# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.0 Introduction

In any bilingual and multilingual society, it is a norm for the plural community to speak more than one language to communicate in their daily life. Malaysia exemplifies this practice whereby the ability of the society to use a variety of languages is due to various races living here (Asmah, 2007). Many Malaysians can speak at least two languages which are the Malay language and the English language. Malays use their mother tongue which is Malay along with the second language which is English. Some Malays may also be able to speak Chinese and Tamil languages if they live within the Chinese and Indians communities. Similarly, most Chinese and Indians speak their mother tongue, the various Chinese languages and the Tamil language along with the Malay and the English languages. Thus when the three races get together in a conversation, either at work or at any social functions, there is a tendency for them to switch to various languages when communicating with each other (Paramasivam, 2010). This phenomenon of switching from one language to another in a discourse is linguistically known as code-switching.

Code-switching can be defined as the alternation of linguistic varieties within the same conversation (Scotton, 2001). Milroy & Muysken (1995:98) explain code-switching as,

> "the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation".

These two definitions explain that code-switching reflects the use of more than one language in a discourse. For example, two Malays who are speaking Malay may

switch to English and later on to Malay again for some reasons. These switches could occur at various levels for instance at word, phrase or sentence level. In the sentence 'She said that it is going to be **susah** (difficult)', the speaker code-switches at word level whereby in another sentence 'It loves to **makan ikan** (eat fish)' illustrates code-switching at phrase level. A switch could also occur at a sentence level whereby the speaker switches from one language to the other at a sentence boundary. When the speaker says, 'He is always like that, **selalu malas nak pergi sekolah**! (always lazy to go to school!)', the speaker reemphasises the English sentence by code-switching it to Malay. This exemplifies code-switching at sentence level.

Gumperz (1982:59) gives another characteristic of code-switching whereby he describes it as,

> "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passage of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems".

In this description, Gumperz states that code-switching involves speeches that combine two languages with different grammatical structures.

The present study defines code-switching by taking the basis of the above definitions whereby code-switching involves the usage of linguistic varieties within a conversation by combining two languages with different grammatical structures.

Many linguists who had conducted studies on code-switching discovered that code-switching is a meaningful phenomenon. Scotton (2001) in one of her studies indicates that code-switching can be a device which conveys important social information ranging from role relationship between speakers to feelings of solidarity, intimacy and others. For instance, it is normal for Malay students who are studying overseas to use English in their daily conversation. However, when their overseas friends approach them, they may automatically switch to the Malay language to exclude

their friends from the issues that they are discussing. Here, code-switching is meaningful in the sense that it reflects the feelings of unity and closeness among the speakers from the same race and the same country.

From the examples given, it can be reflected that code-switching could occur anywhere at anytime (Jacobson, 2004). It can occur during formal events like in official speeches, talk shows and classroom teaching and is also common in informal settings for instance during conversations in a telephone or discussions at the canteen. As argued by Barker in one of his research on code-switching (1947:185),

> "How does it happen, for example, that among bilinguals, the ancestral language will be used on one occasion and English on another, and that on certain occasions bilinguals will alternate, without apparent cause, from one language to another?"

This argument supports code-switching is a normal phenomenon which can happen to anyone at any time. Thus this brings us to the employment of code-switching in the educational setting which is in the classrooms.

In the Malaysian educational setting like in the classrooms at schools, teachers may use Malay or other native languages like the Mandarin, Tamil and others together with English to teach English and other subjects like Mathematics and Science which during this study are taught in English. This is to ensure students' understanding of the lessons delivered in class. If the teachers use only English during the lessons, some students might not be able to comprehend due to their incompetence in the target language (Dealwis & David. M.K, 2009).

This raises the issue of whether teachers should use only English or are allowed to use other languages, especially the Malay language to teach English. Inevitably, teachers' code-switching behaviour in English classes may cause slight dissatisfaction

among language practitioners and parents. They may question the effectiveness of the process of teaching and learning the target language when the teachers use other languages than English in the classroom. This is because many parents believe that teachers have to maximize the use of English in the class as the students will not learn the language well if the teachers use Malay, for example, to teach the language. In addition, The Curriculum Division of the Malaysian Education Ministry has imposed the "English Only" policy in all schools during English lessons (Dealwis & David, M.K. 2009). This policy adds to the conflict especially to teachers whether to adhere the ruling or to facilitate understanding of the students in the class.

