

# Multilingual communities: effects of code switching



In multilingual communities, code-switching is a widespread phenomenon that happens from daily life and workplaces to classrooms in which specific languages have been instituted as the official languages of instruction. Malaysia is one of the nations that have multilingual communities that consists of three main races; Malay, Chinese and Indians. From 1957 to 1967, language was used as an important tool in order to achieve unity and Bahasa Malaysia becomes the national language. Previously, English was compulsory in all schools especially the vernacular schools and due to the lack of English educators at that time, the idea was off the hook. In 1967, English language status was removed but it was still used nationwide.

## **1. 1 Background of Problem**

In 1956, the Education Review Committee aimed to establish multicultural education systems that support other languages since Malaysia have multilingual communities and English becomes part of it. Today, English had becomes an international language and unofficially second language in Malaysia since most people used it. English as a second language status in Malaysia has been complemented through wide use of English in the social setting as well as the education setting. Teaching of English has been greatly emphasised by the government through its ministry. Due to this matter, the declining level of English proficiency among students has brought about the need to find out how to tackle the issue. Teachers, consequently, have been employing code switching as a means of providing students with the opportunities to communicate and enhancing students' understanding. Furthermore, code switching helps to facilitate the flow of classroom instruction since the teachers do not have to spend so much time trying to

explain to the learners or searching for the simplest words to clarify any confusion that might arise. Code-switching should not be considered as a sign of shortcoming in the teacher. Instead, it is a careful strategy employed by the teachers. Code-switching should be allowed whenever necessary with some learners in specific situations.

Richard (1985) suggests that code-switching is a term in linguistics referring to replacement between two or more languages in a single conversation, stretch of discourse, or utterances between people who have more than one language in common. Speakers of more than one language are known for their ability to code switch or mix their language during communication. This phenomenon occurs when the speaker substitutes a word or phrase from one language to a phrase or word from another language. Ayeomoni (2006) claims that many educators have attempted to define the term “code switching” and each understand the concepts from different points of view. Gumperz (1982) defined code-switching as the use of more than one code or language in the course of a single speech event, taken to refer to teacher utterances in the classroom. In other words, the teachers’ use code-switching in order to convey meanings to the students. Besides that, Numan and Carter (2001) stated that code switching as “a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse” (p. 275).

Appel Musyken (1987) mentioned that code switching can be divided into two categories which are intrasentential and intersentential. Intrasentential is a switch that occurs in the middle of a sentence. It was also known as ‘code mixing’. For example, my girlfriend ‘suka’ ice cream. The word “Suka” means “like” in the Malay language. The real sentence is “My girlfriend

likes ice cream”. A word from the Malay language is replaced by an English word in a sentence. The later is a switch of language that happens between sentences. A suitable example is “ I got an A for my drawing, awak macam mana, Farid?”. “ Awak macam mana” means “ what about you”. The exact sentence should be “ I got an A for my drawing, what about you, Farid?”. The first sentence uses English and the later is in Bahasa Malaysia.

There is one more type of code switching which is extrasentential as introduced by Hamers and Blanc (1989), extrasentential switches include tags and fillers. An excellent example of a local extrasentential code switching that close to our culture is ‘ Later lah’. “ Lah” is a particle widely used by Malaysians and Singaporean in their speech. Holmes (2008) stated that the particle “ Lah” is used to show intimacy or solidarity in a relationship.

So, the term code switching in this study is the use of two languages within a sentence or between sentences. Intrasentential refers to the switch that occurs within a sentence while intersentential points to switches between sentences. Last but not least, extrasentential refers to the tags and fillers that do not exist in the word list of the language used.

## **Statement of Research Problem**

Malaysian learners’ needs to become proficient English users in order to access knowledge and information available in English as well as to be able to communicate successfully, thus suggesting the important position the students may hold in the future. But before they can get to the targeted proficiency level, definitely they must get used to the English language itself.

Since English acts as a second language in Malaysia, the lack of exposure is the pivotal factor that will hinder the students to become proficient in English. Thus, classroom instructions are the most valuable experience for learners because of the limited exposures to sufficient comprehensible input from the natural environment they might get. Therefore, in order to raise their proficiency level, they must gain sufficient comprehensible input. It means the students have to gain understanding towards what they learnt before thinking about raising the proficiency level. This is where a strategy to help them learn English as a second language must be applied by teachers. Code switching is a form of strategy that will solve these problems. It helps to facilitate the flow of classroom instruction since the teachers do not have to spend so much time trying to explain to the learners or searching for the simplest words to clarify any confusion that might arise. Teachers code switch when the level of English used in the textbook or to be taught is beyond the learner's ability or when the teachers have exhausted the means to adjust his speech to the learner's level.

