AN ANALYSIS ON THE USAGE OF CODE SWITCHING AMONG ENGINEERING STUDENTS DURING GROUP DISCUSSION

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA
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AN ANALYSIS ON THE USAGE OF CODE SWITCHING AMONG ENGINEERING STUDENTS DURING GROUP DISCUSSION

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of 
the requirements for the award of the degree of 
Bachelor of Science and Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education 
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MARCH 2004
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Date : MARCH 2004
Aisah Bee Ibramsah
For your talent as a mother
And your grace as a best friend
And all the inspiration for all these years
and...
Hisham, Nadia and Emellia
You are constantly opening my hearts and rekindling my
spirits
I love you very much!
and...
Friends
Muhammad Rozi, Dr. Shamila, Yasmin, Farrah, Diyah and Eddy
Who pleasure me in a thousand ways
I cherish every moments and experiences that we’ve been
through
and...
Those who generously helped me color the mosaic of this
research with the tiles of their knowledge, expertise and
memories
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I am also much obliged to my dearest mother and friends, who throughout the duration of completing this research unfailingly offered comfort and support especially at the low point of my life. This also goes to my course mates who all listened patiently to all my grousers and grumbles and share similar pains and experiences while completing their thesis. Last but not least, I would like to thank once again all who have assisted me in completing this research.
Language learning has proven to be one of the most difficult issues in schooling for non-native English speakers. Typically the concern is in learning English, and other school content through English. The question of whether or not to use the mother tongue (L1) in the English language (L2) classroom is complex. However, a careful, limited use of L1 does help students to get the maximum benefit from activities which in other respects will be carried out in the TL. This paper presents an analysis and description of code switching behavior of multiraces students who are at present following a foundation year programme at University Teknologi Malaysia. The central concern of this paper is to determine the type of code switching used in a group discussion under classroom setting. The data used in this study came from two sources: (1) recordings of several group discussions with a specific topics given for the students to discuss over a period of twenty minutes per group, and (2) structural interviews conducted with the informants, the main purpose of which is to determine their reasons and purposes for code switching. This paper also proved that code switching should not viewed as an interference phenomenon but a device to compensate the deficiency of the L2 itself.
ABSTRAK

Pembelajaran subjek Bahasa Inggeris menjadi salah satu subjek yang paling sukar di sekolah terutamanya kepada para pelajar yang tidak menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa ibunda. Ianya merupakan sesuatu yang sukar bagi para pelajar dalam mempelajari subjek ini, dan juga subjek-subjek lain yang memerlukan Bahasa Inggeris sebagai medium perantaraan. Persoalan sama ada untuk menggunakan Bahasa Melayu di dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris adalah sesuatu yang kompleks. Walaubagaimanapun, penggunaan Bahasa Melayu yang terbatas dapat membantu para pelajar untuk memperolehi faedah yang maksima ke atas aktiviti-aktiviti yang dijalankan. Kajian ini menerangkan analisis dan deskripsi tingkah laku pelajar terhadap peralihan/pengubahan bahasa. Ia dijalankan ke atas para pelajar yang mengikuti program tahun asas di Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan jenis-jenis peralihan/pengubahan bahasa yang dilakukan oleh para pelajar di dalam kumpulan perbincangan semasa di dalam kelas. Data yang telah dianalisis di dalam kajian ini diperolehi dari dua sumber: (1) daripada rakaman terhadap beberapa kumpulan perbincangan dalam jangkamasa dua puluh minit bagi satu kumpulan dengan tajuk perbincangan yang ditetapkan, dan (2) dengan menemuramah beberapa orang pelajar, di mana tujuan utamanya adalah untuk mengetahui sebab-sebab peralihan/pengubahan bahasa ini dilakukan. Kajian ini juga membuktikan bahawa peralihan/pengubahan bahasa tidak harus dilihat sebagai satu fenomena gangguan tetapi sebagai satu alat untuk melindungi kelemahan di dalam Bahasa Inggeris.
# CONTENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>iv</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRAK</td>
<td>vi</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT</td>
<td>vii</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xi</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>xii</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER I  INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

