



## **INFLUENCE OF AN ENGLISH LECTURER'S CODE-SWITCHING PRACTICE ON STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE IN THE SUBJECT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Malaysian classrooms are culturally-diverse and used to the practice of switching from one language to another. This practice is known as code-switching. Code-switching takes place not only among students' communication but also among educators in order to facilitate students' learning process. The factors of educators code-switching in class has been an area of study frequently explored by scholars. Nonetheless, not many have looked at it from the students' perspectives in response to what they think about their teachers' code-switching practice. Therefore, the researcher took the opportunity to look into students' reaction towards lecturer's code-switching in class. A survey was distributed to 27 students of B. Sc. (Hons) in Software Engineering to investigate their lecturer's code-switching in relevance to their affective reaction and their learning success. The aim of this research was to find out whether these students react positively or negatively to their lecturer's alternation from English to other languages while teaching.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, it is common to notice switching between two to more languages among bilinguals and multi-linguals. This phenomenon happens in various domains such as the family, employment, religion, friendship as well as the education domain especially in the tertiary level. Tertiary education in Malaysia is a unique domain to study about code-switching because Malaysians are generally non-native speakers of English, yet, the medium of instruction in universities is English. This leads to lecturers' needs to code-switch from English to another language in hopes to assist students' understanding during lessons. The factor of code-switching by lecturers varies. It could be caused by switch of topic, create affective functions, reiterate key words, facilitate learners' second language learning and so on. Despite the regularity of this norm, code-switching in Malaysia's multilingual classroom remains under-explored as not many studies have been conducted in the Malaysian context.

The context of this study takes place in University Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN) Malaysia. In this study, a total of 27 Malaysian B.Sc. (Hons) Software Engineering students participated in a survey distributed in an English class. The main purpose of this research is to look into students' perceptions about a lecturer who code-switches from English to other languages in her English class. A questionnaire was distributed to the students in investigating the lecturer's code-switching and students' affective stage, as well as how they perceive the correlation between this phenomenon and their success in mastering English. Questions in the questionnaire were formulated based on these research objectives:

1. To scrutinize whether code switching practice of an English lecturer affects students' confidence in the lecturer's proficiency.
2. To examine whether students perceive their English lecturer's code switching practice as an effective communicative strategy in assisting their understanding during lessons.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Different linguists have defined "code-switching" in different ways. Some earlier definitions of the term "code-switching" can be found in [Valdes-Fallis \(1977\)](#) who defined the term as "interchangeability of two codes done concurrently by transferring, borrowing and mixing words from both codes". On the other hand, [Gumperz \(1982\)](#) explained the term as "the juxtaposition of the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two grammatical systems or sub-systems."

Some definitions suggested in recent years include [Lee \(2010\)](#) who provided the simplest and most direct description for the term – "The use of two languages in the same discourse," which parallels with [Nunan and Carter \(2001\)](#). [Cook \(2000\)](#) provided another straightforward explanation which denoted code-switching as a process of going from one language to another in the midst of a conversation, where both parties can understand the same languages. In addition, [Lightbown \(2001\)](#) defined the term as "the systematic alternating use of two languages or language varieties in within a single conversation or utterance."

One obvious similarity which can be identified from these definitions, is based on the erstwhile ones or current ones, is code-switching requires speakers to have knowledge in at least two languages. Speakers are not ought to have native-like proficiency, but need to be at least semi-

lingual in a second language in order to interchange codes freely. This denotes that code-switching is a practice which is restricted to bilinguals and multi-linguals only.

Some linguists differentiate code-switching based on the level of mixing one language with another. When switching happens within a sentence (intra-sentential level), it is known as code-mixing. In contrast, when it involves more than one sentence (inter-sentential level), the given term is code-switching instead. Myers-Scotton (1993) explained that code-mixing involves the use of a phrase, an affix, or a word and only occurs within a sentence. Poplack (1980) stated that since code-mixing involves syntactic concerns of more than one language in a sentence, speakers have to be fluent in both languages in order to ensure the mixing of both languages conforms to their rules. In the Malaysian context, code-mixing happens regularly and subconsciously among speakers due to the multilingual environment. Conversely, Liu (2010) defined inter-sentential switching as “at a sentence or clause boundary, where each clause or one sentence is in one language or another.”