## **Research Objective**

The purpose of this study is to investigate code switching in the teaching of English as a second language to secondary school students. There are several factors which are vital in determining the effectiveness of this study.

Objectives of the study:

- To investigate the attitudes of teachers towards code switching
- The attitudes of teachers towards code switching
- The types of code switching

- Function of code switching in instruction

## **Research Questions**

In more details, this study will answer the following question:

- What do teachers think about code switching in the English classroom?
- Do English teachers code switch in the English classroom?
- What types of code switching occur in the classroom?
- What is the function of code switching?

## **Definition of Terms**

Specifically in this study, there are several terms which are used throughout the whole study, thus it is necessary to provide the definition of these terms for better understanding as well as reference to readers. The terms are:

**Learning** – It can be described simply as mental activity that includes receiving, storing, retrieving and using knowledge. This process requires interest and often demands effort. It depends heavily on memory process.

**Distance Learning** – It can be defined as formal education process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. It is a two way between teacher and students who are separated by a geographical distance and time where the communication support the educational process.

**Adult learners** – Individuals who are experienced, financially independent, working full time while enrolled in a learning programme, have other responsibilities and enrolled in the learning programme on their will. They are also experienced, achievement oriented, highly motivated, relatively

independent and also required a degree of independence in learning. In this study, adult learners refer to adult students enrolling in PJJ Programme in Faculty of Education, UiTM Shah Alam.

**Intrinsic motivation** – Intrinsically motivated actions is that which occurs for its own sake, action for which the only rewards are the spontaneous affects and cognitions that accompany it. Intrinsically motivated behaviors require no external supports or reinforcements for their sustenance.

**Extrinsic motivation** – It refers to motivation that comes from outside an individual. The motivating factors are external or outside, rewards such as money or grades. These rewards provide satisfaction and pleasure that the task itself may not provide.

**Institutional barriers** – It can be defined as structural in nature as those barriers erected by organization that provide learning opportunities for adults or all practices and procedures that exclude or discourage working adults from participating in educational activities.

**Situational barriers** – It can be defined as problem that arises from one's situation in life at a given time.

**Dispositional barriers** – It can be defined as attitudes or self – perception about one – self as learners.

**PJJ students** – It can be defined as part time students who come to class on every weekend and most of them are adult learners who are working.

## **Significance**

This study is apparently one of the first few attempts to investigate the code switching in the teaching of English as a second language to secondary school trainee English teachers in Mara University of Technology, at Malacca City Campus. Therefore, this study may provide a useful launching pad for further research in this area of interest towards teachers from other states. The findings of this study could provide some data for future research in this area. It could perhaps also help in the more effective teaching strategy in the teaching of English as a second language to secondary school students as “code switching” can be considered as one the teaching strategy.

## **Limitations**

This study was conducted in Mara University of Technology, at Malacca City Campus and due to this matter; the results will not be the generalization of the whole population of English trainee teachers nationwide.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

Alternation between languages in the form of code switching is a widely observed phenomenon in foreign language classrooms. Numan and Carter briefly define the term as “a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse” (2001: 275). Following this definition, “discourse” will be handled as the students’ and teachers’ naturally occurring language use in classroom settings throughout this paper. Additionally, the languages between which alternation is performed are the native language



of the students, and the foreign language that students are expected to gain competence in. While putting the phenomenon of code switching in context, the functions of code switching will be introduced in various aspects. Firstly, its function in bilingual community settings will briefly be explained by giving a sample authentic conversation which will help the reader deduce ideas about its possible applications in educational contexts. Secondly, the functionality of code switching in teachers' classroom discourse will be introduced with its aspects as: topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions. Thirdly, the focus will shift to students' code switching by introducing some basic functional perspectives as: equivalence, floor holding, reiteration, and conflict control. Lastly, weak and strong sides of code switching in foreign language classrooms will be discussed with a critical approach.

This chapter outlines past research on code switching especially the main factor contributing the attitudes of teachers in the use of code switch, types and functions of code switching used in the classroom. This chapter will provide a clear idea of how code switching plays role in second language learning from the perspective of previous researches and the findings from past studies.

