CODE SWITCHING IN INFORMAL INTERACTION AMONG A GROUP OF 4TH YEAR TESL STUDENTS OF UTM

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

Borang Pengesahan Status Tesis

JUDUL: Code Switching in Informal Interaction Among
A Group of 4th Year TESL Students of UTM

SESJI PENGAJIAN: 2007/2008

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CODE SWITCHING IN INFORMAL INTERACTION AMONG A GROUP OF 4TH YEAR TESL STUDENTS OF UTM

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This Project Report is Prepared as a Requirement for
The Bestowal of Bachelor of Science and Education (TESL)

Faculty of Educational
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

30th APRIL 2008
I admit that this project entitled “CODE SWITCHING IN INFORMAL INTERACTION AMONG A GROUP OF 4TH YEAR TESL STUDENTS OF UTM” is my own research except for, the citation and summary which the resources of each has been stated.

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Date: 30th APRIL 2008
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my deepest gratitude and thanks to my beloved supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mohamad Hassan Zakaria for his endless support and great guidance in helping me throughout this project. Thank you for being so patient with me. I would like also to express highly thanks to three of my friends, who volunteered to take part in this project as the respondents and their cooperation and support. I would like to offer great love and thanks to both of my supportive parents: Mr. Stephen Kalong and Madam Misy Sarawak for their endless moral support. I would like to say a million thanks to my friends, Nursophia Hasdina binti Hashim, Nor Hidayah binti Ramli and Azri bin Abdul Aziz for their moral support and endless help throughout this project. Nevertheless, to those who had helped me that I did not mention their names, thank you.
Code-switching is the use of more than one language in a conversation. It is a common daily practice among people in the world for various reasons and usually an unconscious activity. This language switching might not be the whole sentence, but also can occur in brief phrases or words. Therefore, in this paper, the types and reasons of code switching will be focused on. The data for this study were collected through an audio recording of 4 TESL students of UTM while having informal conversation in their room. The findings suggest that the speakers code switched for solidarity, as well as to signal group membership and local identification. The findings also show that there are four types of code switching: intra-sentential, inter-sentential, situational and metaphorical. This paper argues that the use of more than one particular code at a time must be used judiciously as it may lead to negative feelings among speakers.
Abstrak

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Code switching is a normal phenomenon seen in our country as we live in multilingual and multicultural communities. Code switching happens when we use more than one language continuously and interchangeably in a conversation. It happens more frequently during an informal conversation. Most of the time, people will code switch while having a conversation with others for example with their friends, their neighbours, their spouse or even with the man who is selling nasi lemak at the stall!

In informal contexts such as in social contexts with friends, family members, neighbours or even during bargaining with the sellers, code switching happens regularly. Some people may not feel comfortable to converse fully in a target language, which is English, with the people who are close to them as this will be awkward. When communicating with friends with the same native language, many people prefer to converse in their native language rather than using English as they feel more comfortable and people might not perceive the speakers as snobbish for using the target language. This goes the same when a person is bargaining for a price with the seller using the native language where both of them share the same language. It is possible that
the person might actually get the price bargained. For example, when dealing with the Mandarin seller, a person who is a Mandarin speaker can easily deal with the seller. However, situation depends on the first language of the person. If we are socializing with our friends who come from a family that converses in English, therefore it is easy for us to communicate with them in English as they have good command and exposure to English since young.

As for the TESL students, it is common for them to converse in English whenever and wherever they are. However, this might affect the perception of other people on the TESL students. Nevertheless, these TESL students tend to code switch their language from English to the native language when they communicate with friends from different courses or when they meet with friends from the same place or during informal contexts. Most of the TESL students also tend to code switch in order to avoid the gaps in communication which may result from the lack of fluency in the target language as they cannot recall the appropriate target language structure or words.

Although code switching might not be suitable and accepted by all people as it would affect the English acquisition especially among the students, code switching is not always the reason for the deficiency in learning a target language. It can be considered as a helpful method in classroom as new content and new knowledge are able to be transmitted to the students effectively.

