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**TEXTUAL CODE-SWITCHING: A CASE STUDY OF  
MALAY/ENGLISH BLOGS**

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***Abstract***

The act of switching languages within a given discourse is known as code-switching. Throughout the years, the focus of study on this phenomenon mostly concerns its oral production in comparison to its written production. This study analyses aspect of code-switching in the written context by means of bilingual Malay/English written blogs. Anchored on the Rational Choice Model, this study adopts the view of code-switching as the act of writers making rational judgment on which language use will provide them with the best outcome for their writings. Five main types of switching and their functions are analysed in this study. The types of switches include quotations, interjections, reiterations, triggers and linguistic gaps. Besides adding colour to their texts, these type of switches more importantly enables the writers to achieve different features of writing within their blogs. Among the features of switching identified in this study includes; to express emotional feelings, to re-enact past experiences, to emphasise on different meanings, to fill certain linguistic gaps and to create a natural style of writing. Utilising these features facilitate writers in effectively delivering the intended messages in their blog-writings. As a whole, this study contributes to the better understanding of the types and functions of code-switching in the written context.

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**Keywords:** Code-switching, bilingual, blog, Rational Choice Model.



## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of code-switching has always been a topic of interest in bilingual research. From a contemporary standpoint, the term code-switching can be defined as the use or the alternation of elements such as words or phrases from two or more languages within the same discourse (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Traditionally, the act of code-switching was perceived negatively. For instance, switching from one language to another indicates the speakers' limited command of both languages, or switching languages within a single discourse is seen as a mere act of stylistics (Montes-Alcala, 2015; 2016). The general direction of research on code-switching has been to mend such perspectives and to establish that code-switching is not simply a negative or a random language phenomenon (Gafaranga, 2007). Attempts to establish and demonstrate the organization of code-switching has led to studies in three major research perspectives. One is through the grammatical perspective, another is through the socio-functional perspective and yet another through the psycholinguistic perspective (Gafaranga, 2007; Stell & Yakpo, 2015).

Although studies through the grammatical perspective have produced better understanding on the morphosyntax of code-switching, and studies through the psycholinguistics perspective have developed a deeper understanding of how switches are represented and processed in the mind (McClure, 2001; Perez-Leroux, O'Rourke, & Sunderman, 2014; Kootstra, 2015), they however have neglected the sociological aspect of the phenomenon. It is through the socio-functional perspective that the meaning, reasons and functions of code-switching can be further clarified and understood (Gumperz, 1982). From the socio-functional perspective, code-switching can be explained through either an organizational paradigm (such as the Conversational Analysis approach) or through an identity-related paradigm (such as the Rational Choice model).

The Conversational Analysis approach examines the sequential patterns or conversational turns during social interactions (Wei, 2005). In general, this approach of is better suited for a face-to-face type of spoken data. On the other hand, the Rational Choice model is more of a speaker centred model as it focuses on the production end of a conversation (not on the response towards the production). Therefore, it is not necessary to analyse sequential type of conversational data when using this model. The Rational Choice model argues that speakers are influenced to make language choices based on their personal goals of conversation (i.e. choices are based on personal goals to maximize rewards and minimize cost, cf. Markedness Model: Myers-Scotton & Bolonyai, 2001; Amuzu, 2015). In order to get the best outcome, speakers have to make rational judgments on the language they choose to use, i.e. which of the language choices available to them would benefit them the most when in use. The main function of rationality in this model is therefore to point out the best language option from a speaker's set of possible language options (Myers-Scotton, 2002).

Contrary to common belief, code-switching is not limited only to spoken interactions but also operates in the written contexts as well. Studies such as McClure (2001), Montes-Alcala (2015) and Weston & Gardner-Chloros (2015) (to name a few), have all analysed the act of code-switching in written context such as in poetry, drama, fiction and literature. Although these studies provide evidences of code-switching in the written form, they are (to a certain degree) less natural forms of textual data. In contrast, a written genre such as blogs, can actually provide a more natural form of textual data for code-switching studies. A