| 1.0 | Introduction  | 1 |
| 1.1 | Background of the Study | 2 |
| 1.2 | Statement of Problem   | 4 |
| 1.3 | Purposes of the Study  | 4 |
| 1.4 | Research Questions     | 6 |
| 1.5 | Rationale of the Study | 6 |
| 1.6 | Scope of the Study     | 7 |
CHAPTER II  REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction  13
2.1 Views on Code Switching  14
2.2 Reasons for Code Switching  15
2.3 Metaphorical Switching  17
2.4 Speech Community  18
2.5 Conclusion  19

CHAPTER III  METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction  20
3.1 Subjects  21
3.2 Research Design and Procedure  21
3.3 Research Instruments  22
3.4 Data Analysis  23
3.5 Assumptions  24
3.6 Conclusion  24
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.0 Presentation and Analysis of Data 25
4.1 Categories of Learners 26
4.2 Frequency of Usage of TL 27
4.3 Knowledge About Code Switching 28
4.4 Reasons for Code Switching 32
4.5 Opinion towards Code Switching 34
4.6 Levels of Occurrences of Code Switching 35
4.7 Pattern of Pauses 44
4.8 Code Switching Between Good and Poor Learners 47
4.9 Discussion 48
4.10 Conclusion 50

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

5.0 Conclusions 51
5.1 Limitations 53
5.2 Pedagogical Implications 54

REFERENCES 56

APPENDICES

Appendix A-D 59-94
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO OF TABLES</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Students’ achievement in SPM English</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Languages spoken at home</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO OF FIGURES</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Subjects according to their category</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Awareness about code switching</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Response towards question</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Consciousness of occurrence</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>The use of code switching when using technical or scientific terms</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Reasons for code switching</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>Students’ opinion about code switching</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Stages of occurrences of code switching</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Pauses at different level of code switching</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>Target Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second Language</td>
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<td>L1</td>
<td>First Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia</td>
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<td>UTM</td>
<td>Universiti Teknologi Malaysia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Malaysia being a multiracial country with a multilingual ability of her people, it is inevitable that all Malaysians are faced with the options of choosing their preference codes when conversing among themselves. According to Gardner-Chloros (1997), it is a common occurrence in many parts of the world in situations of native bi- or multilingualism. Code switching happens when a speaker changes from a code to another with the interlocutor in a multilingual context. It appears to be relatively a stable situation where a speaker chooses a particular code depending on the situation they find themselves in; social context or the relationship between speaker and interlocutor.

Every conversation occurs in a particular setting, involves interlocutors who have a particular relationship to one another and talk about the same topic. A distinction between two kinds of code switching are situational code switching that involves the
change of setting, interlocutor and topic, and the other one is conversational code switching that depends on the features of conversational itself. Sometimes, the change of codes happens so quickly that it is hard to explain between the two types.

Speakers of more than one language (e.g. bilinguals) are known for their ability to code switch or mix their languages during communication. This phenomenon occurs when bilinguals substitute a word or phrase and even sentence and paragraph from one language with a phrase or word or sentence and paragraph from another language. Traditionally, code-switching has been viewed as a strategy to compensate for diminished language proficiency. The premise behind this theory is that bilinguals code-switched because they do not know either language completely. As in this study, most students were tempted to code-switch during their group discussion because of the lack of knowledge in the L2 that is English, to make the interlocutor understand the conversation better, forgot the word in L2, etc. The argument is also known as semi-lingualism. However, one concern with this account is that the notion of language proficiency is not clearly defined. (Heredia and Brown, in press).

Whenever the L2 is spoken, there will usually be a supplementary by the speaker’s L1 on the purpose of compensating the deficiency of the L2 itself, sometimes the speaker forgot the words they are about to utter in L2 and this makes them perform the switch.