## 2.1. Functions of Code-Switching in General

Regardless of level of switching and mixing of speech elements in a discourse, both code-switching and code-mixing share several functions. Two of the earlier researchers who categorised the functions into two main categories – situational and metaphorical switch – were Bloom and Gumperz (1972). According to Blom & Gumpers, situational code-switching involves change of topic, participants, as well as setting of a conversation; on the other hand, metaphorical code-switching entails different conversational purposes such as to reject, to apologize or to complain.

Linguist Holmes (2008) provided a more thoroughly explained list of purposes of code-switching and categorized the functions as follows:

1. **Participants:** When there is the arrival of a new person in a social situation, members of the social group will code-switch either to take positive account of the company of a new member, or to exclude the new member from the group's discussion.
2. **Solidarity:** Speakers sometimes code-switch to signal shared ethnicity or social group with a certain addressee.
3. **Status:** Speakers alternate the formal or informal standards of a language based on the status of their addressees. For example, an employee would use formal standard when conversing with his superior, but changes to a friendlier informal standard with his co-workers.
4. **Topic:** Speakers sometimes code-switch in order to quote a certain saying in a culture which meaning cannot be entirely translated to another language. It is known as switching for referential purpose.
5. **Switching for affective functions:** Code-switching is used to express affective meaning apart from referential function. Holmes (2008) stated that sometimes addressees do not need to understand the words to receive affective effect because it can be achieved by regional pronunciation.
6. **Metaphorical switching:** This function of code-switching draws on associations of both codes. Speakers who have high proficiency in more than one code will switch like metaphor to enrich communication.

7. **Lexical borrowing:** When a language reflects lack of vocabulary which can be replaced by another language, code-switching occurs. This often happens when speakers fail to find an appropriate word to be used in a second language and need to borrow from the first language.

## 2.2. Code Switching in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Code-switching in the education domain has attracted attention among ELT scholars in the past decade. Many have conducted studies on code-switching in English as a second language and foreign language classrooms based on different contexts and countries in order to examine its pedagogical purposes and effectiveness.

According to Cook (2000), as quoted in (Malik, 2010), the practice of alternating languages in teaching can be traced back to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Direct Method was first led into the education. Malik (2010) study in exploring the significance of various functions of code-switching in Pakistani classroom has unveiled 11 functions of code-switching among 406 school teachers across Pakistan. The functions were listed based on the following ranking: clarification (68%), ease of expression (63.3%), giving instructions effectively (62.1%), creating a sense of belonging (57.1%), checking understanding (56.9%), translation (55.2%), socializing (55.2%), emphasis (53.4%), repetitive functions (47.5%), topic shift (48%) and linguistic competence (39.9%). Malik (2010) research showed that none of the purposes proposed in his survey was entirely rejected by his participants. This indicates that code-switching plays a significant role in catering students' learning needs in classroom.

Gwee (2006) conducted a study with the same objective in the Singaporean context by observing, tape-recording and transcribing 110 lessons in Singaporean multilingual fifth grade Science, Mathematics, social studies and English classroom. In her study, some functions of code-switching that were summarised include: emphasis, procedural scaffolding, humourous effect, softening of a command, rapport building, regulation, solidarity, reiteration, and checking on students' engagement. It was concluded that code-switching practice among the teachers in a multilingual classroom serves important education functions. Scholars who suggest that the use of native language in language classroom could make teachers work in the deficit mode was proven to be unrealistic in Gwee (2006) study.

In the Chinese context, Liu (2010) conducted a study in three Chinese universities in order to prove that code-switching in Chinese plays positive roles in the China's EFL university classrooms. The research involved both qualitative and quantitative methods where Liu (2010) distributed a questionnaire to 261 undergraduate students from three universities in China in investigating their attitudes towards their lecturers' code-switching in class. Apart from that, Liu (2010) also observed and recorded lessons of 60 lecturers from the same universities and analyzed the purposes of their code-switching. In her study, it was found in the quantitative part of the study that as high as 66% of the students agreed with their lecturer's code-switch of English to Chinese in their English classroom while only 7% demonstrated disagreement. On the other hand, the qualitative part of the research demonstrated the functions of code-switching to Chinese among the lecturers. Three major functions were discovered: to translate unknown vocabulary items, to explain grammar, and classroom management. Other minor functions include: to emphasize some points, to quote others'