blog is a personal online journal which is accessible publically through the web. Blogs are unique as they provide textual data that are representative of the natural speech form of communication. This is because blogs are typically written in an informal style, allowing the writers to freely and creatively express themselves while maintaining a first person speech-like manner of writing (Kharkhurin & Wei, 2014; Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2018). In this sense, the characteristics of blogs themselves makes it possible for an analysis through a model developed for speech communication such as the Rational Choice model. As mentioned earlier, the model emphasises on the aspects of language production, i.e. a speaker-centred approach. By the same token, written blogs provide data of language production, i.e. blogs are writer-centred discourse (Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2018). It is therefore appropriate for a study of code-switching on written blogs to be anchored on the principles of the Rational Choice model.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Code-switching has been studied from many different aspects. However, the typical focus has conventionally been on the analysis of its spoken interactions. As a result, studies of code-switching in the written production are not as prolific in comparison to studies of its oral production (Weston & Gardner-Chloros, 2015). In today's digital era, we find ourselves heavily indulge in written and text based communication such as text messaging, chats, emails and blogs (to name a few). To a certain extent, text-based interactions have now become the more common and preferred method of communication. The act of combining and alternating languages within these medium of communication is not an unusual practice, especially among bilinguals. This study is concern with the act of code-switching in the written context by focusing on the phenomenon in written Malay/English bilingual blogs.

## **3. Research Questions**

What are the types of code-switching acts that can be found from the data of Malay/English written blogs? What are the functions of the switches that occurs in the written blogs?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyse the act of code-switching in the written context through bilingual Malay/English written blogs. The main focus is on the types of switching that occurs and the functions they perform in blog-writing. This study adheres to principles of the Rational Choice model, i.e. the principles of this model facilitates in the understanding of the types and the functions of the switches that occurs in the blogs.

## **5. Research Methods**

The textual data for analysis in this study is obtained from four Malay/English bilingual blogs namely; (A) muzsweetheart.blogspot.com, (B) bamboo3.blogspot.com, (C) ummuhurayrah.blogspot.com and (D) zaatiliffah.blogspot.com. The blogs belong to different individuals, all of whom with Malay as their first language. The content of the posts displays a fair variety of topics ranging from personal everyday

experiences, to political issues in the media. The styles of writing are personal and informal. As a whole, the writers of these blogs can be considered as active bloggers, as they regularly post a minimum of 1 to 15 posts each month. The data for the analysis were selected from the original postings of the respective blogs, compiled of posts written from April 2007 to July 2008. Posts within this 18 months period that demonstrate occurrence of code-switching were extracted and compiled for analysis. The final compilation of the data amounts to a corpus of 42 posts, ranging from as little as 60 words up to 1,300 words in a single post. The total word count for the corpus is approximately 45,500 words. Although this corpus is relatively small, it is nonetheless suitable for an analysis of a specific sociolinguistic enquiry, such as the case of this current study (Knight, 2015).

In the analysis, a given word is considered as a ‘code-switch’ as long as the word is not being modified to suit the phonological and/or morphological attributes of the base language (i.e. the main language in which the switching takes place), and the switched word must also have a common equivalent in the base language (McClure, 2001; Backus, 2015). If however, a given word is integrated phonologically, orthographically and/or morphologically into the base language, it is not considered as a ‘code-switch’ word in this study (Backus, 2015). The term ‘code’ here plainly means ‘language’. With regards to the use of the terms ‘switching’ vs. ‘mixing’, this study adhere to the concept of ‘code-switching’ as an umbrella term for the subject matter (instead of ‘code-mixing’, cf. McClure, 2001; Stell & Yakpo, 2015). Thus the term ‘code-switching’ in this study is to be understood in its generic sense, i.e. the act of switching more than one language within a discourse. Posts in the blogs that were written fully in either Malay or English (without any evidence of switching) were discarded from the analysis. Taking into account that this is not a study of grammatical structures, a free translation into English is presented below each exemplified sentence taken from the posts. The original posts from the blogs are labelled as OP (original post) while the translated versions are labelled as FT (free translation).

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Language use and preference

The analysis begins with a frequency count to determine the language use of each group of the blogs. Three postings were randomly selected and grouped as a representative of each blog. A word and a sentence count were employed. The results are shown below in Table 01.

**Table 01.** Word frequency patterns form 3 postings in groups of each blog

Blogs	Malay words	English words	Total words
A	710	99	809
B	2674	139	2813
C	1200	846	2046
D	648	571	1219

Table 1 shows the word classification for each group of the respective blogs. Blogs A and B have high percentage of Malay usage, with 710 (87.8%) and 2,674 (95.1%) Malay words, in comparison to 99

(12.2%) and 139 (4.9%) of English words respectively. Blog C has 1200 (58.7%) Malay words and 846 (41.3%) English words, while blog D has 648 (53.2%) Malay words and 571 (46.8%) English words.

