Functions of Code-Switching: A Case Study of a Mixed Malay-Chinese Family in the Home Domain

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ABSTRACT

In the social environment of Malaysia various languages are used in daily communication. It is common for Malaysians of the same linguistic background or Malaysians of different ethnicities, educational background or social strata to pepper their conversation with linguistic interference, interlingual code-mixing and code-switching. Code switching is a phenomenon that occurs in both formal and informal settings. Since the population of Malaysia is ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, intercultural marriages among Malaysians occurs regardless of ethnic background and religious orientation. Marriage is viewed differently by couples of interracial marriages. The different perspective on marriage may reflect the linguistic choices of couples when they communicate with their spouses in the home. Studies have found that code-switching in interracial marriages in Malaysia occurs in informal settings in the home domain especially in verbal communication regardless of the family's ethnic background, be it Malay, Chinese or Indian. This research focusses on the types and functions of code-switching in a mixed Malay-Chinese family in the home domain. The types of code-switching were analysed using Poplack's (1980) types of code-switching while the functions of code-switching were further analysed using a conceptual framework developed by the researcher that was adapted from Appel and Muysken's (2005) functional model of code-switching and Hoffman's (1991) functions of code-switching. .

INTRODUCTION

Muysken (2001, p. 7) defined code-switching as "the alternative use by bilinguals of two or

more languages in the same conversation." The phenomenon of code-switching is the norm in Malaysia; Malaysians code-switch between Bahasa Malaysia (national language) and English (second language) in their daily conversations. It is likely to occur in both formal and informal domains wherever communication takes place. It is manifestly clear that code-switching in multilingual Malaysia has become an entrenched code, and like any other language practice, performs a broad range of functions. This article focusses on the types and functions of code-switching in a mixed Malay-Chinese family in the home domain. The purpose of the study is to examine the code-switching behaviour that occurred in their conversations. The types of code-switching were analysed using Poplack's (1980) types of code-switching, while the functions of code-switching were further analysed using a conceptual framework developed by the researcher that was adapted from Appel and Muysken's (2005) functional model of code-switching and Hoffman's (1991) functions of code-switching.

The formal categorisation of code-switching, according to Poplack (1980; p. 605), defines three types of code-switching: Tag-switching, Inter-sentential switching and Intra-sentential switching. Tag switching refers to the insertion of tags such as in sentences that are completely in the other language. It involves attaching a tag from one language to an utterance entirely in the other language (Hamers & Blanc, 2000; p. 259). Tag-like switches are at the bottom of the scale. These include interjections, fillers, tags and idiomatic expressions. Tags are isolated words or phrases that are not related syntactically to the rest of the utterance. Examples of tags are "you know", "I mean" and "right". The occurrence of a tag does not break any grammatical rule. Inter-sentential code-switching involves switching at sentential boundaries (MacSwan, 1999; p. 1), where one clause or sentence is in one language and the next clause or sentence is in the other. The switched units are larger segments; more knowledge is required to produce this kind of switch. Meanwhile, intra-sentential code-switching takes place within the clause boundary (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p. 260).

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multilingual country with a population of about 28 million people and at least 100 languages and dialects. The population of Malaysia is ethnically and linguistically heterogenous. It is made up of Bumiputra (65.1%), of whom the Malays are the majority, Chinese (26%), Indians (7.7%) and other ethnic groups (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010 July 2). Most Malaysians are bilingual, as Malay is the national language and the main medium of instruction in state schools, while English is a second language for many Malaysians. David (2003) stated that in Malaysia, code-switching among the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic and linguistic groups has become the norm. According to Lim (2012), most Malay adolescents are bilingual, and use Malay and English as their main languages. Saravanan (1999) mentioned that English

is always preferred with Chinese parents while Malay families use their community language, which is Malay for worship and interaction with kith and kin.

Since the population of Malaysia is ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, intercultural marriages among Malaysians occurs regardless of ethnic background and religious orientation. David (2003, p. 218) defined mixed marriages as marriages between spouses of different cultural backgrounds and languages who may have different values, beliefs, customs, traditions or lifestyles. David (2001), Jawakhir (2006), Jariah Mohd Jan (2006) and Kuang (2002) found that code-switching in interracial marriages in Malaysia occurs in informal settings in the home domain especially in verbal communication regardless of the family's ethnic background, be it Malay, Chinese or Indian.