Despite this argument, most studies (Tam, 1992; Ong, 1990; David, M.K. , 2001 & Norita, 2004) discover that it is common for teachers to use at least two languages in the class to teach English. This practice is common especially in the rural areas and particularly among the Malay students (these studies are further discussed in chapter two). The phenomenon is influenced by various factors such as students' family background, students' social status and students' proficiency and interest in English. In the rural areas, the students' exposure to English is limited as most of them use the language only in English lessons (Dealwis & David, M.K. , 2009). In addition, many students are not able to practice the English language outside the school as their parents prefer to speak Malay at home (Paramasivam, 2010). Furthermore, many students are not interested in the language as they do not see the importance of learning English. Besides, most of them view English as a difficult language to be learnt and this view can impede their ability to learn the language effectively. Due to these reasons, teachers are forced to use not only English, but also the students' mother tongue, the Malay language in assisting the students to learn English faster and more effectively (Cath and McLellan, 1993).

Based on the awareness of the issue regarding code-switching in the English language classes, many researchers are motivated to investigate the phenomenon of code-switching in the English as a second language classrooms. These researches generally focused on the patterns of the teachers' code-switching, the reasons which motivate the teachers to code-switch and the teachers and students perceptions towards the employment of the switches in the class. Among those who have investigated the phenomenon of code-switching in the English as a second language classrooms are Cath and McLellan (1993) who studied patterns of class interactions in Bruneian classroom and Tam (1992) who investigated the teachers' language choice in two classes. Cath and McLellan discovered that teacher code-switching acted as one of the strategies to ensure pupils' understanding and to reduce miscommunication between the teacher and the students. The study by Tam also attempted to investigate the teachers' reasons in engaging in code-switching in the ESL classrooms. A comparison was made on the linguistic patterns of the teachers' code-switching in two classes. The results showed that the teachers' code-switching were meaningful and did not simply occur at random. The data also showed that teachers had the tendency to code switch more often in classes with low English proficiency level. Thus Tam concluded that the proficiency level of the students is one of the determinant factors for the teachers to code switch in the language classroom.

There are also other researches (Schweers, 1999; Bruden, 2001; Tang, 2002 & Badrul Hisham & Kamarulzaman, 2009) which study the teachers and the student perceptions of the phenomenon of code-switching in the English language classroom. These studies seeked to understand the view of both parties on the usage of other than the target language in the class in the process of teaching and learning English. Schweers (1999) conducted a study which involved EFL students and their teachers in a Spanish context to investigate their attitudes toward using the first language in the

English language classroom. The results indicated that the majority of students and teachers agreed that Spanish should be used in the EFL classroom. Meanwhile, Badrul Hisham & Kamarulzaman (2009) carried out the study with 257 low English proficient learners attending Communication 1 proficiency course in a public university in Malaysia. They discovered that learners perceived code-switching as a positive learning strategy due to the various functions it has. From the studies mentioned above, it can be concluded that teachers and students were optimistic towards the employment of code-switching in the language classrooms which they believed will facilitate a better teaching and learning process of acquiring the target language. Thus the researcher is interested to know if the students in the present study will have the same perception as the ones carried out by earlier researchers.

These studies show that code-switching plays an important role in the process of learning and teaching English. Thus, it is hoped that the present study will add more to the knowledge of code-switching phenomenon in the classroom, particularly in the Malaysian English as a second language classrooms.

**1.1 Statement of Problem**

A common phenomenon for teachers and students in a multilingual setting like Malaysia is the alternating use of two or more languages in the language classrooms. Based on the researcher's own experience as a teacher for almost 11 years, it is common to see teachers code-switch from English to Malay and vice versa, English to Tamil and vice versa and English to Mandarin and vice versa while teaching not only English but also other subjects like Math and Science which at the moment are taught in English. Despite these variations, this study will only focus on the phenomenon of code-switching employed by a Malay teacher who teaches English to Malay students.

