

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Communication constitutes a major part of human interaction. It is through language and conversation that humans communicate information and ideas through a variety of speech registers and styles, including code switching (Ervin – Tripp, 2001). Communication is one way we express ourselves and we do this through language. For those with the linguistic repertoire of more than one language, it is common to display their linguistic ability. What sometimes ensues is a fusion of different languages, styles or even dialects which is termed code switching. The code switching phenomenon has been present in multilingual societies where languages, dialects and different varieties of the same language are used. Code switching is common in multilingual Asian countries such as the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia where English, Malay as well as other languages are mixed in an utterance. In Malaysia, it is common to hear a speaker using English words even when much of the conversation is in Malay and vice-versa using the Malay language in a English dominated conversation. In other words, code switching is a common phenomenon among Malaysians (David, 1997). This study hopes to look at code switching among the primary school learners in Malaysian settings. Code-switching, which may be defined as the alternation between two or more languages in a speaker's speech, (Haugen, 1956) occurs naturally in the scheme of bilingualism.

Wardough (1998) reports that code-switching often happens subconsciously as speakers may not be aware that they have switched, or be able to report, as to which language or code they used for a particular topic. However, although bilingual speakers claim that

code-switching is an unconscious behavior, research has also shown that it is not a random phenomenon, as attested by Li Wei (1998, p. 156):

Sociolinguist who have studied code switching draw attention to extra linguistic factors such as topic, setting, relationships between participants, community norms and values, and societal, political and ideological developments influencing speakers' choice of language in conversation.

Code-switching is, thus, seen as a purposeful activity, as there are functions and intentions such as topic, setting and context of the conversation and the relationship between speakers assigned to this behavior (Gumperz, 1971; Myers-Scotton, 1983; 1988; 1989, Hoffman, 1991). Function and intention here is seen as the purpose or reason for speakers or participants to make choice of language during the conversation.

Code switching is a common phenomenon here in Malaysia as we live in multilingual and multicultural communities with various ethnic groups. Code switching happens when more than one language is used in a conversation. Most of the time, people will code switch while having a conversation with others like their friends, neighbours, spouse or even with the nasi lemak seller.

In informal contexts such as in social contexts with friends, family members and neighbours code switching happens regularly. When communicating with friends with the same native language and who are well-versed in English, speakers tend to code switch in these two languages. Communicating in both their ethnic language and English offers them a better way to express clearly what they mean.

As for the classroom environment, students tend to also code switch in both their mother tongue and English. These students tend to code switch between English and their native language when they communicate with friends at school.

Students also tend to code switch in order to fill in gaps in communication which may result from the lack of proficiency in the target language as they cannot recall the appropriate structure or words in the target language. Other than that, many other variables may influence the usage of code switching in classroom setting. One of the variables that this study would like to investigate is if gender is a factor that contributes to similarities or differences in the functions of code switching among upper primary learners in a school in Malaysia.

1.2 Definition of Code Switching

Code-switching is the use of two languages in a conversation. Code-switching also takes place in a single language within two or more varieties, for instance from standard Malay to Malay dialects. It takes place in a bilingual and in a multi-lingual society where code-switching takes place between both languages.

Asmah (1982:65), based on verbal communication among Malaysians, observes:

... bilinguals are on the increase. The role of Malay as the national and official language, contributes to the presence of bilingualism among individuals in Malaysia. Coupled with this, the English language which at the moment remains as the second most important language in Malaysia, has also brought about the rise of bilinguals of Malay- English, Cantonese-English, Tamil-English and so on.

According to Reyes (2001), code switching is common in any ELT classrooms and although it is not favoured by many educators, an understanding of its functions and reasons for code switching are important. Previous research shows that monolingual speakers have the capacity to switch between a variety of linguistic registers (e.g., Gumperz, 1967; Ervin-Tripp, 1964, 2001). Similarly, bilinguals also have these communicative registers that monolinguals have, but in addition they have two linguistic codes to alternate as a resource for sociolinguistic strategies during conversations. From the sociolinguist's point of view, code switching is studied to understand why people alternate between languages in a particular conversation or situation. This study will look at the functions of code switching that occur among the primary learners during their group discussions.

The concept of code switching, as defined by Gumperz (1973), refers to the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation. Most of the early research on code switching looked at adult–adult interaction (e.g., Clyne, 1967; Gumperz, 1967, 1973). However, the early 1980s witnessed increased interest in studying children's code switching (Álvarez, 1979; Genishi, 1976; Zentella, 1982, 1997). These studies have shed some light on how bilingual children use different languages according to addressee and context.

However, these studies do not describe how code switching is used to extend communicative competence for achieving conversational goals during inter-gender peer interactions. The present study hopes to analyze the functions of code switching in the speech of L2 classroom students as well as to explore the relationship between the different functions of code switching and to investigate inter – gender code switching.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Being a multilingual country, code switching as a sociolinguistic phenomenon is common in the speech of Malaysian speakers. Studies have shown that it occurs in both formal and informal contexts of communication and has become a normal verbal mode among Malay-English bilinguals (Jacobson, 2004). Code switching is also found among the less proficient students as they might have limited knowledge of the target language or are unable to recall the suitable structure or lexicon as in this study's focus, namely, English.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the social significance of code switching among upper primary learners during peer interactions. It attempts to identify the social factors that initiate and influence code switching to establish patterns of code switching and to examine the functions of code switching. Code switching is a subject which has been actively explored and studied by linguists. Much literature can be found on the subject of code switching with studies carried out in various settings and researchers have pointed out the various functions of code switches (Gumperz 1972, Pascasio 1978, Zentella 1997, Becker 1997). As evidenced from these studies, code switching performs many functions and the reasons for code switching vary from one community to the other. Apart from looking at the functions, this study will also analyze the relationship of gender with the functions identified. This aspect is rarely done by linguists who study code switching among primary learners.

