CODE-SWITCHING PRACTICES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH AND SCIENCE TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

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CODE-SWITCHING PRACTICES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ENGLISH AND SCIENCE TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study examined code-switching practices of secondary school English and Science teachers in the classroom. The participants were nine English teachers and nine Science teachers teaching Form One and Form Two classes for three secondary schools in Kuching. The theoretical framework for the analysis of code-switching functions is taken from Gumperz's (1982) semantic model. The data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations of naturally occurring teacher discourse. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify teachers' views on their reasons for code-switching. The results from the analysis of the teachers' classroom code-switching using showed that the teachers frequently code-switched for reiteration and quotation in English and Science classrooms. The results also showed that the teachers quoted students' answers to negotiate understanding of terms and concepts in classrooms. The teachers' reiteration of message enhanced the clarity of lessons. The teachers' code-switching promoted meaningful communication and successful transfer of knowledge to students. The English teachers also used more addressee specification, personalisation and objectivisation to establish a more interpersonal communication with students as compared to Science teachers who tended to code-switch for quotations. Teachers also used a combination of code-switching functions to emphasise message, empower teacher and incorporate students' speech and text materials into teacher talk. The interview results indicated that the teachers viewed code-switching as linguistic resource to help students to understand terms, instructions and concepts but they reported reservations to code-switch due to language policies and concerns about students' learning. The findings
showed that the teacher reports on code-switching often do not match with code-switching practices in actual classrooms suggesting code-switching occurs subconsciously.
ABSTRAK

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents code-switching as a phenomenon of multilingual speech. The negative impact of code-switching in monolingual settings and the functions of code-switching in multilingual settings are also presented. It is shown that code-switching happens in language and content classrooms in multilingual settings. Various studies on classroom code-switching based on either teacher reports or observation of code-switching phenomenon in Malaysia are also described. The significance of the study is also included in this chapter.

1.1 Background of research problem

Code-switching refers to the use of more than one code or language in the course of a single speech event (Gumperz, 1982). Such switch in language in the midst of a speech is frequently found in bi/multilingual discourse (e.g. Hlavac, 2006; Montes-Alcala, 2000; Myers-Scotton, 1993). The terms bilingualism and multilingualism have been used interchangeably (e.g. Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006; Romaine, 2006). Bi/multilingualism is usually associated with the speaker’s ability to use languages. The ability to use first and second language is bilingualism (e.g. Edwards, 2006; Farkhan, 2008; Haugen, 1953); the ability to use three or more languages is multilingualism (e.g. Farkhan, 2008; Nomura, 2003). A speaker with the ability to speak three or more languages (multilingual) need not necessarily use all the languages known to him/her at all times but could switch from
one language to another in his/her discourse. The tendency of multilingual speakers to code-switch is acknowledged in various studies (see Bhattacharjee, Rahman & Chengappa, 2009; Hlavac, 2006; Montes-Alcala, 2000; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Nomura, 2003).

The negative impact of code-switching on individual and society is much discussed in literature from a monolingual perspective. The act of switching from one language to another is often viewed as a sign of linguistic and cognitive deficiency for monolinguals and a rejection of incorporation into the society by nativists (Bailey, 2004). There are also misguided fears associated with code-switching. For instance, parental fear (what have I done to my child?), cultural fears (does bilingualism entail acculturation?), educational fears (does bilingualism affect academic progress?) that are prominent in immigrant groups enrolled in bilingual education out of necessity but not parents who send their children to acquire additional language by choice, and politico-ideological fears (is bilingualism a threat to the nation state?) (Beardsmore, 2003). These fears, however implicit or explicit, shows code-switching is not well accepted in monolingual settings.

However, research also claims code-switching is often functional in a multilingual setting. In agreement with Crystal (1987), Skiba (1997) further expounded on the contribution of the alternate use of languages in compensating a speaker's inability to express oneself in a language, expressing solidarity with a particular social group, and conveying a speaker's attitude. At other times, code-switching bridges communication between different linguistic groups (Myers-Scotton, 1993). In school settings, the
inclusion of students’ first language invigorated story writing activity (Brock-Utne, 2002), facilitated story telling and story writing process (Stein, 1994 as cited in Setati, Adler, Reed, & Bapoo, 2002), and facilitated second language vocabulary reception through first language vocabulary (Perozzi, 1985).