Many teachers tend to use more than one language to teach English because many Malay students, particularly in the rural areas, are not proficient in the English language. Thus, they cannot understand the lesson well if the teachers use only English in class. This lack of proficiency is due to several reasons such as the students' family background, the students' social economic status, and the students' interest and motivations towards learning English. For all these reasons, teachers are forced to use the mother tongue, namely the Malay language in assisting the students to learn the English language. This leads to the existence of the practice of code-switching in the English classrooms.

Even though the teachers do practice code-switching most of the time in class, it is doubtful that they are aware of how, when, how much and why they actually code-switch. This is because code-switching is an impromptu act and most of the time happens naturally along the discourse. In addition, the teachers may not know about the student perceptions towards their code-switching behaviour in the class. Most importantly the teachers may not realise the pedagogical purposes that code-switching may serve in the classroom. As stated by Halliday (1973:45),

> "The knowledge of how, when and why code-switching is employed is absolutely necessary to provide insight into the way language is learned and why language is as it is".

Thus, the understanding of the phenomenon will help teachers to see its strengths and weaknesses when applied in the language classroom while teaching the target language to the students.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

There are three objectives in this study. First, it aims to describe the linguistic patterns of the teacher's code-switching. This is done by looking at the teacher's discourse in the English as a second language classroom and whether teachers code

switch at word, phrase or sentence level. The study also tries to learn the functions of the teacher's code-switching. In addition, the study attempts to investigate the student perceptions toward the teacher's code-switching behaviour in the classroom.

Thus, the study specifically aims to:

1. Describe the linguistic patterns of the teacher's code-switching in the English as a second language classroom.
2. Learn the functions of the teacher's code-switching in the classroom.
3. Investigate the student perceptions toward the teacher's code-switching behaviour in the classroom.

## 1.3 Research Questions

In relation to the purpose of the study, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What are the linguistic patterns of the teacher's code-switching in the English as a second language classroom?
2. What are the functions of the teacher's code-switching in the classroom?
3. What are the student perceptions toward the teacher's code-switching behaviour in the classroom?

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study will describe the linguistic patterns of the teacher's code-switching in the English as a second language classroom, the functions of the teacher's code-switching and the students' perceptions towards the teacher's code-switching behaviour in the classroom. The researcher hopes that the findings from this study can increase the teachers' awareness of this phenomenon that takes place in the classroom during the process of teaching and learning. From this knowledge, teachers should be able to

reconsider how much they can code-switch in the English lesson without affecting the students' abilities to acquire and learn the target language effectively.

This study is also significant because there are limited researches done to describe the linguistic patterns, the functions of teacher's code-switching and student perceptions towards the teachers' code-switching behaviour particularly in the Malaysian classroom context. This is because most studies of this kind are carried out in the Western countries like in the United Kingdom (Blom & Gumperz, 1972), Spain (Lipski, 1978 & Poplack, 1981) and the United States of America (Scotton, 1993) and in the Eastern countries like Korea (Chun, 2001), India (Southworth, 1980 & Kachru, 1983) & Brunei (Cath & McLellan, 1993) . Thus, this study is done to fill in this gap. In addition, the understanding of the phenomenon should also be helpful for further improvement of the second language teaching and learning practice in Malaysia.

## 1.5 Limitation and Scope

This study involves only one teacher teaching English to a group of form four students in a selected school in Kedah. With this awareness, the researcher does not try to over-generalize her findings and apply it to all teachers teaching English throughout the country.

In addition, the focus of this study is on the linguistic patterns, the functions of the teacher's code-switching and the student perceptions on the teacher's code-switching behaviour between English and Malay. Thus, the researcher will not examine the linguistic patterns of students' code-switching and the functions of the students' switches.