Other than that this study will also look into speech acts confined to John R. Searle's (1975) work to study linguistic features that correlate with code switching. Young Malay speakers who are the participants in the present study are bilinguals proficient in both Bahasa Malaysia and English. Here, the researcher is looking at the purpose for

these bilinguals to code switch and whether there are similar or different functions in code-switching for different genders. At the same time, the researcher will also look at the speech acts involved when code switching occurs during the group discussions of these participants in the present study.

Studies on code-switching have now moved from the notion that the switching behavior is a compensation for linguistic deficiency in bilingual speakers (Adendorff, 1996; Myers-Scotton, 1995). According to Adendorff (1996:389), code-switching is seen as 'functionally motivated' behavior. Therefore, a study that investigates the functions of code-switching occurring in Malaysian bilinguals' communication will, therefore, be meaningful toward the understanding of this phenomenon with inclusion of inter-gender purposes in code switching.

Hence, this present study aims to investigate the functions of code switching found in the speech of primary learners in two types of group interaction in a classroom setting, namely, in single gender interaction and mixed gender interaction. It would be interesting to examine if both genders code switch for similar or different functions and in which types of speech acts code-switching occurs.

This study also intends to examine inter-gender code switching by comparing the frequency and the reasons for code switching found in the data recorded during the interactions of these two genders.

Linguistic features such as speech acts are also considered as an important element in studying code switching. Speech acts that occur in the conversation script would also be analyzed as a linguistic feature in inter-gender code switching.

Personally, the researcher has long been interested in the ways in which inter-gender multilingual make use of the various languages at their disposal. Whenever multilingual pupils and friends from both genders alternate between languages within a single conversation, the researcher wonders what motivated the switch. Did they switch languages because they simply could not think of a word in one language or because one language lacks a concise word for a given notion? Whether this switch involves different genders in different context is also argued. Other than that this study will also look into speech acts confined to John R. Searle's work to study linguistic features that correlate with code switching. Young Malay speakers who are the participants in the present study are bilinguals proficient in both Bahasa Malaysia and English. Here, the researcher is looking at the purpose for these bilinguals to code switch and whether there are similar or different functions in code-switching for different genders while code switching. At the same time, the researcher will also look at the speech acts involved when code switching occurs during the group discussions of these participants in the present study.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are the following:

1. To study the functions of code switching between L1 and L2 among primary school learners. (L1=Bahasa Melayu, L2=English Language)
2. To compare the functions of code switching between different genders in single and mixed gender interactions.
3. To investigate the various speech acts between males and females in code switching that occurs among primary school learners.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the above mentioned objectives, the research questions are framed. The main research questions addressed in this study are;

1. What are the functions of code switching found in group interactions among upper primary learners?
2. How similar or different are the functions of code switching in single gender and mixed-gender group interactions among male and female participants?
3. What types of speech acts are identified when code switching happens during inter gender group interaction?

1.6 Significance of Study

This study attempts to explore the different patterns of code switching among Bahasa Malaysia–English bilingual among upper primary students during inter gender peer conversation. These findings are particularly important for classroom teachers, because code switch should be understood as a tool for cognitive development and a skill children use to achieve communicative goals. Educators, teachers, and parents should not consider code switch as a sign of cognitive confusion, but instead as an indicator of children’s bilingual competence.

By pursuing this study, the researcher hopes to be able to contribute to the current pool of knowledge on code-switching in a Malaysian classroom setting. Herewith this study will more or less reveal the relationships that occur between means of code switching, linguistic features such as speech acts and gender.

This study hopes to throw some light to help educators facilitate discourse practices in the mixed gender classroom according to students' first language (Bahasa Melayu) and L2 linguistic skills, as in this study, English as L2. The findings of this study may benefit bilinguals in terms of setting learning policies and curriculum. Most of all, parents, teachers and bilinguals can make use of this knowledge in understanding why code switching occurs.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study provides an analysis of the inter-gender code-switching among upper primary learners in Malaysian setting. However, it is limited in several ways that might be addressed in future research. The limitations of the present study are:

1. The functions of code switching found in this study are based only on a small sample of 8 students that may not represent the total school population in Malaysia. Thus, the statistical analysis of the data obtained may not represent exclusive evidence about the functions of code switching widely and does not present general relationship between code switching and gender variable among all Malaysian students.
2. The types of code switching found in this study may be exhaustive due to the sample size. However, the results may be able to provide a reflection of the functions of code switching among the sample of the upper primary learners population used in this study in a Malaysian setting.
3. This study looks at only a particular age group of 11 to 12 years old and only of Malay bilingual speakers in Klang Valley.

To overcome these limitations, future research could seek code-switching data from a larger number of upper primary learners at a variety of Malaysian school settings.

1.8 Summary

This chapter has presented the basis for studying inter-gender code switching among the primary school learners by the researcher. This chapter has described the importance of studying code switching with relation to linguistic features such as speech acts and gender. The terms of definition and basis of this study has clearly been stated that is to use the findings gained from the study to help students and teachers or educators to understand the deeper meaning of code switching occurrence in communication.