CODESWITCHING AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN A UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study was to discover the major reasons why undergraduates codeswitch from English to their mother tongue or other languages when conversing with each other and vice versa. Besides that, this study also looked into the awareness of undergraduates who codeswitched.

The instruments used in this study were recording, interview and questionnaire. 41 subjects were involved in this study where their conversations or discussions were recorded in a university environment. The findings revealed that the major reasons for undergraduates to codeswitch from one language to the other are 1) to express anger or frustration or surprise, 2) cannot think of the appropriate or correct word or expression in the language used at that moment, 3) to refer to a specific person or a particular group, 4) do not know the term in the language used, 5) to emphasize what has been said and, 6) familiar or comfortable in using specific terms. The study also revealed that in actual conversations, a vast majority of the undergraduates were not aware when they codeswitch.
ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji sebab-sebab utama mengapa mahasiswa/i mengamalkan pertukaran kod atau 'codeswitch' dari Bahasa Inggeris ke bahasa ibunda atau bahasa-bahasa lain apabila mengadakan perbualan atau perbincangan bersama dan disebaliknya. Selain itu, kajian ini juga meninjau kesedaran mahasiswa/i terhadap pertukaran kod yang diamalkan.

Di dalam kajian ini, beberapa kaedah telah digunakan seperti merakam, temuramah dan soal selidik. 41 subjek telah terlibat dalam kajian ini dan perbualan atau perbincangan mereka telah dirakamkan dalam situasi di dalam universiti. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa sebab-sebab utama mahasiswa/i mengamalkan pertukaran kod apabila mengadakan perbualan atau perbincangan bersama termasuklah: 1) untuk meluahkan perasaan marah atau kekecewaan atau terperanjat, 2) tidak dapat memikirkan perkataan atau ungkapan yang betul atau sesuai dalam bahasa yang digunakan pada masa itu, 3) untuk merujuk kepada seseorang atau satu kumpulan tertentu, 4) tidak tahu istilah tertentu di dalam bahasa yang digunakan, 5) untuk menegaskan apa yang telah dikatakan dan, 6) selalu atau biasa menggunakan istilah tertentu. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa perbualan dalam situasi sebenar, sebahagian besar daripada mahasiswa/i tidak sedar bahawa mereka telah mengamalkan pertukaran kod.
CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.0 Introduction

Codeswitching is not something unusual and it is found all over the world where speakers who know two or more languages switch from one language to the other when talking to each other. While codeswitching had previously been considered as a matter of minor importance within the more narrow tradition of research on bilingualism, it has now shifted into a more general focus of interest for sociolinguists, psycholinguists and also general linguists. A lot of the studies done by linguists are mainly focused on discourse/pragmatic aspect or grammatical/syntactic aspect of codeswitching.

Malaysia is a multilingual country, mainly because it consists of a number of speech communities but this does not indicate that all Malaysians are multilingual. There has been no specific survey conducted to examine the percentages of monolingual, bilingual and multilingual Malaysians. Nevertheless, there is considerably a high percentage of bilinguals and yet the number is still increasing (Asmah Haji Omar, 1982: 119). The role of Malay as the national language in Malaysia, coupled with the English language which at the moment is the second most important language in the country, has brought to the rise of bilinguals or even trilinguals. According to Asmah Haji Omar (1982), the communication between Malaysians can be considered to occur within the following parameters: -
1. Communication within a specific subgroup which generally take place in the language of the subgroup itself and if in the group itself, among them there are people who have a second language, then there is always a tendency to intersperse their verbal communication with any one of these languages.

2. Communication between different subgroups where it may be conducted in either Malay, English or Chinese or a language of one of the subgroups.

3. Communication between different (major) subgroups where the major groups denote the main groupings of the Malaysian population and the communication conducted is either in Malay or/and English.

(Asmah Haji Omar, 1982: 120-123)

As a result of the national education policy which specifies Malay as the main medium of education and English as a compulsory second language taught in school, a good number of Malaysians are bilinguals of Malay-English. In schools, universities and other educational institutions, Malay and English play an important role in teaching-learning and everyday communication. Malay as been stated as the main medium of instruction and at the university level, although many teaching subjects and academic activities will be conducted in Malay, there will be subjects taught in other languages. Thus, for those who are in the university level, they possess at least two languages that is Malay and English. In terms of communicating within a specific
subgroup, between different subgroups or between different (major) subgroups in a university environment, it is likely for codeswitching to occur.