Nonetheless, the complexity and versatility of such code-switching in multilingual setting is inadequately researched. Studies have confirmed code-switching strategy is used in language classrooms (e.g. Flyman-Mattsson & Burenhult, 1999; Greggio & Gil, 2007; Martin, 2005; Reini, 2008) and content classrooms (e.g. Butzkamm, 1998; Martin, 1996, 1999; Zabrodskaja, 2007). They also show code-switching in classrooms are often functional. Researchers have categorised the code-switching instances based on its functions, to name a few, annotating talk (e.g. Martin, 1996, 1999, 2005), addressee specification (e.g. Huerta-Macias & Quintero, 1992; Then & Ting, 2009), quotation (e.g. Then & Ting, 2009; Zheng, 2009), and situational code-switching (e.g. Blom & Gumperz, 1986; Gumperz, 1982; Seidlitz, 2003). Nevertheless, it is unclear how such use of code-switching would differ according to context, if used (see Onyango, 2009).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Malaysia is a multilingual country. Many Malaysians speak several languages and dialects. The code-switching between the national language, Bahasa Melayu, and other widely used languages, English, Mandarin Chinese, and Tamil is common (see Run & Chin, 2003). There are about 140 languages in Malaysia inclusive of immigrant
languages such as languages of Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the major languages are Bahasa Melayu, English, Mandarin Chinese and Tamil (Paul, 2009). In interaction involving speakers who do not share the same language repertoire, speakers have to make significant and meaningful language choices when interacting in inter- and intra-ethnic community (David, 2003).

The Malaysian classroom is not free from the influence of multilingualism. Teachers and students who are multilinguals themselves bring with them their home languages (e.g. Malay and Kelabit) into the classrooms besides the official language of instruction, English (see Martin, 2005). Numerous studies in Malaysia are based on teacher reports of code-switching use in Mathematics and Science classrooms (e.g. Pandian & Ramiah, 2004; Tan & Chan, 2003; Yahaya, Noor, Mokhtar, Rawian, Othman & Jusoff, 2009). For instance, Pandian and Ramiah’s (2003) survey of Mathematics and Science teachers showed that the teachers’ main problem was explaining concepts in English and most of them admitted they explained in Bahasa Melayu when faced with a communication breakdown in English. The strategy of using Bahasa Melayu to explain concepts to address students’ problems is also found in Yahaya et al.’s (2009) survey of pre-university educators teaching Science and Mathematics. Another survey by Tan and Chan (2003) on Mathematics and Science teacher trainees in UPM indicated that they would resort to Bahasa Melayu if they have difficulties explaining in English although a few of them consider themselves as efficient bilinguals. In another study on teacher trainees by Othman and Saat (2009), most of the pre-service teachers reported in the questionnaires that they code-switch frequently in order to gain their students’ attention and to facilitate
learners' understanding of science concepts in their classroom. These studies generally used questionnaires and interviews as sources of evidence and found teachers were prone to using Bahasa Melayu when they had difficulty in getting meaning across to students in English, suggesting that the teacher code-switching is a sign of trouble rather than a strategy for teaching.

Studies that used observation strategies to study code-switching in Malaysian classrooms are scarce (e.g. Mahadhir & Then, 2007; Martin, 2005; Then & Ting, 2009). Observation of pre-service teachers in English lessons revealed that they used code-switching as a resource to continuously dispense content knowledge to students in English classrooms (Mahadhir & Then, 2007). Other studies on teachers found a similar reliance on code-switching as a strategy for explaining content. Martin (2005) found that English teachers of a primary school and a secondary school located in the interior of Sarawak code-switched to Bahasa Melayu to annotate lessons, facilitate comprehension and accomplish lessons because the students understood Bahasa Melayu. Then and Ting (2009) examined how the code-switching between Bahasa Melayu and English took place. They found the teachers frequently reiterated to Bahasa Melayu followed by a lengthier qualification of message in a mixture of English and Bahasa Melayu to transfer knowledge to their students in teacher-fronted lessons. Their study showed that code-switching was used judiciously by the teacher to quote students' responses and make personal statements in the teacher-facilitated lesson. This indicates that teacher code-switching plays a role in assisting students in the understanding of learning content.
Findings from these local studies show that code-switching is a common phenomenon in English, Science and Mathematics lessons. Apart from Then and Ting (2009) which confirm code-switching in English and Science teachers' discourse, the other studies focused on one subject. There is a need to confirm code-switching in English and Science lessons because of the different role of the language. In English lessons, it is the language that the students are learning but in Science lessons, English is the language of instruction and it is the scientific concepts that the students are learning. In Science lessons, English is a tool to understand the content but in English lessons, learning the language is an end in itself. Hence, the nature of code-switching could be different in English and Science lessons, and needs further investigating.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the study

Therefore, this study examines the code-switching practices of secondary school English and Science teachers in the classroom. The specific objectives of this study are to:

1) determine the frequency of code-switching occurrences in the English and Science lessons;
2) identify the functions of code-switching prevalent in the discourse of English and Science teachers in classroom;
3) identify the teacher views on the reasons for code-switching in the English and Science classrooms; and
4) determine whether there is a match or mismatch between teacher reports of code-switching and their code-switching in actual classroom practices.
1.4 Significance of the study