words, to change topics, to draw students' attention and to check comprehension. Results show that all participants demonstrated high interest in the use of code-switching and possessed positive acknowledgement towards the practice.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted by distributing a set of questionnaire to investigate students' feedback on lecturer's code-switching from English to *Bahasa Malaysia* or any other languages that were understood by the students. The questionnaire was constructed based on two sections (A and B). Section A calls for students' attention to their perceptions towards lecturer's code-switching and affective aspects; whereas Section B points at students' success in learning under lecturer's code-switching exercise. Questions in Section B were based on [Badrul and Kamaruzaman \(2009\)](#). The rationale is that the research was done in a context similar to this one, which is tertiary education in a Malaysian public university. Simultaneously, the objectives of this research happen to be similar with two out of four objectives found in Badrul & Kamarulzaman's research. By administering the same questions (in section two), it is hoped that it would be appropriate to do a comparison between results obtained from UNITEN students and Badrul's public university students.

### 4. DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Findings About Lecturer's Code-Switching and Learners' Affective Stage

In order to achieve the research objectives of this study, a questionnaire labelled as Table 1 below was distributed. Each question starts with "When my lecturer switches from English to *Bahasa Malaysia* or other languages in class,..." followed by the second halves of the statements in Table 1. Each question is arranged based on mean calculated, with the highest mean positioned at the top of the table, followed by questions with lower mean value.

Based on the results in Section A of Table 1, the majority of the students agrees that the lecturer tries to enhance students' understanding when she code-switches. This is shown by the highest mean in Section A, which is 2.56. On the other hand, 44% (mean: 2.26) of the students agree that code-switching makes them feel less stressful in English class because the lecturer will explain difficult terms in another language. More than half of the students (52%) think that code-switching is seen as a part of the process of mastering standard English while one third of the students disagree hence the mean is only 2.22. When asked if code-switching makes students more comfortable in learning, 44% (mean: 2.11) of the students feel neutral while 33% answers agree and 22% answers disagree. Apart from that, 41% (mean: 2.04) of the students feel confident that they will be able to score an A for the course when their lecturer code-switches. In contrast, it is found that students do not take code-switching as a strategy of minimizing boredom in class as the percentage of all answer choices are rather average, leading to the mean value of 2.03. No significance is shown when asked whether students feel closer to their lecturer when she code-switches because the mean value is 2.00. Not many agree that code-switching helps them to feel engaged in class, 44%, says neutral and 30% agreed, leading to mean as low as 1.96. In addition, most students think that code-switching does not help to gauge their attention in class, the majority thinks that it is not a success while the same number of students agree or feel neutral about the

statement, whereby the mean is 1.98. Finally, more than half of the students (59%) disagree that code-switching by is a form of unproficiency in English, hence the mean is 1.56.

#### 4.2. Discussions About Lecturer's Code-Switching and Learners' Affective Stage

Based on the results, a few inferences can be drawn. First, students are aware of their lecturer's intention for alternating English to *Bahasa Malaysia* while teaching. This is evident in question 1 where the mean reaches 2.56, which is the highest in the list. Nonetheless, despite being aware of their lecturer's intention, these students do not see code-switching as an effective method in enhancing their emotional attachment to the class. This second inference is students do not perceive code-switching as a practice which can help to retain their interest in learning. This inference is drawn based on mean values in the remaining questions (number 4 to 9). Students are not amused with the communication strategies demonstrated by their lecturer, hence fail to feel engaged or achieve solidarity with their lecturer. Finally, the third inference is drawn from question 10 in this research. The mean value of this question is as low as 1.56 which indicates that even though the lecturer would alternate between languages, it does not entail his/her incompetency in English. Conversely, it is within their knowledge that the lecturer is trying to enhance students' understanding by changing codes. It is important for students to acknowledge this fact because students' perceptions on an English lecturer's competency may affect their confidence in the lecturer's teaching. When students have no faith in a lecturer's competence, they may feel demotivated to learn and affect their performance in class.

