

The code switching among students



This essay deals about code-switching phenomenon among students in MARA College Seremban and the research question is “ Code switching: Why has it become a wide spread phenomenon among students of MARA College Seremban?”. The historical background about the establishment of English language in Malaysia has been provided and the term code-switching has been defined. In Malaysia, code-switching is happening between Malay and English language. Several students from the college have been interviewed to get their opinions about what causes the phenomenon to be widely used by students. Therefore, seven factors that contribute to the phenomenon among students have been identified. A number of 30 students were given the questionnaires in order to get their feedback on how frequent did they code-switched in daily conversations and to whom they mostly preferred to code-switched whether with friends, teachers or family. Several reasons why students preferred to code-switched in conversation have been investigated from the questionnaires. Besides that, a survey about students’ perceptions towards the phenomenon has been successfully conducted. An example of dialogue in a group of friends is provided to show the code-switching happened between them.

In Malaysia, Malay language or Bahasa Melayu is the country’s first language while English is the second language. As second language it has its own impact on the Malaysian society especially in communication between people. Nowadays conversations held between two people or in a group are no longer using Malay language totally. Most Malaysians prefer to import some of the English words to complete their sentences during conversation. Some English words like so, if, because, after, etc have been used by many

Malaysian. Today, it is observed that more and more teenagers are mixing the two languages together.

Code-switch phenomenon has widely spread among people in Malaysia. Besides, the phenomenon has become more popular among the urban society in this millennium era. Because it is so popular, people from various levels constantly use it in various occasions. From my observation, almost all young people in this country would code switch while conversing among themselves. They also code switch in any and every situations such as in classes, restaurants, libraries and others. Various words from English are being used in everyday conversation but they are not using English language completely and because the phenomenon has become very popular among Malaysians it has raised my interest to conduct a research on it. I decided to focus my study on students of my college, MARA College Seremban . Thus, I come out with my research question “ Code-switching: Why has it become a widespread phenomenon among students of MARA College Seremban?.

MARA College Seremban is situated in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. Its students are currently undergoing International Baccalaureate Programme and Cambridge Advanced Level Programme for two years and most of the subjects learnt are mainly in English.

Therefore, the medium of instructions is English. Currently, this college offers foundation programmes for students under MARA scholarship who are pursuing their study in Medicine, Dentistry, Biotechnology, Engineering, Accountancy, Teaching English as Second Language, and Teaching in

Mathematics and Sciences to various universities in Australia, New Zealand, India and Czech Republic.

In my research, I have conducted a survey to students of MARA College Seremban to find out the number of students who usually code-switch in daily conversations. I have also interviewed several students to get their personal views about this phenomenon. Besides that, I also studied factors that contribute to code switching, reasons why students like to code switch and how the students perceive the phenomenon among the society. I have prepared questionnaires to 30 students in this college, age range between 19-20 years old. Through the questionnaires, I was able to get answers for my research. I have included the historical background about the English language in Malaysia and defined the term 'code-switching' for further understanding about the establishment of English language in Malaysia; and the code switch phenomena. Also, in order to identify the uses of English words in everyday conversations I have prepared several examples of everyday conversation among Malaysians that involved code switching.

Finally, through the research done, I was able to make a conclusion at the end of this essay.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND- HOW ENGLISH LANGUAGE SPREAD IN MALAYSIA?

English was first introduced in this country during the colonial empowerment over Malaya 53 years ago before Malaysia obtained its independence in 1957. British empowerment had caused several missionary schools to be built in several places in Malaya (Baskaran, 2002a). From pre-Independence days to post-Independence times, English medium schools were the first

attempt at education, other than the religious schools for the local Malay (Baskaran, 2002b). As such, English became a coveted language with the Malay language, and all other vernaculars, taking a back seat as fluency in the language would almost guarantee a government position (Normala, n. d.).

After the colonial era in Malaysia ended, the teaching of English is continued by the government of Malaysia. The education system in Malaysia regards English as the second important language that should be learnt in schools. Therefore, the emergence of many individuals who are bilingual started since the pre independence year of Malaya. Now, as the national education system in Malaysia make it compulsory for every school in Malaysia to teach Malay as the first language and English as the second language. The teaching of these two languages has caused a phenomenon known as code-switching to occur among Malaysian. As more people are bilingual, they actually prefer to mix the two languages in many occasions. In this research, I will focus on students of MARA College Seremban.