Thus, in a university setting, a conversation between two person of the same linguistic or even dialectal background may be ‘consolidated’ with interference and codeswitching. With regards to this matter, it arouses the interest of the researcher to look into the major reasons why university students codeswitch from English to their mother tongue or other languages and vice versa when conversing with each other.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

All over the world speakers of two or more language carry on conversations with two or more languages. Consequently, conversations in two or more languages are the subject-matter of this study. In Malaysia, almost everyone know at least two languages, namely Standard Malay and English. Thus, it is not uncommon for one to hear the switching from one language to another within a conversation.

In a university setting, one can often hear the alternate use of two or more languages in conversations that take place in different situations. Therefore, this study was carried out in a university setting to investigate the major reasons for speakers to codeswitch from the English to their mother tongue or other languages and vice versa when conversing with each other. Besides that, it also look into the awareness of speakers regarding codeswitching.
1.2 Research Objectives

This study was carried out to meet the following objectives:

a) To discover the major reasons why undergraduates (speakers of two or more languages) in a university environment switch from English to their mother tongue or other languages when conversing with each other.

b) To discover the major reasons why undergraduates (speakers of two or more languages) in a university environment switch from their mother tongue or other languages to English when conversing with each other.

c) To gauge the awareness of undergraduates who codeswitch.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated in order to meet the purpose of the study:

a) Why undergraduates codeswitch from English to their mother tongue or other languages when conversing with each other?

b) Why undergraduates codeswitch from their mother tongue or other languages to English when conversing with each other?

c) Are undergraduates aware when they codeswitch?
1.4 Significance of the Study

Codeswitching among undergraduate students who can speak two or more languages is a common phenomenon. Although there has been a great deal of research about codeswitching in western countries, this kind of research is fairly scarce in Malaysia. This study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, this study is important because it looks into the major reasons why undergraduate students codeswitch from English to their mother tongue or other languages and vice versa in a university environment. In other words, this study identifies the common reasons for codeswitching to occur when undergraduate students converse with each other. This study also look into the awareness of speakers towards codeswitching.

Furthermore, the findings of the study can serve as a guide for further research and help researchers who are interested in implementing similar studies in other universities. Besides, the findings of the study can provide additional knowledge for scholars and deepen their understanding of codeswitching, mainly reasons of codeswitching from English to their mother tongue or other languages and vice versa among undergraduates.
1.5 Limitations of the study

Some of the limitations encountered in this study are:

a) Time constraint, especially in terms of collecting the data for the study. Therefore, the subjects for the study is only restricted to the students in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Time constraint also restrain the recording and analyzing of more conversations among undergraduates. Hence, only a limited number of conversations were recorded and analyzed.

b) Since the study is conducted within a university environment, the settings for the recording are limited.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The definition of important terms used in this study is given below:

A. Codeswitching

Asmah Haji Omar (1982) notes that codeswitching "is a phenomenon which reflects the change from one code to another in the speech of a particular speaker in a particular situation." Here Asmah has defined that code "may mean language, dialect or style". According to Myers-Scotton (1993), codeswitching "involves the use of 2 or more languages in the same conversation, usually within the same conversational turn, or even within the same sentence of that turn."
In this study, codeswitching is the use of two or more languages within the same utterance or conversation and it usually occurs when the speakers know the same two languages and change from one language to the other in midspeech. Codeswitching can involve a word, a phrase, a sentence or several sentences depending on a particular reason or situation.

B. Conversational Codeswitching

In conversational codeswitching, there is no changes in the situation or topic. Thus, conversational codeswitching occurs when a speaker expresses one sentence in one language and the next sentence in another language, and so on, but it is also possible for the two languages to be used in different parts of the same a single sentence (Hudson, 1991: 57). Gumperz (1994) defined conversational codeswitching as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems.”

C. Situational Codeswitching

Differ from conversational codeswitching, situational codeswitching happens when there are changes in participants and/or strategies. In other words, situational codeswitching is motivated by changes in factors external to the speaker’s own motivations.
D. **Bilingual**

According to Richards, Platt and Platt (1992), bilingual is defined as,

"a person who knows and uses two languages. In everyday use the word bilingual usually means a person who speaks, reads, or understands two languages equally well (a balanced bilingual), but a bilingual person usually has a better knowledge of one language than of the other."

In this study, when the term or word bilingual is used, it also refers to the trilingual and speakers of more languages. The reason for restricting this term is because almost all literature or references regarding codeswitching emphasize more on the bilinguals but most of the explanations and arguments given have the same implications for speakers of more than two languages.