1.1 Background of Study

The application of code switching has been discussed in the literature of bilingualism since the early nineteen hundreds when Epinosa (1917 in Huerta – Macias, 1992), came up with a writing of a “speech mixture” in the speech of New Mexicans. Since that, lots of studies regarding code switching have been conducted.
According to Hymes (1974 cited in Ayeomoni, 2006), code switching can be defined as a general term used for the use of more than one language, varieties of a language or speech styles by a speaker while Bokamba (1989 cited in Ayeomoni, 2006) defined code switching as the mixture of words, phrases and sentences from two different languages (grammatical systems) across the sentence boundaries in the similar speech event. Bacigalupi (1997) described code switching as a shift from one mode of communication to another mode of communication in the similar conversation. In other words, code switching can be defined as the use of two or more languages in a same context or speech event, and it is comprehensible to all speakers who share the same language.

In the previous investigation done by scholars from around the world, there are some causes of code switching that can be found. In Ayeomoni (2006), some of the causes are status, integrity, self-pride, comfortability and prestige. Other causes include modernization, westernization, efficiency, professionalism and social advancement. There could be many reasons why a person code switches in his/her everyday lives. This could be affected by the surroundings, the people whom he/she interacts with or even the purpose of code switching. Therefore, this study examines the reasons of using code switching among a group of TESL students.

In the case of TESL students, as the future English teachers, they are, of course, required and expected to master and be good in English and not the mixed English but the Standard English. However, the frequent use of code switching in their everyday lives might be an obstacle or barrier for them to polish and master their standard English.
1.2. Statement of Problem

Most of the TESL students might not realize that the frequent use of code switching might affect their future career as English teacher. Code switching occurs normally among the less proficient TESL students as they might have limited knowledge or unable to recall the suitable structure or lexicon of the target language and in this case, English. According to Sert (2005), the use of code switching might have a long term negative effect to the users of code switching in learning the target language as it may lead to loss of fluency in the target language. In this case, TESL students are in a big risk in facing this problem as the more frequent they use CS, the bigger chance for them to face fluency loss in mastering English.

Other than that, TESL students might face demotivation in learning English as they use code switching in most of their study years. This might lead to some of the undesired behaviours among the students. The students might lose their interest in teaching and learning English in the future as they sometimes use their mother tongue to communicate in most of their daily lives either during class or outside the class. As mentioned by Sert (2005), a learner might lose his or her interest in learning the target language as he or she knows that he or she will always get the chance to code switch and this might result negative academic consequences as the learner does not learn the target language appropriately. In this case, some of the TESL students might feel demotivated to learn English and this might lead to the production of the less proficient and less motivated English teachers in the future.

Moreover, the use of English without code switching might affect the solidarity and sense of belonging among TESL students especially between those who are very proficient in English and those who are less proficient in English. This might lead to the division of the students into two groups; the proficient ones and the less proficient ones. Therefore, it might affect the relationship and refrain the students from being closer.
To sum up, there are many possible effects on the TESL students proficiency in English. Furthermore, they are the future English teachers who are going to teach the younger generations once they graduated. In this study, the possible reasons of applying code switch among final year TESL students are investigated.

1.3. Purposes of the Study

The frequent use of code switching among final year TESL students of UTM and their proficiency in both writing and speaking in English might lead to some long term effects such as insufficient vocabularies in English and lack of proficiency in sentence structure. Apart from that, there is a tendency that UTM might produce less proficient future English teachers if these students keep on using code switching frequently in their everyday lives. In response to this matter, this study was conducted in order to examine the use of code switching among final year TESL students of UTM.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To find out the reasons of code switching occured during an informal conversation among a group of TESL students.

2. To identify the types of code switching occurred during an informal conversation among a group of TESL students.
1.5 Research Questions

This study will provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the reasons of using code switching during an informal conversation among a group of TESL students?

2. What are the types of code switching that can be found during an informal conversation among a group of TESL students?

1.6. Significance of the Study

This study is important to the users of code switching as it tells them the reasons and types of code switching that can occur in conversations. It is useful to know that some aspects of code switching can help foster positive rapport and effective communication among speakers.