Although code-switching in interracial marriages is a common phenomenon, limited research has been done particularly looking at the code-switching behaviour in interracial marriages between the two major races in Malaysia: the Malays and the Chinese. Hence, this study focussed on the code-switching phenomenon that occurs in verbal interactions in a mixed Malay-Chinese family in the home domain. David (2002) in her studies mentioned that it would be interesting to analyse the types, patterns and functions of code-switching that occur in this type of family.

Mixed marriages have influenced the language choice and patterns of code-switching and to some extent, propagated shift. Each language carries its own functions in communication. For instance, David and Nambiar (2002) stated that some of the Malayalee Catholics in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, who had contracted mixed marriages communicated more in English. They were more comfortable expressing themselves in English. Meanwhile David's (2003) study on the offspring of Pakistani men and their Kelantanese wives in Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia showed that these families tended to communicate more in Kelantanese Malay. However, the Pakistani men tended to code-switch, using their mother tongue, when expressing dissatisfaction.

Functions of Code-Switching

Code-switching has been the topic of interest in linguistic research because of its specialty in natural occurrence in the use of languages by bilinguals (Ariffin & Rafik Galea, 2009). The motivations, functions and reasons for code-switching have been studied widely by many researchers from various linguistic perspectives. According to Hoffman (1991), there are 10 functions of code-switching:

1. To talk about a particular topic
2. To quote somebody else
3. To provide emphasis about something (to express solidarity)
4. To make an interjection (by inserting sentence fillers or sentence connectors)
5. To repeat in order to clarify
6. To express group identity

7. To show intention of clarifying speech content for interlocutor

8. To soften or strengthen a request or command

9. To meet a real lexical need or to compensate for lack of an equal translation

10. To exclude others when a comment is intended for an exclusive audience

Based on the functions listed by Hoffman (1991), this study intended to analyse the functions of code-switching behaviour in the conversations of a Malay-Chinese family in the home domain. It was believed that there would be lack of explanations and categories of the functions if the analysis were based on only one functional model as each functional model has certain functions that may be inappropriate for use in analysing the code-switching behaviour in this study. For the purpose of the study, seven functions were selected:

1. Phatic
2. Poetic
3. Issues discussed
4. Quoting somebody else
5. Being emphatic about something
6. Interjection
7. Real lexical need

Appel and Muysken (1987) proposed a functional model for code-switching based on the work of Jakobson (1960) and Halliday (1964). This model suggests that code-switching serves various functions in interactions between individuals. As

suggested by Hoffman (1991), the reasons for bilinguals to code-switch depend on the situation in which bilinguals are prone to code-switch. For instance, a bilingual may code-switch when quoting someone or when needing to provide emphasis in a conversation. It is believed that among all these suggested reasons, the ultimate reason for code-switching is to achieve effective communication between the writer and reader, or the speaker and receiver.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study is an ethnographic research study and it is purely qualitative in nature. This type of study involves describing, analysing and interpreting a culture-sharing group's shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs and language that develop over time. According to Stake (1995; cited in Creswell, 2013; p. 465), case study researchers may focus on a programme, event or activity among individuals rather than a group per se. In this study, the 'case' involved an interracial Malay-Chinese family. The number of participants in this study was four: the parents and their two children, a daughter and a son.

The mother was Chinese. English was her first language (L1) and Bahasa Malaysia was her second language (L2). She was educated in an English school and English was the medium of instruction in her family since young. She was also an English teacher in a secondary school in Perlis. However, she was also proficient and fluent in Bahasa Malaysia as she was married to a Malay and has been living in a largely

Malay community for almost 24 years. Meanwhile, the father's first language (L1) was Bahasa Malaysia while English was his second language (L2). However, he was proficient and fluent in English as he went to an English school during his secondary years. He was teaching Mathematics in a secondary school in Perlis at the time. He was 51 years old at the time of this research. Bahasa Malaysia was the son's first language (L1) while English was his second language (L2). As for the daughter, Bahasa Malaysia was her first language (L1) while English was her second language (L2).