## **2. 1 Theoretical Background**

Multilingual communities have the tendency to switch code either with or without their consciousness and Malaysia is a good example of a community that practice code switching. People sometimes switch code varied within a domain or social situation. For example, when there is some obvious change in the situation, such as the arrival of a new person, it is the obvious reason

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why people switch code. In most cases, a speaker may similarly switch to another language as a signal group of membership and shared ethnicity with an addressee. The code switch occurs from the first language to the second language or vice versa. In addition, switches motivated by the identity and relationship between the participants often express a move to show solidarity and it may also referred as the status relations between people or the formality of their interaction. The main focus here is to examine code switching in the field of education, in other words, the correlation between code switch and English teacher in school especially in secondary school. In order to gain a better insight into code switch and its roles in terms of education, the main concern should be focused on the fundamental concept of code switching. According to Marasigan (1983), the use of two languages in the same discourse is referred to as code-switching. Ayeomoni (2006) stated that many scholars have attempted to define the term “code switching” and each understands the concept from different points of view.

A search of the Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts database in 2005 shows more than 1,800 articles on the subject published in virtually every branch of linguistics. However, despite this variation or perhaps in part because of it, scholars do not seem to share a definition of the term. A useful definition of code switching for sociocultural linguistic analysis should recognize it as an alternation in the form of communication. It also signals a context in which the linguistic contribution can be understood. The ‘context’ so signaled may be very local (such as the end of a turn at talk), very general (such as positioning), or anywhere in between. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that this signaling is accomplished by the action of

participants in a particular interaction. That is to say, it is not necessary or desirable to spell out the meaning of particular code switching behavior. Rather, code switching is accomplished by parties in interaction, and the meaning of their behavior emerges from the interaction. This is not to say that the use of particular linguistic forms has no meaning, and that speakers “make it up as they go.” Individuals remember and can call on past experiences of discourse. These memories form part of a language user’s understanding of discourse functions. Therefore, within a particular setting certain forms may come to reappear frequently. Nonetheless, it is less interesting (for the current author at least, and probably for the ends of sociocultural linguistic analysis) to track the frequency or regularity of particular recurrences than to understand the effect of linguistic form on discourse practice and emergent social meanings. In earlier studies, Bokamba (1989) suggests that “code switching is the mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within a speech event” (p. 279). The term code switching (or, as it is sometimes written, code-switching or code switch) is broadly discussed and used in linguistics and a variety of related fields.

Code mixing on the other hand, is “the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes (bound morphemes), words (unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from two grammatical (sub) systems within the same utterance and speech event” (p. 279). Numan and Carter (2001) define code switching as “a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse” (p. 275). To recapitulate, code switching is a practice of parties in discourse to signal changes in context by using alternate grammatical

systems or subsystems, or codes. The mental representation of these codes cannot be directly observed, either by analysts or by parties in interaction. Rather, the analyst must observe discourse itself, and recover the salience of a linguistic form as code from its effect on discourse interaction. The approach described here understands code switching as the practice of individuals in particular discourse settings. Therefore, it cannot specify broad functions of language alternation, nor define the exact nature of any code prior to interaction. Codes emerge from interaction, and become relevant when parties to discourse treat them as such.

In a more recent publication, Unanumo (2008) regards code switching as the use of more than one language in a conversation. Appel and Musyken (1987) suggest that code switching can be categorized as intrasentential or intersentential.

Intrasentential is a switch of languages which occurs in the middle of a sentence. This type of switching is often called 'code mixing'. An example of a Malaysian intrasentential switch is "My youngest sister ambil Biology". "Ambil" means "take" in the Malay language. The sentence should be "My youngest sister takes (studies) Biology". A Malay word is embedded in an English sentence. Intersentential, on the other hand, is a switch of language which occurs between sentences. An example of intersentential would be "I quit all my jobs already. Christie tak beritahu?". "Tak beritahu" means "did not tell". The sentence should read "Christie did not tell you?" The second sentence uses the Malay language while the former is in English. Poplack (1980, as cited in Hamers and Blanc, 1989) introduces extrasentential

switches which include tags and fillers. These would also include an exclamation a parenthetical statement or particle from another language.

An example of a local extrasentential switch is “ Nothing lah”. “ Lah” is a particle widely used by Malaysians in their colloquial speech. McArthur (1998) describes the multi-purpose “ lah” as a token especially of informal intimacy and solidarity. Such a particle also exists in the Singaporean variety of English. Wee (2003) explains that it is typically found in clause-final position. It is monosyllabic and used for discourse pragmatic functions. The term “ code switching” in this study adopts Clyne’s definition (Clyne, 2000) as the alternate use of two languages either within a sentence or between sentences. “ Intrasentential” in this study refers to switches within a sentence while “ intersentential” refers to switches between sentences. “ Extrasentential” refer to tags and fillers which do not exist in the lexicon of the base language used.