This study is also important to teachers of English as code switching can both facilitate and hinder the learning of English. There are classroom situations where code switching can be used to assist weak learners of English. However, overuse of the native language may deprive learners of the needed input.

Although there is no concrete evidence that can prove that the frequent use of code switch among final year TESL students of UTM might lead to the loss of fluency and proficiency in English, the findings of this study are vital to help the final year TESL students of UTM to improve their English and to avoid using code switch frequently in their everyday lives so that they will be able to master and at the same time, to learn to practice good and standard English as they will be the future English teachers. With the information at hand, the students will be aware in using code switch
an will be motivated in learning and using good English frequently and less code switch. However, code switching can promote effective communication between teachers and students or even students with students.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Based on the research, there were a few limitations which have significantly affected this study. The limitations are as listed as below:

Limited Subjects

For this study, there were only four subjects that were involved. Such a limited number of subjects were definitely not enough to make any generalizations on the nature of code switching in casual conversations among peers in TESL students. Since they cannot represent the whole population of TESL students, the results obtained from this study might not be that generalized to the whole TESL student population.

Recording a naturally occurring conversation

The subjects were informed earlier about the recording and were told to act natural during the conversation. Therefore, they may not be natural and they tend to monitor their use of language and minimize the amount of code switching in their interaction. In other words the subjects realized that they were being recorded, so they were not being themselves during the conversation.
1.8 Scope of the Study

This study will involve a group of final year TESL students of UTM. The data will be collected via audio recording. This recording will be transcribed into written form and will be analyzed according to the objectives of this study.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Code Switching: Code switching is a process which involves two or more languages in the same contexts and usually applied by those who know more than two languages.

Reasons of Code Switching: Some of the reasons are to signal group membership, to show solidarity, and purposes of elaboration, emphasizing, specifying an addressee and clarification for efficient communication.

Types of Code Switching: There are several types of code switching which are intra–sentential code switching, intra–sentential code switching’, metaphorical code switching and situational code switching.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Code Switching

Code switching can be defined as the use of two or more languages in the same speech contexts. Code switching is usually being applied by those who have and know more than two languages as their mode of speech. After decades of studying code switching, lots scholars and researchers from all over the world came out with their own definitions of code switching.

Hymes (1974 in Ayeomoni, 2006) describes code switching as a general term that is being used as another way in conversing using another language, aside mother tongue language. It is also another way in identifies the difference of varieties of a certain language or even the difference of the style of a certain speech. Bokamba (1989 cited in Ayeomoni, 2006) defines code switching as a combination of words, phrase and sentences from two different grammatical (sub) systems across sentence limitations in the similar speech contexts.
According to Bacigalupi (1997), code switching is the transmission of a code from one mode of communication to a different mode of communication within the similar conversation. In the findings in her research paper on code switching in the neighbourhood Latino youth center, it is found that code switching in the form of clarification is unable to break the language barriers. Although code switching is used to clarify the unknown words, however it also works as a device for bilinguals in order to speak at ease. Bacigalupi also sees code switching not only involve exchange orally languages, but also involves physical such as hand gestures, facial expressions and posture to indicate the unknown words.

Numan and Carter (2001 cited in Sert, 2005) defines code switching as “a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse”. In his paper, Sert claimed that the “discourse” will be dealt with as both students’ and teachers’ naturally occurring language use in classroom environment. The languages involved in the code switching are the native language of the students and another language, the foreign language which is the language that the students are required to be proficient in.

Blom and Gumperz (1972 cited in Namba, 2000) identifies two types of code switching. Firstly, situational code switching where the speaker will switch their code depends on the suitable situation at that moment and secondly, metaphorical code switching where the speaker will switch their code in order to obtain a special communicative effect. Through these two concepts, Blom and Gumperz came out with another term which is ‘conversational code switching’ which it comprises different types of functions such as quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, message qualification and personalization vs objectivization.

