BORANG PENGESAHAN STATUS TESIS

JUDUL: CODE-SWITCHING AMONG THE UNDERGRADUATES OF
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

SESIE PENGAJIAN: 2003/2004

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ABSTRACT

In multiracial and multilingual societies, bilingualism is a phenomenon and code-switching is a common element within bilingual interaction. This particular feature of bilinguals is a regular practice in the diverse Malaysian society. Although the codes used vary according to ethnicities, the most frequent occurrences are Malay and English code-switching as the majority of Malaysians consist of Malays and both languages are widely used in formal and informal discourse for Malay is the national language whilst English is Malaysian second language. In this study, the Malay-English code-switching is analysed in order to identify the characteristics related to it. Prime focus is being cast upon the types of code-switching occurrences encountered in e-mail discourse among ten UTM undergraduates. Nevertheless, e-mail merely functions as a medium that proffers tangible written discourse and thus, does not play any vital role that could affect this analysis. Apart from that, the reasons and attitudes towards code-switching are also analysed through random distribution of questionnaires to UTM undergraduates. The findings of this study reveal that code-switching is broadly practised in informal written discourse. Most importantly, the occurrences of code-switching in the e-mails conform to a number of characteristics identified in previous studies by expert researchers such as Gumperz (1983) and Spolsky (1998). Code-switching is proved by this study to occur when there is no equivalent word(s) in either language to replace the other code. Some of the switched word(s) are determined by culture being practised only by the native speakers of one of the languages. Code-switching also marks a sense of solidarity or a sense of belonging. This type of switching is called metaphorical switching. The pattern illustrated by this study shows that code-switching frequently occurs during addressee specification or interjection as well. Besides that, it functions as a discourse strategy that comes in the form of reiteration. As a result of code-switching, grammars of the languages used are often assimilated into each other. It is interesting to note that code-switching is viewed positively by UTM undergraduates as they perceive it as a discourse strategy that could improve the quality of communication and not as a damaging catalyst to either language.
ABSTRAK

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

There is no denial that code-switching is an inseparable item of bilingualism. In fact, there are no bilinguals who do not code-switch at all as non-existence of code-switching in any of their days is a sign that they are actually not bilinguals. Harding and Riley (1987) wrote that “… the bilingual child’s development is very similar to that of the monolingual child’s, the only difference being that the bilingual has the extra task of distinguishing between the two languages. Directly related to this task are two skills or activities which monolinguals, by definition, can never perform: these are code-switching and translation” (page 57). In this sense, code-switching is professed as a phenomenon unique among bilinguals, who have the knowledge of similar languages, thus enabling them to utilise the communicative resources of both codes without any failure to understand each other. As Harding and Riley (1987) emphasise it: “such occurrence is always meaningful” (page 57).
Code-switching has been analysed from various points of perspective which all aim to clarify the features that outline such act and the essences of the occurrence itself. These analyses have succeeded to draw clearer patterns of the behaviours of code-switching among bilinguals, which are curbed by grammatical and sociological constraints. Derived from this finding is the notion that code-switching is rule-governed. The selection of e-mail as a medium of gaining data for the code-switching phenomenon is based on its rapport as a convenient means of communication, thus widely used today, and the great availability of code-switching occurrences there (Skiba, 1994).

1.2 Background Information

Code-switching has always been a point of great interest among both amateur and professional researchers in language studies who want to gain better understanding of the characteristics of bilingualism. Innumerable analyses have been conducted and all of them lead to one agreement- code-switching does not take place randomly, but in fact is meaningful in many ways (Legenhausen, 1991).

The conclusion of general characters of code-switching noted by Legenhausen above is indeed parallel with Gumperz’s notion that code-switching must be subject to certain linguistic constraints (Gumperz, 1983). This notion indicates that the occurrence of code-switching is rule-governed and has been linked with certain syntactic regularities. Refutations that deny code-switching as a mere random behaviour are further strengthened by numerous studies which prove how the phenomenon is bounded by a range of particular reasons. Huerta, in her study ‘Code-Switching Among Spanish-English Bilinguals: A Sociolinguistic Perspective’, even argues the use of syntax as a basis for describing code-switching. In one of the reasons highlighted for this argument,
she emphasised that code-switching appears to be mainly influenced by factors in the social context, thus should be primarily viewed from the social-psychological aspect rather than describing it syntactically. Nevertheless, that study still retains the notion that code-switching is not a random occurrence.

Although code-switching has been proven as a norm in bilingual communities, pessimism still lingers in the attitudes towards the habit of switching languages in any discourse (Duran, 1994; Gumperz, 1983). Code-switching is beheld as a symbol of arrogance for one is not being loyal and patriotic to the mother tongue or the national or official language. Hence, the persons who commit the act of switching are also perceived as not proud to depict their ethnicity. Besides that, their proficiency in one of the languages used while code-switching is doubted for conventional perceptions towards the act explain code-switching as the need for speakers or writers to fill the gap, caused by their handicap in a language, with another language (Huerta, 1978). These opinions are not confined to the public community only, but have also been approved by most sociolinguists and linguists in the past. More systematic researches have cast brighter light on the opinions of code-switching though experts, at least, are becoming more and more positive in viewing its nature (Legenhausen, 1991).