## **2. 2 Attitudes of Teachers in the use of Code Switch**

Within the world of languages use, code-switching has often been perceived as being of lower status, a strategy used by weak language performers to compensate for language deficiency. This view of code-switching and bilingual talk in general is more normatively based than research-based as pointed by Lin( 1996) who added that such a view conveys little more than the speaker or writer’s normative claims about what counts as standard or legitimate language. An extensive body of literature studies reported that code switching in classrooms not only just normal but useful tool of learning. Cook (2001) referred to code switching in the classroom as a natural response in a bilingual situation. Furthermore, in the same study, Cook

considered the ability to go from one language to another is highly desirable not only among learners but teachers. Moreover, in eliciting teachers reflections to their classroom teachings, Probyn (2010) noticed that most notable strategy that teachers used was code switching to achieve a number of communicative and metalinguistic ends. Cook's studies were mainly in the second language classroom context. Rollnick and Rutherford's (1996) studied the science classrooms and found the use of learners' main languages to be a powerful means for learners to explore their ideas. They argue that without the use of code switching, some students' alternate conceptions would remain unexposed. Amin (2009) mentioned about the recognition to switch codes goes beyond switching between languages; it also recognizes the value of using the vernacular which believes to allow students to draw on useful sense-making resources. Cook (2001) stated that researchers see by using code switching in the classroom as a "legitimate strategy" (p. 105). Skiba (1997) added that no matter how it might be disruptive during a conversation to the listener, it still provides an opportunity for language development. However, historically, researchers believe that code switching occurred in many countries, which made Ferguson (2003) to conclude that ideological and conceptual sources of suspicion all often attached to classroom code-switching, suggesting that deep rooted attitudes may not be easy to change.

Cheng and Butler (1989) list the following as some of the motives a speaker may have to code switch: "conversational topic, role of the speaker, setting of the interaction, familiarity of the two speakers, age, sex, race, ethnic, linguistic background, etc" (p. 295). Wardhaugh (2006) stated that, when

done consciously, switching languages may also allow a speaker to “ assert power; declare solidarity; maintain certain neutrality when both codes are used; express identity; and so on” (p. 110). For example, if a group of bilingual Malay-English speakers are conversing in both Bahasa Malaysia and English and a monolingual, Malay speaker enters the conversation, the group will most likely begin speaking only Bahasa Malaysia, in order to allow the monolingual to participate in the conversation, thereby expressing their solidarity with the monolingual. Or, if the bilingual group wishes to assert linguistic power over the monolingual, they might continue speaking only in English to exclude him or her. Unfortunately, code-switching is often wrongly misinterpreted as evidence of a lack of a linguistic ability of the speaker or deterioration of one or both languages. However, sociolinguistic research confirms that code-switching plays an important role in social functions, and does not necessarily indicate linguistic incompetence. So, the main concern here is reasons of code switching used by the English teachers during their lessons in the classroom. In order to discuss further into this matter, the scope will be correlated with the roles of English teachers in the English language classroom.

English as a second language status in Malaysia has been agreed through wide use of English in the social setting as well as the education setting. Teaching of English has been greatly emphasized by the government through its ministry. In classroom practice, teachers have been instructed to teach by using high quality English in the classrooms. The second or foreign language learning can only accept the presence of high quality input in the classroom for learners’ acquisition. Cook (2001) stated that all language

classroom input must be in the target language, an effective model of language use can ensure that the intended learning was successful. Classroom instructions, therefore, are the most valuable experience for learners because of the limited exposures to sufficient comprehensible input from their natural environment.

Hence, the decreasing level of English proficiency among students is the main reason to the need in finding out how to tackle this issue. Teachers have been employing code switching as a means of providing students with the opportunities to communicate and enhancing students' understanding. Furthermore, code switching helps to facilitate the flow of classroom instruction since the teachers do not have to spend so much time trying to explain to the learners or searching for the simplest words to help clearing the students' understanding. According to Norrish (1997), teachers code-switch when the level of English used in the textbook or to be taught is beyond the learner's ability or when the teachers have exhausted the means to adjust his speech to the learner's level.

### **2. 3 Types of Code Switching used in the Classroom**

Richard (1985) suggests that code-switching is a term in linguistics referring to replacement between two or more languages in a single conversation, stretch of discourse, or utterances between people who have more than one language in common. Speakers of more than one language are known for their ability to code switch or mix their language during communication. This phenomenon occurs when the speaker substitutes a word or phrase from one language to a phrase or word from another language. Ayeomoni (2006) claims that many educators have attempted to define the term “ code



switching” and each understand the concepts from different points of view. Gumperz (1982) defined code-switching as the use of more than one code or language in the course of a single speech event, taken to refer to teacher utterances in the classroom. In other words, the teachers’ use code-switching in order to convey meanings to the students. Besides that, Numan and Carter (2001) stated that code switching as “ a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse” (p. 275).

