEARNERS' CODE SWITCHING IN CEC FROM TL ANGLE

English majors are not encouraged to switch codes frequently in class, for once they arrive in fossilization state, their English learning would be dramatically influenced. However, if they conduct moderate code switching, adaptation to linguistic reality, social convention and psychological state could be attained perfectly. In the following, the thesis summaries common functions of learners' classroom code switching via data gathered from the above empirical study.

##### Translating sentences and passages

Translation is widely used when the learners are required to do exercises on sentence and paragraph translation. In the case, learners switch to native language to clarify meaning of the sentences and passages. Owing to particularity of the translation instruction, learners would consciously switch to relevant expressions which are congruent with MT linguistic rules in the psychological cognitive level. For learners' English level is not very high, their translated versions are undoubtedly of interlanguage form, which combines FL codes and IL grammatical subsystem.

Take it for example. In CEC, the teacher interprets usage of the word "inaugurate", and asks students to translate the following sentence afterwards.

**Example 1:** T: inaugurate: v. open a building or start an organization, event, etc. for the first time.

Look at the sentence here. "A research rocket was launched to inaugurate the first home-built space centre of the country," How to translate it?

S: 研究火箭的发射为建立这个国家的第一个航天中心举行了开幕典礼。

Learners only have a vague understanding of "inaugurate" meaning, which includes "to hold an opening ceremony, to have a swear-in ceremony, to set up for the first time" etc.. Therefore, learners are inclined to apply other contextual meaning and translate the sentence into a "S+V+O+Adv. (Pre.+V+O)" structural one. In the translated version, for its adverbial modifier, learners create a "pre.+v+o" framework, which is different from both English and Chinese. And learners' linguistic production "为建立这个国家的第一个航天系统" is actually a "pre.+v.+o" interlanguage structure. But if learners acquire large quantities of TL input constantly and continuously, such usage of IL lingual structures would be greatly reduced.

##### Explaining grammar rules

As shown by classroom performance, most students' English skills are of low and average level. They are lacking in TL knowledge storage. So when asked to explain certain sentence structures and some grammatical points, learners have an inclination for MT codes and IL linguistic form.

**Example 2:** T: The front garden was a gravel square; four ever-green shrubs stood at each corner, where they struggled to survive the dust and fumes from a busy main road.

To analyze the structure of the complex sentence.

S: The complex sentence is divided into two parts by the.....分号. Before the 分号 is a simple sentence. After it is a sentence with .....定语从句. The subject of 定语从句 is four ever green shrubs.

In grammar expounding, learners are asked to employ a lot of grammatical terms, like attributive clause, main clause, sub-clause, antecedent, semicolon etc.. For English sophomores from an ordinary second ranked university, their terminological accumulation is far from adequate, so their preference of interlanguage set is unavoidable. Learners would mix the complex sentence structure in MT and TL unconsciously when asked to do sentence pattern analysis. In the example, learners have confused antecedent concept in English attributive clause with the subject concept in Chinese sentence. In Chinese grammar, the subject often lies in the beginning of the sentence. And in English, the antecedent, served as a component of the attributive clause, is located in front of the guiding word. The learners here have mistaken the main clause subject “shrubs” for the antecedent of the attributive clause “where they struggled to survive the dust and fumes from a busy main road”. And finally the learner gives an interlanguage shaped answer, for she insert MT codes and mix grammatical rules of FL and TL unintentionally.

#### Expounding key words and phrases

When required to expound word meaning, learners would automatically borrow interlanguage expressions, which often lead them to cognitive barriers and the dilemma of conveying convey messages accurately.

**Example 3:** T: On March 25th, 1616, fifty-two-year-old Master William Shakespeare signed his will leaving the famous legacy of his “second best bed and furniture” to his wife and the greater part of his estate to his married daughter.

Would you paraphrase “legacy”?

S: legacy is after someone died, his money and house is left to the relatives, 遗产吧。

Learners find that they can't explain meaning of the word “legacy” clearly and fully by means of paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is to explain the same object in a different way. And from time to time, those complicated and specious English-English explanations can't trigger learners' knowledge Lenovo mechanism. Thus, to switch to MT codes for supplementary explanation would make up for English paraphrasing deficiency.