Also, the research is not conducted to investigate the teacher's approach of teaching as the researcher will only analyzes the teacher's classroom discourse. The

researcher also does not attempt to examine the relationship between the phenomenon of code-switching and the students' performance in the target language. The study mainly describes linguistic patterns and functions of the teacher's code-switching and also the student perceptions towards the phenomenon of code-switching in the English language classroom.

## 1.6 Definition of Terms

There are several linguistic terms used throughout the study and below are the definitions of the terms.

### 1.6.1 Code-switching

Linguists offer various definitions for code-switching as this phenomenon is studied from various perspectives such as linguistics, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and psycholinguistic. From the linguistic perspective, Scotton (1993:10) defines code-switching as,

> "the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation. Switching may be either intra- or inter-sentential and often (but not necessarily) involves stretches of more than one word".

Similarly, Milroy & Muysken (1995:98) explain code-switching as,

> "the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation".

These two definitions illustrate that code-switching involves the use of more than one language in a discourse.

In addition, Gumperz (1982:59) identifies code-switching as,

"the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or sub-systems".

This definition explains that code-switching involves speeches that combine two languages with different grammatical structures.

Scotton (2001:41) adds that code-switching may also serve various social functions. She states that,

"Code-switching can be a device which conveys important social information ranging from role relationship between speakers to feelings of solidarity, intimacy and others".

All of definitions above will be taken into account when discussing about the phenomenon of code-switching throughout the study.

### 1.6.2 Intra-sentential code-switching

This is among the various categories of code-switching suggested by Scotton in her Matrix Language Frame model (1993) which is used to analyze the linguistic patterns of code-switching. This category of code-switching is reflected by the use of two languages within a sentence. The switches occur at two levels; word level and phrase level (Scotton, 1993:4).

According to Longman Basic English Dictionary (2002), a word is a group of letters that together make something that we can understand. The sentence 'I do not have to **sapu** the floor yet' exemplifies intra-sentential code-switching at word level. The Malay word '**sapu**' which means 'sweep' is code-switched in the English sentence. Meanwhile, a phrase which means a group of words that does not make a whole sentence is another level of intra-sentential code-switching (Longman Basic English

Dictionary, 2002). The sentence 'I love to go shopping **dengan dia**' illustrates code-switching at phrase level as the Malay phrase '**dengan dia**' which means 'with her' is used in the English sentence.

### 1.6.3  Inter-sentential code-switching

Another category of code-switching is inter-sentential code-switching which refers to the use of two languages at sentence level or sentence boundary (Scotton, 1993:3). According to the Longman Basic English Dictionary (2002), a sentence means a group of words that makes a statement or a question. A sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop or a question mark.

When the speaker code-switches, he may speak English and then repeat the sentence which is similar in meaning or different sentences in Malay. For example, when the speaker says 'You spend too much time watching television' and then repeat the whole sentence in Malay '**Awak habiskan terlampau banyak masa menonton televisyen**', the speaker unconsciously code-switches from the English language to the Malay language at a sentence level. The speaker normally does this to emphasis the meaning of the sentence so that the listener can understand the sentence well.

### 1.6.4  Matrix language

The notion of Matrix language in a speech is suggested by Scotton in her Matrix Language Frame model (1993). She stated that matrix language is the language that plays the dominant role in code-switching. In this study, English is considered the Matrix language as in the English as a second language classroom, English should be used as the medium of instruction to teach the language.

### 1.6.5 Embedded language

The embedded language is another variety that plays lesser role in the discourse (Scotton, 1993). In the study, the Malay language is an embedded language whereby it is inserted in the English discourse throughout the lesson.

### 1.7 Conclusion

This chapter provides some background information about code-switching phenomenon which has been analyzed extensively by linguists and some current issues regarding the phenomenon of code-switching in Malaysian ESL classrooms. It also presents the objectives of the study which should be accomplished by the researcher at the end of the study. In addition, it discusses the importance of the study to the teachers and language practitioners and some limitations that the researcher might face upon completing the study. It also illustrates several important definitions of linguistic terms which will be used throughout the study. The researcher hopes that this chapter is able to introduce the concept of code-switching to the readers and to give them some insights of what they can expect from the study.