Appel Musyken (1987) mentioned that code switching can be divided into two categories which are intrasentential and intersentential. Intrasentential is a switch that occurs in the middle of a sentence. It was also known as ‘ code mixing’. For example, my girlfriend ‘ suka’ ice cream. The word “ Suka” means “ like” in the Malay language. The real sentence is “ My girlfriend likes ice cream”. A word from the Malay language is replaced by an English word in a sentence. The later is a switch of language that happens between sentences. A suitable example is “ I got an A for my drawing, awak macam mana, Farid?”. “ Awak macam mana” means “ what about you”. The exact sentence should be “ I got an A for my drawing, what about you, Farid?”. The first sentence uses English and the later is in Bahasa Malaysia.

There is one more type of code switching which is extrasentential as introduces by Hamers and Blanc (1989), extrasentential switches include tags and fillers. An excellent example of a local extrasentential code switching that close to our culture is ‘ Later lah’. “ Lah” is a particle widely used by Malaysians and Singaporean in their speech. Holmes (2008) stated that the particle “ Lah” is used to show intimacy or solidarity in a relationship.

So, the term code switching in this study is the use of two languages within a sentence or between sentences. Intrasentential refers to the switch that occurs within a sentence while intersentential points to switches between sentences. Last but not least, extrasentential refers to the tags and fillers that do not exist in the word list of the language used.

## **2. 4 Functions of Code Switching used in the Classroom**

Code switching has a variety of functions which vary according to the topic, people involved in conversation and the context where the conversation is taken place. Baker (2006) have discussed the topic of code switching from a sociolinguistics perspective, in which he listed twelve main purposes of code switching, which are relevant to bilinguals talks in general. Some of these functions can be observed in classroom environment and in relevance to teachers and students interactions. According to Baker (2006) code switching can be used to emphasize a particular point, to substitute a word in place of unknown word in the target language, to express a concept that has no equivalent in the culture of the other language, to reinforce a request, to clarify a point, to express identity and communicate friendship, to ease tension and inject humor into a conversation, and in some bilingual situations, code switching occurs when certain topics are introduced. In the substituting a word in another language, Man and Lu (2006) found that in Hong Kong schools, both teachers' and students' major reason for code switching was that there was no direct translation of words between English and Cantonese, additionally, the same study of Man and Lu found that teachers in Hong Kong schools use code switching also to ease tension and inject humor in to conversations.

In a previous study, Eldridge (1996) has listed four purposes in which student code switching as equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration and conflict control. Equivalence which is a strategy that bilingual used to find the equivalent of the unknown lexicon of the target language in the speakers' first language to overcome the deficiency in language competence in second language. The second purpose of code switching is for floor holding which is a technique used by bilingual students during conversing in the target language to fill in the stopgap with words in native language in order to maintain the fluency of the conversation. The third purpose of is reiteration, as it implies, it is emphasizing and reinforcing a message that has been transmitted firstly in the target language but then students rely on repeating the message in first language to convey to the teacher that the message is understood. The last function is conflict control, which is used to eliminate any misunderstanding when the accurate meaning of a word is not known in the communication.

These researches shown that, the teachers' and students' used of code switching is not always performed consciously; which means that the teacher which is the main concern for this study is not always aware of the functions and outcomes of the code switching process. Therefore, in some cases it may be regarded as an automatic and unconscious behaviour. Nevertheless, either conscious or not, it necessarily serves some basic functions which may be beneficial in language learning environments. Mattson and Burenhult (1999) stated that all of these functions are listed as topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions. (p. 61).

In order to have a general idea about these, it will be appropriate to give a brief explanation about each function. In topic switch cases, the teacher

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alters his/her language according to the topic that is under discussion. This is mostly observed in grammar instruction, that the teacher shifts his language to the mother tongue of his students in dealing with particular grammar points, which are taught at that moment. In these cases, the students' attention is directed to the new knowledge by making use of code switching and accordingly making use of native tongue. At this point it may be suggested that a bridge from known (native language) to unknown (new foreign language content) is constructed in order to transfer the new content and meaning is made clear in this way as it is also suggested by Cole (1998): “ a teacher can exploit students' previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2”.

In addition to the function of code switching named as topic switch, the phenomenon also carries affective functions that serve for expression of emotions. In this respect, code switching is used by the teacher in order to build solidarity and intimate relations with the students. In this sense, one may speak