CODE-SWITCHING- WHAT IS CODE-SWITCHING?

Laura (2004a, p. 5) writes that:

‘ Code switching is the use of words and structures from more than one language or linguistic variety by the same speaker within the same speech situation, conversation or utterance. There are two different types of code switching mentioned by which is conversational code-switching and situational code-switching. Conversational code-switching is the use of two languages by the same speaker within the same speech event and

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situational code-switching as language alternation by the same speaker in different speech situations, though the speaker's utterances within each situation are monolingual.'

Laura (2004b, p. 11) states code-switches were used for reasons other than just to fill lexical gaps.

Most students in Malaysia have the ability to communicate bilingually. Therefore, the code switching will occur between these two languages. Roberto and Jeffrey (n. d.) also states that

' Speakers of more than one language (e. g., bilinguals) are known for their ability to code-switch or mix their languages during communication.

Traditionally, code-switching has been viewed as a strategy to compensate for diminished language proficiency. The premise behind this theory is that bilinguals code-switch because they do not know either language completely. This argument is also known as semi-lingualism, which underscores the notion that bilinguals " almost" speak both languages correctly.'

FACTORS CAUSING STUDENTS TO CODE-SWITCH IN DAILY CONVERSATIONS.

Graph 1 : Factors that cause students of MARA to code-switch in daily conversations.

The graph bar described ‘ Factors that influenced the students of MARA College Seremban to code-switch in everyday conversations’.

The first bar showed percentage of student influence by their friends to code-switch in daily conversations. The bar showed that, 100 percent or all the students agree that peer pressure influenced them to code-switched during their conversations. ‘ Friends’ is one of the major factors that influence the MARA College Seremban students to code-switch during conversations. Friends are people who the youth interact with most of the times.

Friends can be considered to be the most influential elements in the youth world. Therefore, the youth is affected by the culture adopted among their friends.

The second bar displayed that about 73.3 percent agreed that their own interest brought them to code-switch during talking with others whereas another 26.7 percent disagreed. Several people are interested to code-switch in their conversations with others. They find the language interesting to them so they use it in multiple conversations with people. They believed that by practising they could improve so they practised using several English words and they normally include the words when speaking with others. In my opinion, self interest is a drive from oneself without the influence of others to study and understand the foreign language that is English.

The third bar presented that 66.7 percent disagreed English materials caused them to code-switch when speaking. However, 33.3 percent admitted that English materials have caused them to code-switch. Through <https://assignbuster.com/the-code-switching-among-students/>

reading, one can find many new words and people who read English materials such as English novels or magazines everyday will find more new words through their reading. Thus, many like to use these words in their everyday conversations. Most of them believed that reading English materials made them to speak more appropriate English with less grammatical errors therefore, they speak it completely rather than code-switch.

For the fourth bar, it displayed that about half of the students agreed that they are affected by English movies, tv series, dramas etc to code-switch when speaking while the other half disagreed. English movies, dramas and series influence their viewers from various aspects. Students are attracted to their way of speaking and mimicked them in their daily conversation.

Students would find mimicking the actors or actresses fun and

entertaining. This is the way that it may influenced the students to act or use certain words in their daily conversation.

However, other students said they are not affected by the English movies as the accent is hard to follow and students hardly pronounce words like the US or British do. Besides, they watch movies for entertainment so they did not put much attention to the words in the dialogues among the actors.

The fifth bar, described about 46. 7 percent of students agreed that advertisements influence them to code-switch in daily conversations whereas 53. 3 percents of them disagreed. Many advertisements in Malaysia use mix match language to promote their products and merchandise. The advertisement use English with Malay language to do their promotions as for

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example 'Indah Water'. This brand name belongs to a company in Malaysia. They used the word 'Indah' in Malay and 'Water' in English. Students would read the advertisements or watch it on television and the words or sentence used in the advertisement would be captured by their minds especially catchy words. Many would use the words when speaking with people thus agreed that advertisement influence them to code-switch. Whereas there are students who feel that advertisement would not affect them as the advertisement promotes brands not words. They would remember only the brands not the words used during the advertisements.