Referring to Duran (1994), code switching is “another non-normative or ‘quaint’ linguistic behaviour of bilinguals or developing bilinguals”. She added code switching has a close link to language transferring and language borrowing. According to Valdes – Fallis (1977 cited in Duran, 1994), code switching can be defined as the application of
two languages concurrently or interchangeably. This involves levels of competence in both languages although the speaker’s bilingual fluency has not established. Poplack (1980 cited in Duran, 1994) identifies two grammatical limitations regarding code switching. Firstly, free – morpheme limitation which implies that a switch between codes is unlikely to happen between a lexical form and a bound morpheme except the previous codes has been phonologically included into the last’s language. Secondly, equivalence constraint rule which affirms that the word sequence immediately before and after the switching point must happen in both languages in order to make the code switch to occur. After then, both languages can be easily switched.

According to Jacobson (2002), Bahasa Melayu which serves as the medium of language in Malaysia allowing several elements from English to be inserted into the sentences. This insertion process, which is code switching, involve several elements such as the insertional code switching which involved the insertion of single lexical items, insertion of specific grammatical units such as phrases, clauses and sentence and random words groups. There are also two types of alternation involving code switching which are intra-sentential code switching where alternation will happen within a sentence and inter-sentential code switching where alternation happen between sentences.

K. Chidambaram (2006) classified code switching into two types. There are intra – sentential code switching and intra – sentential code switching. Intra – sentential code switching is usually takes place within a sentence, a clause or a word where there are no any changes happen in topic, speakers and the settings of the conversation. This type of code switching is closely linked to code mixing which involved the processes of noun insertion, verb insertion and clause and sentence insertion. Inter – sentential code switching however happen between sentences.
2.2. Reasons of Applying Code Switching

People code switch always for various reasons. It is not simply a conscious activity done by a speaker. People sometimes switch code within a same domain or social situation depending on the speakers. A speaker might code switch to a different language to indicate group membership and similar ethnic with the addressee. The code switch might not be the whole sentence but also can occurred in brief phrases or words. Moreover, in some speech context, code switching makes it easier to comprehend or to understand people better.

As cited in Avarez-Caccamo (1990) in his research paper, there are some reasons why code switchers switch their code:

i) To reflect social structure, specifically class-structural
ii) To change interethnic relationships
iii) To signal group membership, in particular local identification and gender and be correlated with group roles of leadership and subordination
iv) To channel ‘the speaker's claim to a social status'
v) To constitute a socio-functional ‘style', a culturally specific ‘mode of speaking', or an ‘unmarked choice' among multilinguals
vi) To manage the speaker's 'ambiguous' or dual group identification
vii) To 'invoke' social identities in discourse, such as official personae vs. private identities

According to Huerta-Macias (1992), code switchers switch their codes due to the purposes of elaboration, emphasizing, specifying an addressee and clarification for efficient communication. Some reasons that can be cited in Huerta-Macias (1992), code switching have functions in conversation “are to give emphasis, to elaborate, to clarify,
to shift the mode of discourse, or to specify a certain addressee (Huerta, 1978; McClure, 1981; Silva-Corvalan, 1983).” [76]

In her research paper (1992), Huerta-Macias had listed some of the reasons of applying code switching as below:

i) **Elaboration**
   - Elaboration happens when extra information or details on a certain topic were added in another language.

ii) **Emphasis**
   - Emphasis takes place when the teacher emphasizes or highlights a detail in another language, for example English. This switch is also come with a change in voice intonation with a higher pitch level to indicate that the detail that being said is important.

iii) **Addressee Specification**
   - Addressee specification happens when the teacher switches his/her languages as he/she addresses, or intends her speech, to a different listener.

iv) **Clarification**
   - Clarification takes place when the teacher switches to native language as she repeats or reiterates something that she had just said in English.

Trudgill (2000 cited in Sert, 2005) claimed that people switch their code in order to manipulate or to persuade or to set the situation that they had wished, and also to deliver the speaker’s meaning and private purpose. In other words, code switching can be meant for self expression and a mode in altering the language just for the sake of the speaker’s private purposes. Sert (2005) suggests that through code switching, it can help to build an intimate and close interpersonal relationships among the members of the
bilingual community. It is also a way to show solidarity between those people who share common ethno-cultural identity.