#### Citing examples

In illustration of TL cultural information, learners would embed ML shaped codes in later English dominated expressions, either in small amounts or in large blocks.

**Example 4:** T: The chunnel is a work in progress. The concrete wall awaits final installation of the power, water, and communication lines that will turn it into a transport system. White dust fills the air. The train screeches painfully.” Makes you appreciate British rail”, someone jokes.

Would you please say something about British rail?

S: British Rail stands for British railway. In the English-French chunnel, the train made loud noise because it hit rocks from time to time. It seems that the train is processing a painful dilemma process. Just as it shows by the double-arrow symbol of English railway station, whether to come forth or go back, and whether to be privately owned or nationally owned.就是英国的铁路总是变来变去, (students laugh) 一会私有, 一会属于国家所有, 人民也因此抱怨大, 感觉变来变去很痛苦, 就像英国火车站的双箭头标志那样, 犹豫不决、进退两难。

Here the learner is a top student who wins the 1st grade scholarship twice. She has a comparative good command of English, so she succeeds to give a systematic illustration of British railway in the first half of her response. But when she goes deeper into the TL culture explanation and illustration, she gets the cognitive pressure for being unable to cover so many attached cultural points. The learner switches to ML form subconsciously in the second half of her response. From the first half to the second half of her answer, there is a considerably large span in code choosing, which induces audiences' resonance in understanding and causes laughter in class. So the learner's answer is a type of interlanguage which is very close to TL linguistic form, such as in genre, syntactic structure, vocabulary application etc.. And her answer belongs to advanced interlanguage system for barely being affected by FL negative transfer.

#### Making up for influent TL expression

In new chapter introducing, oral training concerning the theme of every unit would be conducted. Learners have to do role play and interaction activity. They have to set on a given topic for less than five minutes.

**Example 5:** T: the best play/ film I have ever seen

Pair with your partner, tell him or her about the best play/ film you have ever seen. Your partner may ask you what is about and why you like it so much. You can concentrate on the following items:

Main idea of the play/ film
Plot
acting
Music
Costume

S: My favorite film is the slumdog millionaire, which is about how a young man win the 200 million rupees prize in the Indian TV program who wants to be a millionaire. Jamal was very luck, because he has answered the first 19 questions correctly, however, on answering the last question he was arrested by the police for they .....怀疑 he was cheating in the program.....I like what women wear in the film, it is the traditional 沙丽。

Undoubtedly, many multi-dimensional contents like culture, economy, society etc.. are involved in long time presentation. Learners would step into TL cognitive blind areas frequently while conducting long talk in TL. They are apt to switch TL code in the interlanguage set, avoiding influent TL expression.

#### VI. CAUSE ANALYSIS OF LEARNERS' CODE SWITCHING FROM TL ANGLE

As shown by qualitative study, there are six influencing factors of learners' code switching in CEC. The thesis would discuss the affective elements from the interlanguage-SLA model. Even though many elements are involved, the absolute premise of code switching is the adaptation to lingual reality & psychological requirement, and filling the cultural gap.

Firstly, learners' code switching is affected by their TL level, which largely depends on their interlanguage frequency in SLA. If learners frequently employ interlanguage system, their TL level can't be very high. Interlanguage is the lingual continuum in SLA, and owns a set of unique linguistic system in phonological, lexical, grammatical and contextual aspects. And especially in the elementary and intermediate stages of SLA, learners prefer to produce and comprehend TL with the help of interlanguage lingual rules. But excessive code switching in SLA would possibly lead to earlier arrival of fossilization state, which hinders TL acquisition and accelerates TL corrosion.