**Table 02.** Sentence frequency patterns from 3 postings in groups of each blog.

<b>Blogs</b>	<b>Malay-only</b>	<b>English-only</b>	<b>Code-switched</b>	<b>Total sentences</b>
A	61	8	24	93
B	178	11	21	210
C	47	27	76	150
D	12	26	47	85

Table 2 shows the sentence type frequency in each group of the blogs. Blog A has 61 (65.6%) monolingual Malay sentences, 8 (8.6%) monolingual English sentences, and 24 (25.8%) code-switched sentences. Blog B has 178 (84.4%) monolingual Malay sentences, 11 (5.2%) monolingual English sentences and 21 (10%) code-switched sentences. Blog C has 47 (31.3%) monolingual Malay sentences, 27 (18.0%) monolingual English sentences, and 76 (50.7%) code-switched sentences. Blog D has 12 (14.1%) Malay-only sentences, 26 (30.6%) English-only sentences and 47 (55.3%) code-switched sentences.

Taking into account both word and sentence frequencies, an overall view of the language preference and usage within the blogs can be roughly projected. Blogs A, B and C can be said to utilise Malay as the base language, and English is therefore considered as the embedding language in these blogs. Blog D however shows relatively more preference towards English as the base language and Malay as the embedding language instead. With this information in hand, the next stage is the analysis of the types of switches and how they function within the blogs.

Scholars have classified several different types and functions of code-switching (Gumperz, 1982; Grosjean, 1982), and even though such method has been criticized, it is nevertheless helpful to have a classification of one in order to illustrate and understand the workings of the phenomenon within a given discourse. Listed below are the switches evident from this study.

## 6.2. Quotations

One of the reasons for code-switching is to directly quote someone or to re-enact past events. Some examples from the data include:

### Example 1

OP: Masih ingat lagi aku, sewaktu tingkatan, kerap pengetuaaku memberi pesan “repetition is mother of success”.

FT: I still remember, back in secondary school, my headmaster often gave us the advice that “repetition is mother of success”.

### Example 2

OP: “Please, can you give me some money, for food” si lelaki, barangkali si bapa, merayu.

FT: “Please, can you give me some money, for food” pleaded the man who is probably the father.

The examples above illustrates how the writers maintain the original English phrases in recalling events from the past. The use of the original quotations here not only allow the writers to directly exemplify the utterances (of someone), but perhaps more importantly allow the writers to draw their readers into the atmosphere of a particular situation. Translating the original English quotes into Malay would have not brought about the same impact in terms of capturing the actual emotional state experienced by the writers.

### 6.3. Interjections

Words and phrasal interjections are commonly use to show spontaneous feeling or emotion in relation to a particular event. Some examples from the data include:

#### Example 3

OP: *Oops...* sebelum tu dah ada sesi potluck...

FT: Oops...there was a potluck session before that...

#### Example 4

OP: *My God! Even* orang tak belajar biology pun tahu jawapan dia.

FT: My God! Even those who didn't study biology would know the answer.

The writers choose to use English interjections (i.e. 'oops' and 'my God') instead of Malay equivalents (such as 'alamak' or 'ya tuhan/Allah'). This is probably due to the universality and dynamism of English interjections in comparison to the Malay ones. Nevertheless, the act of using interjection switches here expresses the writers' state of emotion in the particular narrated event. Notice how they are used very similarly to the usual manner of using interjection in the oral form. This illustrates how blog-writers actually make an effort to ensure that their writings are as natural as possible, i.e. mimicking the features of spoken language.

### 6.4. Reiterations

The act of reiteration in code-switching context is to restate or repeat selected words and phrases, but in a different language. Some examples from the data include:

#### Example 5

OP: Tiada apa yang perlu dirisaukan, cuma mungkin batasan masa (*time constraint*) yang agak mencemaskan.

FT: There is nothing to worry about, perhaps maybe of the time constraint (*time constraint*) which is slightly worrying.

#### Example 6

OP: Mereka juga adalah lambang kepada kesucian dan kemuliaan - *icons of chastity and purity?*

FT: They are also the symbols of purity and chastity - icons of chastity and purity?