E. **First Language (L1)**

First language is also known as mother tongue. In other words, it is the first language that a person is initially exposed to. Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) defined first language as,

"(generally) a person’s mother tongue or the language acquired first. In multilingual communities, however, where a child may gradually shift from the main use of one language to the main use of another (e.g. because of the influence of a school language), first language may refer to the language the child feels most comfortable using."
1.7 Summary of Research Problem

The use of two or more languages, mainly Standard Malay and English in conversations among undergraduates in different situations in the university has aroused the interest of the researcher to look into the major reasons why undergraduates switch from English to their mother tongue or other languages and vice versa when conversing with each other. This study also looks into the awareness of undergraduates regarding codeswitching.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

Grosjean (1982) points out that “Using two or more languages in one’s everyday life is as natural to the bilingual as using only one language is to the monolingual”. Codeswitching is an important aspect related to bilingualism. This chapter attempts to provide a better understanding of codeswitching by looking into some widespread views about codeswitching and some previous studies related to codeswitching.

2.1 The Prevailing Views of Codeswitching

In daily interaction with others, it is common that the variety of language use constantly change. In a bilingual setting comprising of two or more languages, a more complex situation can take place, basically because not only bilinguals can choose among different varieties of a language, but when speaking with other bilinguals, they can also choose between two languages whereas a monolingual can only switch from one variety to another in one language.
Figure 1: Language choice and codeswitching

Bilingual speaking to
monolingual

will use

L1

with code-switching

L2

without code-switching

bilingual

will use

L1

with code-switching

L2

without code-switching

Language choice

Code-switching

(Source: Grosjean, 1982: 129)

Figure 2.1 presents a two-stage approach in which the bilingual initially attempt to choose the base language to use and then, if the interlocutor is also a bilingual, whether to codeswitch or not. Hence, Grosjean (1982) specifies that it should be differentiated when a bilingual is speaking to a monolingual and to another bilingual. When conversing with a monolingual, the bilingual will naturally choose the language of his interlocutor whereas the appropriate language chosen by a bilingual when speaking to other bilinguals is usually "chosen unconsciously with no extra time or effort" (Grosjean, 1982: 130).

Köppe (1996) points out that there should exist the knowledge on both levels of competence, grammatical and pragmatic in order for codeswitching to occur.
Referring to Figure 2.2, initially a child has to learn the specific rules of language use of his or her linguistic community. After the establishment of these primary rules of language choice, the child might acquire more complex stylistic functions of codeswitching, depending on whether or not this is the practice used in his or her linguistic community. As for the level of grammatical competence, the acquisition of grammatical constraints on codeswitching requires fundamentally a prior differentiation of the two grammars (Köppe, 1996: 930-933).
Myers-Scotton (1993) presents a theoretical model to explain the socio-psychological motivation behind codeswitching based on primary examples from naturally occurring conversations in Nairobi and Kenya, as well as some conversations from Harare and Zimbabwe. This model is known as the Markedness Model and it gives an explanation accounting for speakers’ socio-psychological motivations when they engage in codeswitching. The theory behind the markedness model proposes that speakers have an awareness of markedness concerning available linguistic codes for any interaction, but choose their codes based on the persona and/or relation with others which they wish to have in place.

2.2 Related Studies

This section look into some of the previous studies pertaining to psychological and sociological aspect of codeswitching.

2.2.1 Psychological Studies

Chan, Chau and Hoosain (1983) carried out an experiment to compare the results of codeswitching of previous studies with those using natural passages and those using passages in two languages to see if there are any cognitive (rather than affective or emotional) factors determining the switch from one language to another at any juncture in a passage. Twenty one undergraduates at the University of Hong Kong served as subjects. They were all Chinese-English bilinguals with Chinese as their native language, and they had used English as their medium of instruction in school
for more than seven or eight years. For the experiment, excerpts from a university publication were put together. The subjects were asked to read a passage with spontaneous bilingual codeswitchings, compared with a unilingual Chinese translation of the passage, a unilingual English translation, a translation with random switchings, and a translation with only nouns switched to English. The findings show that there was no difference between the reading speed for the passage with natural switchings and the unilingual Chinese passage, thus questioning the need to postulate a bilingual input/output switch.

Subsequently, Chan, Chau and Hoosain (1983) carried out another experiment to test the hypothesis that the switched items were more readily available in the English form than in Chinese. The subjects for the experiment were similar to the subjects in the first experiment. In this experiment, the 20 subjects were divided into two groups, one to translate the 39 English items into Chinese and the other to do the opposite. The timer was activated once an item was projected on the screen in front of the subject and as soon as the subject pronounced his or her translation, the timer was stopped. The findings of the experiment show that the mean response time for English-to-Chinese translation was 2.3s while the mean for Chinese-to-English was 1.9s, significantly different ($t = 1.73$, $df = 27$, $p < .05$). Thus, this indicates that in natural codeswitchings, the English lexical items produced were more available, even though English is generally the weaker language.