From previous studies on code-switching in educational context, it is known that code-switching helps student comprehension when language proficiency is a barrier to learning. Code-switching has been used for functions such as repeating messages, signaling changes to topic, indicating reported speech and negotiating teacher intention. In Malaysia, research into code-switching has shown that is a common practice of teachers in English, Science and Mathematics lessons but the possible differences between the nature of code-switching in different subjects have yet to be investigated in-depth. This study will, therefore, contribute to the existing body of research on code-switching in Malaysian classroom. Insights into code-switching use in instructional contexts is of practical value to educators. At the implementation-level, English and Science teachers can address the need for code-switching and consider the usefulness of code-switching strategies. By studying how code-switching is used in the teaching process, the current study hopes to suggest some strategy for the strategic use of code-switching to enhance the learning of students. At the planning level, the findings of this study provide some empirical basis for formulating policies on the acceptability of code-switching in Malaysian classrooms.

1.5 Operational definition of terms

Bilingualism is the ability to use two languages (Farkhan, 2008). For the purpose of this study, a speaker is considered a bilingual if he/she can comprehend and produce simple
utterances in two languages, for instance, why you *ketawa* (laugh)? This is because the participants of the classroom studied not only included teachers of English and Science subjects but also students with varied level of language proficiency.

**Multilingualism** is the ability to use three or more languages (Farkhan, 2008). In this study, a speaker with the ability to speak and understand simple sentences in three or more languages is considered a multilingual.

**Code-switching** is defined as the use of more than one code or language in the course of a single speech event (Gumperz, 1982). In this study, the teacher code-switching is limited to spoken discourse as the evidence came from verbal data. This study includes all alternate use of languages which are inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. Intra-sentential code-switching is also referred to code-mixing by Myers-Scotton (1993) but in this study, a distinction is not made between inter- and intra-sentential code-switching, following Gumperz’s (1982) semantic model of conversational code-switching (for further detail, see Chapter 2, section 2.1, p. 11). All instances of languages other than the language of instruction are considered instances of code-switching.

**Speech event** is a unit of content or activity defined by the speech occurring in the content or activity (Blom & Gumperz, 1986). For instance, exchanging greetings, telling jokes, and checking attendance are speech events.
Proper nouns refer to code-switching instances that function as if they are proper nouns found in the classroom data. For instance, the word *Kementerian* in Bahasa Melayu meant ministry in English but could also refer to the Ministry of Education in spoken speech by teachers and other participants in Malaysian school context because they are with this ministry.

Frequency of code-switching refers to the number of times a code-switching function is identified in the lessons. Every time a code-switching function is identified, it is counted as one instance of code-switching function. For example, when a teacher switched from English to Bahasa Melayu, from Bahasa Melayu to English, and again from English to Bahasa Melayu. This is considered as three instances of code-switching. However, usage of the word ‘okay’ is excluded from the frequency count as it is also used in other languages and including it would over-represent the actual frequency of code-switching (see Then & Ting, 2009).

Bahasa Melayu or Bahasa Malaysia is the national language of Malaysia. Initially, Bahasa Melayu was the term chosen to refer to the national language of Malaya (currently known as Malaysia) at its independence (Gill, 2005). However, it was renamed as “Bahasa Malaysia, the national language of Malaysians” by the government in conjunction with the racial tensions that spurred in the sixties (Asmah, 1992 as cited in Gill, 2005, p. 242). Presently, the two terms are used interchangeably with “Bahasa Melayu to signify that it is the language of Malays and Bahasa Malaysia to signify that it
is the language of Malaysians" (Gill, 2005, p. 242). In this thesis, the term Bahasa Melayu is used for consistency.

This chapter has covered the introduction to the study. The statement of the study and the significance of the study have also been presented. The operational definition of terms used in this study has also been provided. The next chapter deals with Literature Review.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents the definition of code-switching and the monolingual and bi/multilingual view of interpreting code-switching. Next, the semantic framework used in this study is described along with recent studies on situational and metaphorical code-switching using the framework. Some of the commonly used methods for teaching English and Science are described to provide a context for understanding the use of code-switching in language and content-based lessons. Related studies on functions of code-switching found in other studies of language and content lessons are also presented.

2.1 Definition of code-switching

Code-switching refers to the use of more than one code or language in the course of a single speech event (Gumperz, 1982). Poplack (1980) distinguishes between intra-sentential switching and inter-sentential switching. In intra-sentential switching, the code-switched segments and those around it must abide by the syntactic rules shared by two or more languages involved in the switch in language. Thus, intra-sentential switching remains meaningful despite the switch in language that happens within a sentence. For example, “Actually, minggu keempat is missing. The whole of minggu keempat” (Actually, the fourth week is missing. The whole of the fourth week) (Jacobson, 2004, p. 2). While the switch in language happens from English to Bahasa Melayu within the same sentence, the sentence remains syntactically comprehensible because it follows the