The occurrence of code-switching is entering a new dimension in today’s avant-garde world with the expanse of communication media. One of them is the e-mail technology. E-mail provides speedy service to connect people with access to the Internet, regardless of their locations. Nowadays, code-switching has appeared prominently and regularly in e-mails. The reasons refer back to the nature or behaviours of code-switching stated in the previous paragraphs, namely the second and third paragraphs of this section. The decision to code-switch in writings does not differ tremendously with the reasons to code-switch in speeches. The only difference is the languages involved and that depends on one’s ethnicity, settings and regards towards the languages. For instance, most Malaysians are required to master ‘Bahasa Malaysia’ as it
functions both as the national and official language, and at the same time, they might want to acquire good control of English as it is becoming the lingua franca of today’s world.

The behaviours of code-switching among bilinguals can thus be generally concluded as comprising varying degrees, depending on the social group that the interlocutor belongs to, as well as the locations of the speaker/writer and hearer/replying person (Crystal, 1987). Skiba further summarises Crystal’s notion by acknowledging those patterns as the established norm for that particular speech society. Consequently, the members of this society have to maintain appropriate language usage (Skiba, 1999). Code-switching can also be discussed within grammatical context in order to elicit the syntactic characteristics of the act in bilingual communities.

1.3 Statement of Problem

Code-switching and e-mails are two distinctive elements which serve similar importance within their own territory. Yet, both elements correlate with each other as code-switching is a common and prominent feature in e-mail discourse. Simultaneously, the ever increasing e-mail exchange has also stimulated the code-switching ‘trend’. The term ‘trend’ is used here to denote the tendency of teenage e-mail users, in particular, to adopt a style that proffers them a comforting sense of solidarity. As people code-switch for certain reasons that might be subconscious and unknown to them, the regular encounters with code-switched messages would further pursue people to frequently code-switch (Hammink, 2000). Nonetheless, it is important to state clearly here that the spread of code-switching in e-mails is not mainly caused by people’s consciousness towards trend. That aspect is minute compared to the fact that code-switching is a norm
among bilinguals and often occurs even though the speaker or writer does not intend to do so (Gumperz, 1983). Nonetheless, it is important to note here that the explanation above substantiates the choice of e-mail as the main medium for this study, as written discourse proffers a more tangible data to be analysed.

The regularity of code-switching in e-mails is perceived by Baron as a stumbling block to one’s language development. Moreover, code-switching could be the culprit for the inefficiency of messages in e-mails as not all receivers are comfortable interpreting the switched languages and this is especially true in mailing list, in which one message can be read by all members whose addresses are listed there (Hammink, 2000). Therefore, the main concern derived from the aforementioned issues is people’s attitudes towards code-switching itself, no matter where it occurs. The act of code-switching somehow associates with social situations and the speech communities the speakers or writers are in. Within this context, family upbringing, surrounding neighbourhood, school culture, circle of friends and religion are some examples of factors that influence one’s level of code-switching; from the choice of words to the structure of sentences. How these aspects result in code-switching should be a matter of concern as most people tend to dislike code-switching in their or others’ speeches without realising that the act is marked by uncontrollable factors that centre on their social background.

However, e-mail as a medium of frequent code-switching has claimed a special interest for its importance in today’s day-to-day tasks. For example, on-line teaching and learning processes that require the use of e-mails can be accessed within a few clicks of the mouse; be them for free or with required fee. The items that demand the utilisation of e-mails in such websites include university lectures, quizzes, and journals or assignment that need to be submitted to teachers or lecturers. Apart from the manipulation of e-mails in the education and corporate world, the service is also used to convey informal messages or conduct informal discussion (which is made more interesting with the creation of mailing list). This is where the code-switching phenomenon features
prominently and commonly for it occurs mainly in informal setting (Huerta, 1978). The inexpensive and fast services are the two factors that popularise e-mail as a convenient means of communication, compared to the internet chat room which has its own disadvantages despite the immediate response: it is time-consuming and there is no privacy. For people who seldom have the opportunity to meet face-to-face and the time to converse through the telephone, e-mail is thus the definite answer. The identity or character of e-mail that is in question is even assumed as neither a form of speech nor of writing, but is in fact a new linguistic entity, as claimed by Hammink (2000). According to Hammink, findings of analyses of e-mail, which are based on the social usage parameters, suggest that e-mail is typically like speech with regard to lexicon and style, but contain some characteristics of writing with respect to social dynamics and syntax (Hammink, 2000). It is also essential to point out that most messages in e-mails are direct in order to limit the size of a file and primarily used to convey personal, thus informal, matters.

The fact discussed above relates well with bilinguals’ nature of code-switching. In numerous occasions, bilinguals will automatically code-switch in an informal discourse, with the interlocutors being bilinguals as well. As code-switching conforms to certain grammatical rules too, it is pivotal to detect specifically those rules or constraints in the written form (which still contains the lexicon and style of speech), besides tracing the behaviours of code-switching among bilinguals when they reply to each others’ writings via e-mails.

1.4 Objectives of Study

The main objectives of this analysis are as follows:
1. To find out the types of code-switching practised by e-mail users and relate the identified types with their functions.
2. To solicit bilinguals’ attitudes towards the act of code-switching and their reasons of doing so.
3. To identify some grammatical constraints of code-switching.

1.5 Research Questions

This analysis aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the types and functions of code-switching that are frequently used by e-mail users?
2. What are the grammatical characteristics of code-switching at its syntactical level?
3. What are people’s attitudes towards the act of code-switching?
4. Why do bilinguals code-switch and what is the correlation between their reasons of doing so and their social backgrounds?

1.6 Scope of Study

The study is to be conducted among a group of undergraduates of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, who are bilinguals and utilise their e-mails regularly. These