According to Tay (1989 as cited in Haesook Han Chung, 2006) code switching is a communicative device which is quite useful in describing a total of communicative effect. A study done by Tay indicates that code switching is a communicative strategy which symbolizes identity of a group and promotes solidarity and rapport in a multilingual discourse.

To sum up, speakers with two languages or more tend to code switch depending on the context at that very moment or to whom they are speaking at that time. They switch code either to indicate to which group they are belong to or to establish a good relationship and promote solidarity with other speakers who share the same language. In ESL classroom, English teacher tends to switch code to Malay for the reasons of elaboration, emphasis, addressee specification and even for clarification of the points that they have delivered to the students in order to make sure that the students understand and accept the transmitted knowledge. Same goes to the students who are learning English; they usually switch code to fill the linguistic gap with their mother tongue language and they make use of their mother tongue equivalent of a certain lexical item in English and switch it to their mother tongue. Therefore, there are lots of reasons why a speaker code switches in a certain context.

2.3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Applying Code Switching

There is a lot of positive and negative assumptions towards the use of code switching, be it in formal or informal contexts. Many teachers especially those who are in favour of the applications of communicative techniques in the classroom environment, are against the use of any mother tongue or code switching in the classroom. Whilst, the supporters of the use of mother tongue in the form of code
switching agree that code switching can be an effective and useful strategy in the classroom.

According to Bacigalupi (1997) in her study on code switching at the neighbourhood Latino youth center, code switching is the type of communication that helps the Spanish speaker and non-Spanish speaker in a conversation. Through code switching, it is easier for the non-Spanish speakers to answer any Spanish speakers’ questions although the questions are in Spanish as they can fill the stopgap of the unknown words with other language. Other than that, code switching permits bilingual speakers to converse in both of their languages. Bacigalupi claimed that code switching is “not a tool for incompetence for people who know two or more languages, it is a form of communication that is agreed on by both of the members of the conversation”.

As mentioned by Huerta-Macias (1992), code switching can help in improving the instruction or order not only in instilling the understanding and two-way communication, but also able to help in forming rapport and good relationship with those who aware that they are actually able to join in the class and let anyone hears their views no matter in what language that they are using. Huerta-Macias also claimed that code switching in a classroom is a practical and feasible way to assist the improvement of the students’ bilingualism. Code switching is not only for improving and making alive the learning and teaching process in the classroom, but also helps to preserve and develop the languages of those who are bilingual. This preservation and development occur by using both languages in a meaningful activity which involve all the main skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Other than that, code switching is used to improve and boost communication skills, in oral or written form.

According to Skiba (1997 as cited in Sert, 2005), the advantage of code switching is it performs as a backing element in communication of information and in social interaction as it works as a tool for continuity in speech in preference to present interference in language. Sert (2005) suggests that code switching works as a bridge
from known (native language) to unknown (foreign language) where the code switchers can learn the new words in the foreign language unconsciously.

However, there are also some disadvantages of applying code switching. According to Cook (2002 as cited in Sert, 2005), some students who do not have same native language might feel neglected as the application of code switching in a multilingual classroom. Therefore, Cook suggested that in order to apply code switching in a multilingual classroom, it is better to have all students to share the same native language in order to make giving instruction is easy and comprehensible. Another problem is the competence of the teacher in the students’ native language plays an important role in applying code switching. Eldridge (1996 as cited in Sert, 2005) suggested that “the learners have no guarantee that their audience will share knowledge of their mother tongue. This perspective relates to the interaction of students with native speakers of the target language, as mutual intelligibility may not be possible if the learner switches his language during communication”. Sert (2005) added that the repetitive function of code switching may lead to students’ undesired behaviours. The students might feel bored and lost their interest in listening to the previous instruction (in the target language).