The examples above shows how words and phrase in Malay are reiterated, i.e. being repeated in their English equivalents. In reality, there is no (actual) reason for the writer to repeat the phrase, for instance 'batasan masa' to 'time constraint', as both phrases are exactly the same in terms of meaning. This

act of reiteration therefore must be due to the intention of emphasising the message. Then again, if the phrase ‘batasan masa’ is repeated in Malay with something different but similar in meaning, it will simply be a redundant act instead. Therefore, by reiterating the phrase in its English equivalent ‘time constraint’, the writer manages to (fairly) evade the act of being redundant, and at the same time create a sense of emphasis. The evidence from above echoes Gumperz (1982) claim that reiteration functions to clarify or create more emphasis on an intended message.

### 6.5. Triggers

A single word or expression from another language can actually ‘trigger’ a switch to the other language within the same sentence. Some examples from the data include:

#### Example 8

OP: Sebab aku ada taget... nak mencapai *financial freedom* (let the money work for me).

FT: Because I have my target... to achieve financial freedom (let the money work for me).

#### Example 9

OP: Ramai yang bertanya, “*how do u like Manchester?*” *Well, to be honest, i love Manchester - very much!!*

FT: Many have asked, “How do you like Manchester?” Well, to be honest, I love Manchester - very much!

Triggering in code-switching context is the act of continuing the subsequent message with the last language used in a given sentence (Grosjean, 1982). The examples above illustrates how the initial English phrases of ‘financial freedom’ and ‘how do you like Manchester’ can trigger a continuation of the same language usage i.e. ‘let the money work for me’ and ‘Well, to be honest, i love Manchester - very much!!’ respectively. The act of switching this way also portrays the natural flow of language usage.

### 6.6. Linguistic gaps

This type of switching is describe as filling linguistic needs or gaps for a lexical item, phrase or expression in the base language (Grosjean, 1982). Some examples from the data includes:

#### Example 10

OP: Tak *hygienic* langsung.

FT: It’s not hygienic at all.

#### Example 11

OP: Sifat *dismissive* saya semakin ketara.

FT: My dismissive characteristic is becoming more obvious.

There are also examples of phrasal and idiomatic expressions in this type of switching:

#### Example 12

OP: Kenapa *double standard* ini ya?

FT: Why is there a double standard?

### Example 13

OP: Kata pepatah Inggeris, *idle hands are the devil's tools*.

FT: As the English saying goes, idle hands are the devil's tools.

The examples above shows how switches occur to fill in certain gaps in the sentence construction. It has been argued that one of the major factors leading to code-switching is when the base language do not have the appropriate or exact equivalents needed to express the desired concepts (Grosjean, 1982), hence the impression - filling in the linguistic gaps. However, this understanding can be rather misleading as it proposes that the base language is inferior in terms of its proficiency or its linguistic system to the embedding language. To some extent, it is true that there may be a lacking of precise or appropriate equivalents, especially of idiomatic phrases such as the ones in examples 12 and 13. However, single lexical switches like 'hygienic' and 'dismissive', do have genuine counterparts in Malay, i.e. '(ke)bersih(an)' and '(me)remeh(kan)' respectively. It has also been argued that switching occurs during interaction due to the inability to access or recall suitable terms to describe a given concept in a particular language (Shay, 2015). This view is not necessarily true for code-switching in the written genre. Different from spoken conversation, blog-writers actually have the opportunity to pre-plan and to consider the type of words, phrases and sentences they want to use in their posts. Therefore, even if they are momentarily unable to access a term, they should (in principle) be able to pause, ponder, and come up with a suitable one to represent the intended concept. Hence, the act of switching here may not necessarily presuppose gaps which need to be filled due to the lack of a suitable term for a word or the inability to access words. It is perhaps better to understand that the writers purposely chose to use the English equivalent perhaps to set a particular tone, to create a certain emphasis, or to create different connotations, all in which to gain the most benefit in conveying their messages through their posts.

## 7. Conclusion

The switching of language within the blogs are said to be dependent on the writers' rational judgment of which language use will benefit them the most. This study has shown how writers are able to utilize several different types of switches in order to achieve this goal. The five types of code-switching identified from the data are quotations, interjections, reiterations, triggers and linguistic gaps. The analysis suggests that these switches allow writers to accomplish different features of writing. Among others, the act of code-switching enables them to express states of emotions and feelings, to precisely portray a (past) situation, to clarify and emphasise on deferent meanings, to fill linguistic gaps within the base language, and to be creative and at the same time maintain a natural style of writing. All of which supports the writers to fulfil their needs and accomplish the goals of their blog-writings.

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