

WRITTEN CODE SWITCHING: THE CASE OF INDONESIAN EMAIL USERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at describing code switching found in Indonesian email users among Indonesian speakers living in Australia with a specific setting in Ramadan and Idul Fitri. It focuses on the analysis of the types, the functions and the reasons why Indonesian students in Australia switch their language. The research problems are what types of code switching Indonesian writers use, the functions of code switching used by Indonesian writers and why Indonesian writers use these particular code switching. This study is expected to make some useful contributions the study of written code switching which had little research to date. Another benefit is that, this study gives an insight into how language competence develops under second language environmental influence. Moreover, this might lead to a better understanding of the use of code switching, especially in the emerging genre of Internet communication.

Keywords: *Code switching, email, Indonesian users*

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of the internet has had an impact on linguistic practices including code switching. Code switching is a natural phenomenon that consists of alternating two or more languages in the bilinguals' discourse, and has traditionally been examined in its oral production. However, recently there has been renewed interest in written mixed-language texts (Anacta, 1996; Tsiplakou, 2004; Urback, 2007). This seems to have been driven largely by new media such as email that provides new, less regulated spaces where language mixing can occur.

In a multilingual country like Indonesia, the ability to shift from one language to another is accepted as quite normal. Most Indonesians are bilingual; indeed many people have a good command of three of four languages. The phenomenon of code switching happens not only between a local language and Bahasa Indonesia, but also among local languages, Bahasa Indonesia and English. According to Hoffman (1991), code switching is potentially the most creative aspect of bilingual speech. He adds that features of bilingual speech such as interference, code mixing, and code switching are quite normal because bilinguals often find it easier to discuss a particular topic in one language than another. As people master languages, their ability to code switch from one language into another language increases. Similarly, Spolsky (1998) says in general that bilinguals like to shift their language for convenience. This may be the basic reason why people switch code in their speech.

As a controllable strategy, code switching happens spontaneously; speakers may not do so habitually, and may not be conscious of every switch they make (Coulmas, 2005). Saville-Troike (1986) determines two basic types of code switching based on the scope of switching in which language takes place, namely, intersentential switching, which occurs between sentences, and intrasentential switching, which occurs within a single sentence. In terms of its functions, McConvell (1988) takes into account the specific functions of switches within the discourse such as to express authority, emphasis, negotiation, opening, closing, etc, and its role within community. In other words, code switching may serve as means to find out which language is most appropriate and acceptable for a given situation.

This study aims at describing code switching found in Indonesian and English in email discourse among Indonesian speakers living in Australia with a specific setting in Ramadhan and Idul Fitri 2009. It focuses on the analysis of the types, the functions and the reasons why Indonesian students in Australia switch their language. This study is expected to make some useful contributions to the theory of Sociolinguistics, particularly the theory of code switching. Another benefit is that students might acquire better understanding of the use of code switching, especially in the emerging genre of internet communication.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Indonesia is one of the most linguistically complex nations in the world. As the fourth most populous nation, Indonesia has diverse ethnic groups that speak more than 500 languages. Therefore, it is not surprising that most Indonesians are bilingual or even multilingual. Besides Indonesian and a local language, some people also speak a foreign language(s), such as English, Arabic, Mandarin, French, or Japanese. Among these foreign languages, English is the most important language for educational and economic reasons. Therefore, English is compulsory for Indonesian students from junior high schools to university to learn it (Lengkanawati, 2004).

The phenomenon of code switching between Bahasa Indonesia and English is very common among young Indonesian. It occurs not only in daily life situations, but also in some radio and television programs. Recently, code-switching practices have become popular in internet communication. These also happen among Indonesians, especially for those people who live in a foreign setting as like in Australia.

Indonesia has had good relationships with Australia, especially in education for over 40 years. As a result, many Indonesian students choose to study in Australia. Currently about 15,000 Indonesians study in Australian schools, universities, and technical colleges (Antara, 2007). To create good relationship among Indonesian students in Australia, a number of organisations have been formed by the Indonesian Student Association of Australia. These organisations offer many activities such as religious

events, networking functions, seminars, lectures, workshops, arts performances, sports competitions and social events. The member of these groups usually use Bahasa Indonesia and English as means of communication.

In formal situations, Indonesian students in Australia use standard Bahasa Indonesia or standard English in spoken and written communication. However, these students tend to code switch between Bahasa Indonesia and English in informal interactions, including in online communication. The phenomenon of code switching happens naturally since they are fluent in both languages. In email communication, they usually interact each other using both Bahasa Indonesia and English to express their feelings, opinions, views, beliefs and ideas.

Since this study aims at describing code switching found in Indonesian and English in email discourse with specific setting in Ramadhan and Idul Fitri 2008, it is necessary to give an overview about Ramadhan and Idul Fitri, specifically for Indonesians. Ramadhan and Idul Fitri are very meaningful for most of Indonesians, especially for Muslims. Ramadhan is a Muslim religious ceremony that takes place during the ninth month of the [Islamic calendar](#). Muslims usually ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance, and try to purify themselves through self-control and good deeds. Through fasting, they learn piety, sincerity in faith, patience, sacrifice and humility. After the end of Ramadhan, Muslims celebrate Idul Fitri.

In Indonesia, which has the world's largest population of Muslims, Idul Fitri event is recognised as a national holiday. This deeper meaning centers on family, food, gifts and time-honored traditions. During the past week in 2008, around 26 million Indonesians have flooded airports, seaports, bus and railway stations in an annual exodus to return to their birthplaces to celebrate Idul Fitri here, this tradition is called 'Mudik Lebaran'. Since it is a day of forgiveness, moral victory, peace, fellowship, brotherhood and unity, Muslims in Indonesia usually ask forgiveness from their relatives and friends.