The recordings of the conversations took place at the family's home in Arau, Perlis during dinner and leisure hours when all of them were present. The topic of the conversations was not pre-determined and the conversations were naturally-occurring situations. All the participants were informed that their conversations would be recorded. They had given their consent for their conversations to be recorded. However, they were not informed about the purpose of the recordings so as to preserve the authenticity of the conversations in order to avoid circumstances where code-switching occurrences were planned in their conversations.

DATA COLLECTION

As proposed by Creswell (2009) and Miles (2011), the data for this study came from the recordings of the conversations that the researcher collected to help understand the central phenomenon under study. A few weeks before the data collection, all the family members were informed and verification was given about the context of this study, which required the recording of personal conversations of the family in the home domain so as to maintain researcher etiquette. However, objectives were kept confidential to avoid cases such as self-initiated code-switching in their conversations. Spradley (1990) proposed that observations represent a frequently used form of data collection, where researchers are able to assume different roles in the process. In this study, the researcher adapted her role to the situation. The researcher entered the site and observed the code-switching patterns as a non-participant. All the family members agreed to contribute data for this study. Four audio-recorded conversations of 25 minutes each of the family in the home domain were recorded. The conversations, with a high density of code-switching occurrences or words within and between the sentences, were then transcribed using Jefferson's transcription convention. The data were then analysed based on the types and reasons for code-switching based on the framework.

DATA ANALYSIS

The theory of Matrix Language Frame by Myers-Scotton (1993) was adopted by the researcher in investigating the patterns of code-switching in this study. The reason this model was used was due to its status as the fundamental model of code-switching that juxtaposes the matrix language (ML) and

embedded language (EL). The MLF model suggests that there is a dominant language that provides a morphosyntactic frame for bilingual utterances and this dominant language is the matrix language (ML). The other language that acts as a guest in the utterance is the embedded language (EL).

After analysing the data based on the model, the researcher was able to classify the types of code-switching in the data collection based on Poplack's (1980) patterns of code-switching. These were: 1) Tag-switching: Tag-switching involves attaching a tag from one language to an utterance entirely in the other language (Hamers & Blanc, 2000:259). These include interjections, fillers, tags and idiomatic expressions; 2) Inter-sentential switching, which involves switching at sentential boundaries (MacSwan, 1999), where one clause or sentence is in one language and the next clause or sentence is in another, and; 3) Intra-sentential switching, which takes place within the clause boundary (Hamers & Blanc, 2000:260).

THE FUNCTIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING

A comprehensive study on motivations, functions and reasons for code-switching has been done by a number of linguists and researchers from different linguistic perspectives. However, Auer (1988) argued that code-switching is used in a creative way and its functions should be boundless without a pre-established set of functional categories. It was found that the four participants in this study code-switched in their conversations for a few reasons whether it was done consciously or subconsciously. The following discussions and examples explain more about the reasons why the interracial Malay-Chinese family in this study resorted to code-switching. The functions and the examples of code-switching in the family's conversations are as below:

Issues Discussed

Based on the analysis of the recorded conversations, it was found that the issues that were discussed in the conversations can be a factor that contributed to the reason for code-switching. In this study the family code-switched to the English Language when they were discussing health (diet), adopting a baby and news from a relative. However, Bahasa Malaysia was used when discussing current issues that were happening in the country. The explanations of the code-switching occurrences when talking about a particular topic can be seen as below:

Diet. The excerpt of the family's conversations below shows that the family code-switched from Bahasa Malaysia to English when talking about diet. They were more comfortable expressing their opinions regarding diet in the English Language. It can be clearly seen that the mother and the son automatically code-switched to the English Language when they talked about diet. Diet is a loan word in Malay; hence, the whole sentence was switched into English while discussing the topic.

Conversation 1:
Mother: Pandai-pandai je eh semua orang. Why do I need to diet? Slim already ma.

Translation: All of you are talking nonsense. Why do I need to diet? I'm already slim.