The sixth bar, presented that 50 percents of the students agreed that family influenced them to code-switch when talking with others, while the other half of the students disagreed. Conversation in a mix of languages such as Malay and English among family members influence the youth to speak the same way. Youth spend a lot of their time with family members. The language used by the family members most probably affects the students. Therefore, the way they speak would follow the way their family members speak because the time spent with family members is much longer than time spent with other people.

The final bar showed that 90 percent of undergraduates agreed that the norm of the society influenced them to code-switch in daily conversations. Only 10 percent of the undergraduates disagreed. Most Malaysians usually code-switch or have their conversations in mix-match language and it can also contribute to the use of mix-match language among the youngsters in Malaysia. Almost all the correspondence agreed that it is the norm of society

that influences them to speak mix-match language. The usage of mix-match language has become a norm among adults, teenagers and even children. The usage has spread widely that people assumed it to be a natural behaviour among them. Therefore, the youngsters are also following this trend as their friends and people living around them are speaking the mix match language. Usually, Malay youth will mix English and Malay words together in their conversation as it has become natural to them.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS CODE-SWITCH WITH FRIENDS, TEACHER AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Pie chart 1: Number of students of MARA College Seremban who code-switch in daily conversation.

The pie chart above showed the number of students of MARA College Seremban who code-switch in their everyday conversations.

From the pie chart, it is observed that 87 percent of the students frequently code-switch in their conversations while only 13 percent seldom code-switch the words in their conversations. From the results, students from this college highly code-switch when communicating with friends and teachers in the college, family members while at home, or in any other situations.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS CODE-SWITCH WITH FRIENDS, TEACHER AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Graph 2 Percentage of students of MARA College Seremban that code-switch (with English words) in daily conversations.

I also compare the conversation between the students and their peers, teachers, and family members to show to whom the students code-switch

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mostly. The bar charts showed the percentage of students in the three categories.

Firstly, about 99 percent code -switch when talking with their friends while only one percent of the students did not.

Secondly, about 70 percent of students code- switch in everyday conversations with their teachers while 30 percents of students did not.

And thirdly, it shows that about 50 percents of the students code-switch when conversing with family members.

From the results, students from this college most probably code -switch during informal talks with friends such as in group discussions, chatting, or gossiping. In some situations, sometimes students spontaneously code - switch in group meetings or informal events among students. Therefore, students showed great interest to use English words with friends because they feel it is common phenomena for them.

Sometimes students prefer to use simple English words which are very short and easy to pronounce to complete their conversation.

Most of the students felt comfortable to code -switch when having conversations with teachers. This shows that code-switching trend has become common among the students and teachers and one of the ways students can communicate with teachers to discuss or to talk about their studies or to express their opinions during classes or other situations.

In my opinion, most students prefer to code -switch when talking with teachers because they felt shy to speak proper English. This is because, they are not well exposed to English speaking environment and English is not their mother tongue but most students learnt English through their studies. In English classes, Malay students usually are very shy to speak English during English classes because outside of English class they use more Malay words.

Bahiyah Abdul Hamid (1992) had also made some several conclusion out of her students behaviour in classes:

“ It can be concluded that their silence is due to several possible reasons which are they don't know the answer or answers to questions asked, they lack the necessary language to communicate effectively in the English language and thus find it difficult to say what they cannot yet say at all, they feel insecure about their level of English and prefer to say little or nothing at all for fear that their mistakes would make their classmates or teacher laugh at or look down on them, they find it difficult to quickly switch from their mother tongue, or another language that they can communicate effectively in, to the English language. And they are following the appropriate and highly acceptable cultural behaviour of showing respect.”[1]

For those students who did not code -switch during their conversations with their teachers it may be because they prefer to use a more formal language or speak with proper usage of the language. Code -switch would involve words from Malay and English and most probably the sentence structure has a lot of grammatical errors.

Among family members most students would usually be talking in the language of their mother-tongue. The reason they prefer to speak in Malay is because they are used to the language since their childhood. Priming is the term used to describe the phenomenon that prior exposure to something influences subsequent responses to the same or related things (Alessandro G, 2009a). Language can be primed, so that exposure to a linguistic feature in

influences subsequent speed of responding to that feature, often called the reaction time or response latency (Alessandro G, 2009b). However, some families' members speak with today trend which most people favour to code-switch during their conversations. The sentence structure will change when English words are used to replace words in the mother tongue language.