#### 4.3 Findings On Lecturer's Code-Switching and Learners' Success

Section B in Table 1, on the other hand, indicates the results which investigate how students perceive their English lecturer's code-switching assist their success in learning the language. Similar to Section A, all questions start with "When my lecturer switches from English to *Bahasa Malaysia* or other languages in class,..." followed by the second halves of the statements in Section B.

The majority (44%) feels that code-switching helps them to understand complex concepts or idea while 37% answers neutral and 19% disagrees. This is shown by the highest mean in questions in Section B, which is 2.56. More than half of the students agree that code-switching is able to aid them in learning new words while 33% (mean: 2.37) feels neutral and only 15% disagrees. Less than half of the students (37%) think that code-switching eases the process of understanding instructions from lecturers; 44% answers neutral while 19% disagrees (mean: 2.16). Finally, only 33% agreed that when the lecturer code-switch, students are able to carry out tasks successfully; majority answers neutral (41%) and 26% says disagree, which give it a mean value of 2.07. An equal number of students (37% each) agree and disagree that code-switching enables them to understand grammar rules more easily (mean: 2.00).

#### 4.4. Discussions about lecturer's code-switching and learners' success

Based on the results in Section B in Table 1, it is shown that in terms of perceiving code-switching as a kind of support to learners' success, only question 1 reaches a mean value as high as 2.56. The first inference that can be drawn is that students perceive code-switching as an easy way

out to obtain the meaning of words. This could be due to students' reliance on spoon-feeding culture developed in primary and secondary education which they would rely on teachers to explain meaning of words. It also entails that the convenience of dictionaries is no longer a preferred choice to learners who are more fascinated with technologies and translating applications in their gadgets. The second inference that can be made from Section B is students do not see the importance of code-switching in aiding their understanding in lesson and instructions. This could be because they are able to understand their lecturer's instructions in English, hence do not need translation, repetition or emphasis in another language.

**Table-1.** Lecturer's code-switching and learners' affective stage

<b>No.</b>	<b>Section A</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1.	I see my lecturer as trying to make me understand what she is teaching to me.	2.56
2.	I feel less stressful in my English class because my lecturer will explain meaning of difficult words in another language.	2.26
3.	I feel that it is okay to mix my broken English with other language(s) when I speak and slowly improve by using standard English.	2.22
4.	I feel more comfortable to learn.	2.11
5.	I feel more confident in scoring an A for this subject.	2.04
6.	it makes the class less boring so I enjoy my lesson more.	2.03
7.	I feel closer to my lecturer.	2.00
8.	I feel more engaged to the whole class and understand what is going on in class.	1.96
9.	I can concentrate more easily because he/she catches my attention in class.	1.89
10.	I see my lecturer as unproficient in English.	1.56
<b>No.</b>	<b>Section B</b>	<b>Mean</b>
11.	I am able to understand a difficult concept or idea.	2.56
12.	I am able to learn and understand new words.	2.37
13.	I am able to understand my lecturer's instructions more easily.	2.19
14.	I am able to carry out tasks successfully.	2.07
15.	I am able to understand grammar rules more easily.	2.00

## 5. CONCLUSION

In short, it can be concluded that students in this research do not hold strong beliefs in code-switching as a practice that can ease their learning processes. The practice does not appeal significantly to students' affection. At the same time, students do not perceive it as an effective way from their lecturer to help achieve their success in learning English. The researcher has drawn two conclusions based on the results of this research. The first possibility is the English proficiency level of this class is at least intermediate, which explains why these students do not need translation or alternating from English to other languages to assist their understanding of lesson and instructions. The second possibility is these students do not favour alternation of languages in an English classroom, because they are expecting more English exposure from the lecturer to familiarise themselves with the target language.

The unexpectedly dissimilar findings from this research compared to related researches done by other scholars as mentioned in the literature review, have unleashed the researcher's perception towards code-switching into a whole new dimension. The researcher has realised that the need for code-switching in classroom varies from class to class. The functions of code-switching in one class are not necessarily needed and applicable to another. Students' learning needs and styles vary

from one to another. It is an educator's responsibility to uncover the needs of different groups of students and cater their necessity accordingly in order to maximise their learning outcomes.

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