Son: Baju lama semua tak muat, right? heh heh You better diet. heh heh

Translation: It seems like you can't fit into your old clothes, right? heh heh   You'd better diet. heh heh

Mother: Ada la yang tak muat. You really think I should diet?

Translation: I can't fit into some. Do you really think that I should go on a diet?

Adopting a baby. The excerpt of the family's conversations below shows that the family code-switched from Bahasa Malaysia to English when talking about adopting a baby. They were more comfortable talking about the adoption process in the English language. It can be clearly seen that the father and the daughter automatically code-switched to the English Language when they discussed adopting a baby.

Conversation 2:
Father: Kami ingat nak adopt baby la. Hampa semua rasa macam mana?

Translation: We're thinking of adopting a baby. What do you think?

Daughter: Apa abah cakap tadi? You want to adopt a baby?

Translation: What did you say? You want to adopt a baby?

Current issues. The excerpt of the family's conversations below shows that the family code-switched from English to Bahasa Malaysia when talking about current issues. In this case, they were more comfortable discussing the rising price of goods such as oil and sugar in the English Language. It can be clearly seen that the father, son and mother automatically code-switched to the English Language whenever they were talking about the spiraling price of goods.

Conversation 4: Line 92
Father: As long as I'm still breathing, don't worry. Eh, do you know, lately semua barang naik harga. Minyak pun naik.

Translation: As long as I'm still breathing, don't worry. All the prices for goods has gone up lately including oil.

Son: Tula, gula pun naik kan?

Translation: The price for sugar has gone up too right?

Mother: Teruk betul. Semua naik harga barang. Gaji tak naik pun.

Translation: That's horrible. All the prices of goods have gone up except for our salary.

Quoting somebody else. When the participants quoted somebody, they continued to speak in the same language. This was probably because they wanted to deliver the story vividly and as interestingly as possible by mimicking the tone and style of speech of the original speaker. In addition, they wanted to get the meanings across to the others as clearly as possible by trying to retain the original and exact words used by the speaker whom they were quoting. Hoffman (1991) has suggested that people enjoy quoting famous expressions or sayings of well-known figures. In this study, this was found to be true as the participants code-switched when quoting somebody else and when relaying famous expressions. The explanations and examples of the situations can be seen as below. In the conversation below, the son code-switched to English when he quoted his friend as he wanted to use the language used by his friend. This was probably because he wanted to retain the original and exact words used by his friend in order to deliver the original meaning of his friend, Bella's words.

Conversation 1:

Son: No lah. Tak berani. Nanti takut Mira dengan Bella gaduh. Ameer serabut la kalau orang perempuan gaduh-gaduh ni. Malu la kat orang..Tau apa dia cakap? "I really like you, Ameer. I don't know why, tapi I rasa I boleh je nak tunggu   you kalau you rasa I ada chance la."

Translation: I dare not. I'm afraid that Bella and Mira will have a fight. I don't like it when girls start to fight. I'm embarrassed. Do you know what she said? "I really like you, I don't know why but I think I can wait for you if I stand a chance."

Based on the conversation below, the father code-switched to English to quote a common expression, "like cats and dogs", because the saying best suits the meaning that the father wanted to convey to his children as they were always arguing with each other. This expression is a Malay proverb that would lose its meaning if translated into another language. Therefore, it can be said that the father code-switched to English to quote a common expression that best explained the situation of the moment.

The conversation below shows that the father code-switched to Bahasa Malaysia to quote a common expression. This was probably because "perigi cari timba" was the expression that best explained what the father was trying to describe as being the behaviour of modern women. This expression is a Malay proverb that would lose its meaning if it were translated into another language. The expression that the father used meant that modern women seemed willing to initiate a relationship with a man, whereas the reverse used to be true at one time.

Conversation 2:

Father: No wonder la. So weird girls nowadays. Perigi cari timba sungguh la hai.