According to Duran (1994), code switching seems to serve a significant communicative and cognitive function in a conversation. She also claimed that code switching plays roles in facilitating and supporting and encouraging thinking and communication. Gibbons in his study on language attitudes and code switching in Hong Kong between Cantonese and English (1983 as cited in Duran, 1994) found that when the Chinese speakers converse in English between each other, it indicates status and westernization and when they are conversing in Cantonese, it shows humility and solidarity.

Nevertheless, Gibbons (1983 as cited in Duran, 1994) in his study of Cantonese–English speakers in Hong Kong, mentioned that the use of code switching and the mix of language is considered as ill–mannered, show off, ignorant, aggressive and proud
through the eye of most of the Cantonese speakers. Chana (1984 as cited in Duran, 1994), states that code switching can cause a speaker to feel demotivated and self-conscious as he will be considered as less fluent, less intelligent and less expressive when he code switch into either languages.

According to Poplack (1980 as cited in Namba, 2000), there are two constraints or limitations of applying code switching as below:

i) **Equivalence Constraint**
- According to this constraint, code switching happens when there are two languages sharing similar order of the word.
- This constraint limits code switching between typologically far-off languages such as English and Japanese. The word order for English is S-V-O while the Japanese’s word order is S-O-V. Hence, this difference can abuse the equivalence constraint.

ii) **Free MorphSeme Constraint**
“Codes may be switched after any constituent in discourse provided that constituent is not a bound morpheme” (Poplack: 1980).

This limitation limits the switch between a lexical item and a bound morpheme except the previous has been included phonologically into the language that is being currently used.

As mentioned by Heredia and Altarriba (2001), code switching could be due to a difficulty of retrieval influenced by a combination of directly linked factors such as language use and frequency of word use. Also, they found out that a general finding in the bilingual literature is that it is much harder and takes a longer time to read and understand sentences consisting code-switched words rather than monolingual sentences. This is because in the bilingual sentences, there more than two languages that are being used and therefore, it takes a longer time for the reader to interpret and process
the meaning of the words rather than multilingual sentences which is much easier and faster to be comprehended as it is only in one language.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology of the research. One of the most vital elements in order to make sure the success of a study is the data collection method chosen by the researcher. Other elements that are needed to be taken in consideration by researcher in conducting a study are the reliability and the validity of the data collected. The main objective of this study is to find out the reasons of code switching happen during an informal conversation among a group of TESL students. It is also to identify the types of code switching involved in the informal conversation among the students.

For this study, a group of UTM final year undergraduates of Faculty of Education was chosen as the respondents. Data for this study were collected through audio recording transcribed into written form.
3.2 Research Instruments

This study was carried out by recording a 47-minutes conversation among a group of TESL students in one of the students’ room which was then transcribed. The transcription is used by the researcher to examine the occurrence of code switching among the four participants.

3.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were four final year TESL students of UTM. The respondents were chosen randomly. The 47-minutes recording was carried out while the respondents were watching television in one of the students’ room. The topics that involved were mainly about beauty products, beauty care and relationship of one of the respondents. Below are the profiles of each respondent:

**RESPONDENTS’ PROFILES**

Table 1: Respondents’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Perceived Proficiency in English</th>
<th>Regional Dialects</th>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Languages/Dialects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Dominant, talkative</td>
<td>English, Bahasa Melayu, Northern Malay dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Always ask questions, quite active</td>
<td>English, Bahasa Melayu, native languages in Sarawak; Iban, Bahasa Melayu Sarawak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These students were chosen to be the respondents for this study because they are in the same clique and close friends for four years. Therefore, it is easier for them to simply talk about anything and the degree of the formality also low to indicate that they are close. Moreover, all the speakers are course mates and it is easy for them to communicate with each other and would make the code switch process from Bahasa Melayu to English easier to happen and to be understood by all of them.

3.4 Research Procedure

The recording began while the respondents were watching television and had a chat in one of the respondents’ room. The recording has been then transcribed into written form and analyzed according to the objectives of the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

In studying the discourse data, the occurrence of the habits of code switching and the other elements of linguistics were identified in order to answer the research questions.

Data was analyzed manually in written form and the results were presented in table forms and some explanation.