Secondly, learners' code switching is influenced by social emotional elements, in which learning motivation and TL cultural identity are included. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, from time to time, learners have to filter teachers' input emotionally. If the filter is higher than the average level, it will be more difficult to internalize TL input; if the filter is lower, it will be easier for learners' input internalization. Thus, learners with stronger learning motivation of TL and stronger TL cultural identity will switch codes less frequently as they curb the impulse of using interlanguage. Interlanguage, the linguistic system with dynamism, has a difficult development from simpleness to complexity and from FL to TL because of learners' improvement on TL level and TL cultural input. In the middle period of SLA, learners are suggested to decrease the usage of code switching and interlanguage since their TL competence and TL cultural storage have been raised greatly. Besides, culture and language are deeply interpenetrated and closely linked. Language learning and cultural learning are unseparated. (Ni, 2007) If there is always a psychological distance between learners and TL culture, learners would switch to FL code forms intentionally or unintentionally. So they produce a new type of TL cultural variety to avoid criticism from fellow people or to adapt to the cognitive psychology of the fellows. If learners fail to shorten the psychological distance between TL culture and themselves, they couldn't necessarily empathize with TL culture acquisition. In all, learners are supposed to trigger their latent psychological structure (Selinker, 1972) to strengthen their learning motivation and to enhance cultural identity of TL. And the interlanguage fossilization state can be put off by resisting long lasting and excessive code switching.

Thirdly, learners' code switching relates to their contact way with TL. The contact ways between learners and TL fall to be two kinds: contact in natural state and contact with human intervention. The thesis primarily concentrates on SLA in natural state. As Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis states, SLA is actually an "i+1" input process. Firstly, for learners to cross from "i" stage to "i+1" stage, the comprehensible input by teachers is a necessary condition but not sufficient. If the input is too easy or too difficult, it won't work very well. Secondly, teachers' TL input is supposed to be natural and original English expressions, and their teaching should be interesting and topic related. Lastly, teachers should be able to offer as much TL input as possible. Amounts and categories of embedded MT codes can be sharply reduced by quantitative TL input. And the approaching process from interlanaguge to TL would also be quickened by inputting large amounts of TL. This is because the interlanguage-TL approaching process is repeated and circular, and the errors which have been corrected would appear regularly and repeatedly.

For example, learners are likely to switch codes in forgotten lingual points and to employ interlanguage set when being away from reinforcement learning for a certain while. As a result, to conduct English immersed class, to choose naturally expressed teaching materials and to increase interestingness of EFL class are of significance for eliminating unnecessary code switching and reducing occurrence of interlanguage.

Fourthly, learners' code switching is under the influence of their learning strategy. Long's Interaction Hypothesis states, that learners would adjust TL output, conversational structure, information content when they have difficulty in TL input comprehension. Long points, it is very important for speaker to negotiate meaning to get the essence of TL input. Through the interaction modification, learners understand even the complicated input. Some students turn to familiar FL codes and interlanguage structures once they encounter difficulties in SLA. Learners are ensured that such switches won't have bad impacts on mutual communication, while improper code switching would reduce the validity of SLA. Their meaning-dominated and simply formed switches are highly likely to cause interlanguage fossilization. Therefore, learners are advised to confront errors in SLA and to no longer depend on substitution of FL codes.

Fifthly, learners' code switching is related with TL types. Rectz Kurashige thinks if MT and TL bear more similarities in language dialects and pragmatics, learners' foreign language competence would be more easily maintained, otherwise, learners would encounter TL disturbance and corrosion. That is, the more similar that MT and TL are, the more simpler code switching is, and the shorter interlanguage period is; otherwise, the more frequent code switching is, the more negative transfer affect on TL and the longer interlanguage continuum is. Take Chinese and English for example. Chinese, belonging to the sino-tibetan language system, is a ideographic language set. While English, one branch of the Germanic language system, conveys meaning by letters. So Chinese and English belong to

totally different language dialects, and that explains why Chinese students switch codes more frequently than German students in learning English.

Sixthly, from the aspect of learners' reading and writing capability. Hansen thinks, learners' TL reading and writing competence is a decisive factor in code switching condition. Reading is the input skill and writing is the output capability, and combination of reading and writing covers almost every key function in SLA. If learners are excellent in reading and writing, they tend to switch to FL code forms at low frequency; if their reading and writing skills are poor, they tend to employ FL lingual forms and interlanguage structure with high frequency. So it is advisable for learners to do more training in English reading and writing for lowering code switching times and improving interlanguage system.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The moderate application of code switching would benefit EFL learning and reduce unnecessary code switching for learners. However, it would possibly lead to excessive code switching conversely. Therefore, strategies like to strengthen learners' learning motivations, to intensify their TL culture identity, to increase teachers' comprehensible TL input, to abolish error avoiding learning mode, to improve TL level etc.. should be put into practice. Learners are supposed to improve their EFL learning through interlanguage standard and code switching frequency.

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