Translation: No wonder. Girls are so weird nowadays (Malay proverb: women willing to initiate a relationship with men)

Being emphatic about something. Based on the recorded conversations, it was found that the participants tended to code-switch when they were being emphatic or showing sympathy for something. They probably code-switched because the code-switched words that they used to express empathy may have a greater impact on the listeners. According to Hoffman (1991), people code-switch, either intentionally or unintentionally, to their first language when they want to be emphatic about something. The explanations and examples of this occurrence can be seen below:

In Example 1, the mother unintentionally switched from Bahasa Malaysia to English when she expressed empathy for her daughter, who was down with fever. She was saying that her daughter was having a fever and suddenly switched to English, her first language, when she started showing sympathy for her daughter's condition as she was more comfortable expressing sympathy for her daughter in her first language, English.

Example 1:
Mother: Itula. Mama dah agak dah. Adik ni demam ni. Pity you. Your voice also different already.

Translation: That's why. I knew it. You are having a fever. Pity you. Your voice sounds different.

In Example 2, the father unintentionally switched from his second language, English, to his first language, Bahasa Malaysia when

he was explaining about the previous year's burglary in the neighbourhood. He was speaking in English when he switched to Bahasa Malaysia when he began talking about a neighbour, Limah, whose house had been burgled. He was more comfortable expressing his sympathy for Limah in his native or first language, Bahasa Malaysia.

Example 2:
Father: Remember last year's case? But somebody injured last year.   Tapi, kesian la kat Limah. Dahla baru keluar hospital, dah kena pulak macam ni.

Translation: Remember last year's case? But somebody got injured last year.   I really pity Limah. She had just returned from hospital.

Interjection. Interjections or sentence fillers can be described as words that are used to express strong feeling or sudden emotion. Hoffman (1991) suggested that language switching among bilinguals or multilinguals can sometimes mark an interjection or sentence connector. It may happen intentionally or unintentionally. Gumperz (1992; p. 77) considered this function as an "interjection or sentence filler". In this study, this function was seen in the examples below.

The mother used an English expression, "Excuse me!" to express her anger towards her husband's statement of wanting to get married again. Her earlier sentence was in Bahasa Malaysia. She code-switched to English when she interjected her objection.

The interjection expressed her sudden and strong feelings of surprise, anger and annoyance in response to her husband's statement.

Conversation 1:
Mother: Apa awak cakap? Excuse me! Nak kahwin?

Translation: What did you say? Excuse me! You want to get married?

In the example below, the daughter used an English word 'Oh, god!' as an expression of surprise. Her earlier sentence was in Bahasa Malaysia. She code-switched to English to register her sudden and strong feelings of surprise and shock because her brother had just found out that their mother had bought her a new handphone, a Samsung Galaxy Note 2, a fact that her mother was supposed to have kept secret from him.

Conversation 2:
Daughter: Tapi adik tak bermaksud la. Oh god! Kantoi.

Translation: I really didn't mean to do it. Oh, god! I'm busted.

Lexical need or no equal translation. Based on the analysis of the recorded conversations, it was found that the participants also tended to code-switch to another language because there was no equal translation for the word that would best describe their thoughts, experiences and feelings. According to Hoffman (1991), this happened because there was no equal translation for the word in another language. Saying it in another language would have sounded very formal and awkward as such words are often slang or colloquial language. For example, the word "pandai-pandai", "poyo" and "pukau" in the examples below are switched in the middle of the sentence as there were no corresponding English words that could replace them.

In the example below, the son code-switched from English to Bahasa Malaysia because the expression "pandai-pandai" was the best word to express wise management of something; in this context, he was referring to time. He code-switched as there was no equal translation for this colloquial term that is often used in informal conversations.

Conversation 1:
Son: Don't worry, pandai-pandai la kami manage time.

Translation: Don't worry, we know how to manage time.

In the example below, the mother code-switched from English to Bahasa Malaysia because the expression "pukau-pukau", a colloquial term often used in informal conversations, was the best to refer to black magic. Black magic is commonly associated with Malay culture; thus, the word "pukau" is commonly used in everyday conversation in direct association with Malay culture.

Conversation 2:
Mother: This is so scary la I think. Pukau-pukau ni dangerous la.

Translation: This is so scary la I think. This black magic thingy is dangerous la.