REASONS WHY STUDENTS CODE SWITCHED

This is an example of a daily conversation between students in the college. There are four students; Anis, Hafiz, Kamarudin, and Aziz. They were planning to study at National Library on weekends. The dialogues between friends were held in Malay and English languages.

Dialogues

Meaning

Anis: Jom pergi National Library this weekend!

Anis: Let's go to National Library this weekend!

Kamarudin: Bila exactly?

Kamarudin: When exactly?

Hafiz: Hari Sabtu or Sunday?

Hafiz: Saturday or Sunday?

Anis: Sunday? tutup tak silap.

Anis: Sunday? The library is closed if I'm not mistaken.

Hafiz: My aunt kata Isnin baru tutup.

Hafiz: My aunt said it closes on Monday.

Aziz: Tak bolehlah, holidaying with family.

Aziz: I can't go, I'm on holiday with my family.

Based on the dialogues, there are many reasons that cause the students to code-switched. Through my research, I have discovered 10 reasons as to why students code-switch in their daily conversations.

Graph 3 Student's reason to code-switch in daily conversation

The bar chart displayed the percentage of the students' reasons to code-switch in daily conversations.

Most students wanted to have conversations with others and they prefer to use simple English words such as English conjunctions; so, then, but to code-switch because they are easy to pronounce and most people understand the usage of these words in the sentence structure.

They also believed that using English words in conversation can enhance their confidence when talking with others especially with teachers and friends. Besides, English words are used by people to stress points that are more understandable in the English language or to accurately describe the points because sometimes they could not find the right word with the same meaning from the mother- tongue language.

Several students like to gain attention from others. They used English words when speaking with various people so that he or she is noticed by people to have his or her way of talking. Besides, some students love to pronounce the English words according to their favourite Hollywood or English artists so the words sound more interesting. Students also believed that they look more educated when using English words during conversations whether in college or outside the college.

Talking in the mix of the two languages could also close the status gap between two people because it makes their conversations less formal with classmates, family members, and lecturers.

STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE CODE – SWITCHING PHENOMENON

Graph 4 Students perception toward the code-switch phenomena.

The pie chart above displayed the students' perceptions towards the code-switching phenomena in daily conversation.

About 60 percent of the students have good perception toward the phenomena. They believed that code-switching in conversations encourage

them to use English words more frequently in conversation so that they become used to the words and eventually they can speak in full English sentence. In addition, they feel more confident when having conversation with people because code-switching make a person look more educated in front of people. Student feel much better when code-switching in conversation because the can speak smoothly as they care less about their grammar.

However, about 40 percent of the students have negative outlook about this phenomena. They think that conversing to others using mono-language is much better than code-switching. People who are speaking to others in Malay have proper sentence structure when speaking. A number of students expressed that the mother-tongue language will soon be tarnished when more English words are used in conversations. They also believed that using mother -tongue language is actually showing that they are proud of their nationality.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, there are found to be at least seven influential factors that cause students of MARA College Seremban to code-switch in their daily conversations which are peers pressure, self- interest, English materials, English movies; drama series etc, advertisements, family members and the norm of the society. The most influential is peer pressure followed by norms of the society and self- interest. The least influential factor is English materials. The students are greatly affected by people around them including friends and society that they lived in. If the society promotes the speaking trends, people around them will spontaneously follow the trend.

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Most students frequently code-switch in their daily conversations. The trend has blended into the society. It is also accepted by most students and it is normal to code-switch in informal conversations. The conversations are believed to make them friendlier and less formal when speaking with others.

The results also showed that students code-switch with friends, teachers and family members. They do it most with friends as they are closer to them and also they are more comfortable with them. Students also code-switch when talking to teachers because they spend time during classes and discussion because they could not find the right word to use. In the family among family members, students do not code-switch so much. They usually speak to one another in their mother tongue language.

There are several reasons as to why students prefer to code-switch in everyday conversations. Several students said they want to pronounce the words like the Hollywood artist, close the status gap, making the conversation less formal and simple etc, as mentioned earlier in my essay.

The code-switching phenomenon has widely spread among the students in the college and also among today's youth. Some see this as positive while others see it as negative. So, is code-switching a positive phenomena to students or maybe to the youth? Obviously, most people accept the phenomena. Does that mean it code-switching benefits them during conversations? Can code-switching be accepted as a new kind of a language or is it seen to tarnish the languages involved? I think we should look at this phenomenon seriously as it would affect the language pattern of the next generations.