1.1 **Background of the Problem**

Since Malaysia is a multilingual and multi-dialectal country, Malaysian speakers are constantly faced with the options of making meaningful language choices when interacting with other peoples. It is assumed that these speakers have alternative
linguistics means available to them when ‘constructing’ their social and cultural experiences. In multilingual settings code-switching is a central part of bilingual/multilingual discourse (Zuraidah, 2003).

The ability of Malaysian citizens to switch from one language to another is quite normal and it is even accepted in our educational setting. This might be due to the fact that most Malaysians even know more than two languages. They tend to switch from Bahasa Melayu to English or vice versa in different settings or contexts. Very often the code switching patterns sound so natural, spontaneous and effortless.

There are a number of possible reasons for the switching from English to Bahasa Melayu or Mandarin or Tamil in a group discussion. The first of these is the notion that a speaker may not be able to express him or herself in one language so switches to the other (from English to their L1) to compensate for the deficiency. As a result, the speaker may be triggered into speaking in the other language for a while. However, it is crucial to take into consideration whether the interlocutor understand the switch that the speaker is performing.

Secondly, switching commonly occurs when an individual wishes to express solidarity with a particular social group. This type of switching may also be used to exclude others from a conversation who does not speak the L2. However, in this study, this kind of switching will not occur as the students will be in a group discussion. They switched for other purposes, especially to compensate the deficiency in L2.

Some speakers code-switch to make the alteration that occurs when the speaker wishes to convey his or her attitude to the listener. Where monolingual speakers can communicate these attitudes by means of variation in the level of formality in their speech, bilingual speakers can convey the same by code switching.

Majority of Malaysians learn and use only one language (mother tongue) at home and proceed to use more during educational system that requires them to learn another
language which is English. When this happens, the tendency of switching codes is higher because they are bi- or multilingual. In this study, findings were made on the use of the code switching among the UTM students during their group discussion.

1.2 Statement of Problems

Does code switching occur because formal Bahasa Melayu and English are taught and learned in school? Whereas when they are in a natural setting, they switch or have to switch to dialect such as northern dialect, Kelantan dialect, Bazaar Malay and the like, in order to be accepted and understood by others. Even if they converse in English or code switch between English- Malay, it will be broken English or just at vocabulary level especially borrowed words like ‘agresif’ from aggressive. On reflection, the researcher feels that this issue needs to be explored from the viewpoints of the teachers and learners so that we can try to understand why code switching occurs.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This study hoped to investigate the use of more than a code in a multilingual situation among the UTM students during their conversation in a group discussion. Malaysian speakers usually faced with the option of switching code whenever they use the L2 that is English. This study investigated the use of more than a code during a communication process within group. Usually, during a group discussion among a number of students, the tendency of switching code is preferably high. This happens
because of the deficiency of the TL and it is absolutely not language interference on the basis that it supplements speech.

The purpose of the study was also to determine the tendency of switching from a code to another among English, Bahasa Melayu, Chinese and Tamil. The L1 of these students would be Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin or Tamil. Although they started learning English since the age of six or seven, the tendency of switching it to their L1 is very high. This is due to the deficiency in the usage of English in their communication purpose. This study determined the tendency of the students in switching from a code to another.

It also intended to find out whether there was a usage of language borrowing, language transferring, language mixing or fillers. Whenever Malaysian speakers converse using English, the tendency of using discourse markers that are in their L1 is very high. They usually use the same fillers that are used in their L1 and they tend to apply the same fillers to the TL. During a conversation, the occurrences of code switching is high because the spontaneity in the speech. Discourse markers would consist of fillers that are usually being used in the conversation in the L1. This study seeks to find out whether there are any discourse markers in the L1 when the students are conversing in the L2.

In a group discussion, the good learners and poor learners are identifiable. This is due to their result in English during their SPM or in other English subjects that have been taken in UTM. This study hopes to investigate the extent of code switching between good learners and poor learners in a group discussion.
1.4 Research Questions

The focus of this study was on the usage of the code switching among UTM students during their group discussion. This study set in to answer the following questions:

a) At what level would students usually switch to in a group discussion?

b) What kind of code switch do students preferably use in a group discussion?

c) To what extent good learners switch compared to poor learners?