Phatic function. From the analysis of the recorded conversations, it was found that the participants tended to code-switch to perform the phatic function as well. This is the use of code-switching to show a change in tone and to emphasise parts of a conversation that are important. Muysken (2005) mentioned that this change of tone can indicate whether the content of the conversation is private, hostile, friendly or even formal. For example, "You're welcome," is not intended to convey the message that the hearer is welcome; it is a phatic response to being thanked, which in turn is a phatic whose function is to acknowledge the receipt of a benefit. Phatic function proved to be a function of code-switching in the conversations of the family studied. The explanations and examples of phatic function for code-switching can are given below:

In Example 1 below, the mother code-switched from Bahasa Malaysia to English when she reprimanded her children for always fighting. Raising her voice, she code-switched and used the expression, "pissed off" in the middle of the sentence to show that she was really mad at them. The change of tone here indicated that she was serious and angry. This was to emphasise that she

could not tolerate her children's constant bickering.

Conversation 1:
Mother: Eh, sudah-sudah. Awat yang asyik bergaduh Hm:m, ma pissed off dah ni!

Translation: Eh, enough enough. Why do you keep fighting. I'm pissed off already.

In the example below, the daughter code-switched from Bahasa Malaysia to English and raised her tone when she insisted that she would not have her buttock injected by a doctor when she switched from Bahasa Malaysia to English in saying emphatically, "No way." The change and rise in tone indicated that she was scared and was ready to defend herself.

Conversation 2:
Daughter: Cucuk? Bontot? No way! I don't want. Please.

Translation: Inject? My butt? No way! I don't want. Please.

Poetic function. The analysis of the recorded conversations also showed that the participants code-switched for poetic functions as well. According to Muysken (2005), switching in this case involves words, puns or jokes in different languages for the purpose of amusement and entertainment and also to make fun or jokes in context. The analysis of the conversation between the participants showed that there were several

instances when the family code-switched to perform the poetic function, as seen below:

In Example 1 below, the mother code-switched from Bahasa Malaysia to English. The words "chubby", "round face" and "really round" were used by the mother to tease her daughter. She switched to English for the purpose of providing amusement as she was teasing her daughter.

Conversation 1:
Mother: Comel sungguh! Dia chubby, round face, really round macam adik. Heh.

Translation: The baby is really cute! He is chubby, round face, really round just like you. heh

In the example below, the son code-switched from English to Bahasa Malaysia. The term "sarung nangka" was used by the son to tease his mother, meaning that she would look funny if she word her old clothes, which would be too tight for her now. He code-switched for the purpose of providing amusement by teasing his mother.

Conversation 3:
Son: You better diet. heh heh. Later, you have to throw all your clothes. If not, jadi sarung nangka! heh heh

Translation: You better go on a diet. heh heh Or else you will have to throw away all your clothes. The clothes will then be too tight for you to wear.

CONCLUSION

The article has highlighted the functions of code-switching, which occurred in a mixed Malay-Chinese family. The findings revealed the functions of code-switching through examples and provided explanations for each one. The functions for code-switching in all four recorded conversations were carefully explored and it was found that the four participants in this study code-switched for several reasons either consciously or subconsciously. In considering the reasons for code-switching in this interracial Malay-Chinese family in their home domain, the data were analysed based on a conceptual framework developed by the researcher. Five functions of code-switching were adapted from Hoffman (1991), namely, issues discussed, quoting somebody else, being emphatic about something, interjection and because of real lexical need. Appel and Musyken (2005) proposed a functional model of code-switching, and two functions were adopted in this study: phatic function and poetic function. The results and data from this study provide new ideas on the functions of code-switching in a mixed Malay-Chinese family in the home domain and at the same time, provide awareness that there are different types of code-switching patterns that occur expectedly and unexpectedly in certain situations in order to perform different functions. The results also help to identify various functions of code-switching such as to express emotions, to provide further elaboration, to provide clarification and to provide emphasis.

This study also created awareness on the language phenomenon of code-switching in interracial families, especially in Malay-Chinese families. This research fills the gap in research into code-switching and also contributes to new findings on code-switching in a mixed Malay-Chinese family in Malaysia.

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