There is also a tradition to exchange Idul Fitri cards to greet people during the weeks preceding Idul Fitri. Previously, people posted their cards usually packaged with an envelope using a conventional way. With the advanced of technology and the internet, people in remote area can be easily sent their Idul Fitri cards by emails to many people extensively. Indonesians who live in Australia also celebrate Ramadhan and Idul Fitri. Using internet communication, they greet their friends and relatives to commemorate the feasts.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This study is conducted based on previous researches by Anacta, 1996; Tsiplakou, 2004; Urbach, 2007 that analysed the types, the functions of code switching and the reason for switching particular languages to English.

Anacta (1996) illustrates how code-switching is used as a strategy in the written discourse of Filipino bilinguals to cover specific functions. She identifies a number of function-specific relations in the rhetorical organization of the written discourse, namely motivation (directives, offers), background (change of topic), problem/solution, elaboration (discussion of the topic), purpose, condition, circumstance and concession.

In a study of the practice of code switching between Greek and English in email communication among monolingual Greek speakers, Tsiplakou (2004) discovered that Greek speakers expressed evaluative comments as well as jokes and teasing mostly in English, while openings and closings were either in English or in Greek. Tsiplakou found that English was used as the language of 'negotiation' when asking favors, expressing disagreement etc., while Greek was reserved for the transmission of factual information. Moreover, Urback (2007) investigated cases of Swedish-English code switching in a bilingual discussion forum on the Internet to find out if, how and why the bilingual users in this forum code-switch when communicating. She found that the most common switch is the insertion of one word, or several words, in another language into a monolingual sentence. The result indicated that the users use code switching to show hospitality and to signal a belonging to the group.

THE AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the practice of code switching between Indonesian and English in email communication among Indonesian speakers living in Australia. The questions are determines as follows:

1. What types of code switching do Indonesian speakers use?
2. What are the functions of code switching used by Indonesian speakers?
3. Why do Indonesian speakers use these particular code switching?

METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive qualitative study that relies much on a content-based analysis.

The data of the study is 15 informal emails about Ramadhan and Idul Fitri 2009 taken from Indonesian student association of Australia Mailing list. To support the finding, the writer also interviews five respondents who write the emails. The data are analysed through Structural Approach to find grammatical aspects of linguistics, focus on syntactic and morphosyntactic constraints , and Sociolinguistics Approach with focus on discourse functions and attempt to explain why bilingual writers write the way they do.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The types of code switching

The results from this study show that there are two general types of code switching found in email communication among Indonesian students living in Australia, they are inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential switching (Saville-Troike 1986). Inter-sentential switching occurs between sentences. This type can be found in these following examples;

‘Selamat hari raya idul fitri **friends, and I wish you all the best.**
Semoga kegembiraan dan kemenangan ada bersama teman-teman semua’
‘Selamat Hari Raya Idul Fitri 1430 H ya.....
May God bless you all’....

Intra-sentential switching occurs within a single sentence. Most emails in this study contain code-switching belonging to this category as the following examples:

Happy Idul Fitri yah...
Again, Happy Lebaran, Minal Aidin Walfaizin.
Happy Eid Mubarak

Based on syntactic and morphosyntactic constraints, code-switching in these examples has followed the notion of the equivalence constraint proposed by Sankoff & Poplack (1981), that code-switching takes place in positions where the order of any two sentence elements, one before and one after the switch, is not excluded in either language.

In addition, there are other various examples of intra-sentential switching forms found in these emails, including the use of unusual terms such as *bekommen* for becoming, *pliss* for please, *congrats* for congratulation. Another is in the form of abbreviations such as ‘n’ represents ‘and’, ‘d’ represents ‘the’, and ‘4’ represents ‘for’, as these following examples:

Cheers, Nela **n** family
let's **4**give each other
let **d** peace lead our soul

Intra-sentential switching found in these emails is also in the form of code mixing, such as *temans* and *rekans*, which are uncommon in Bahasa Indonesia. To represent plural form, repetition form is normally used, for instances, *ibu-ibu* for ladies, and *bapak-bapak* for gentlemen. In this case, the writers use English plural form ‘s’ instead of saying teman-teman or rekan-rekan. This code mixing also occurs when the writers directly use English in Indonesia version, for instances,

I really really really need your forgiveness
Berhubung Jabat Tangan Tidak Sempat
Lewat Milist-pun **No What-What**, he..he..he..

The use of English or Bahasa Indonesia from these examples is ungrammatical and not considered appropriate in both standard English and Bahasa Indonesia. Code-mixing raises several issues involving grammar because in code mixing, morphemes, words or phrases can be mixed from one language into another. Code mixing has been often regarded negatively as a sign of laziness or inadequate command of language since these attitudes devalue many aspects of multilingual behaviour (McKay and Hornberger, 1996). Regardless of this notion, code-switching and code-mixing imply more sophisticated linguistic competence than monolingual language use as they presuppose the ability to integrate grammatical units from two different language systems into a complex linguistic structure.

The functions of code switching

As one of communicative strategy, code switching can express different functions within the discourse (Mc Convell, 1988). Some different discourse functions are found in this study, the writers of these emails use code switching to:

1. greet people in Ramadhan and Idul Fitri, as these following examples;

Selamat menunaikan ibadah puasa

Wishing you a Ramadan

filled with prayers, thankfulness, blessing and joy

On this festive occasion of Eid ul Fitri...

I wish the warmth of our friendship always remain the same

Eid Mubarak Minal Aidin Wal Faidzin Mohon Maaf Lahir dan Bathin.

Ramadan and Idul Fitri are very meaningful for most Indonesians, especially for Muslims. Greeting people in these special occasions is a part of Indonesian tradition. The purpose is to convey between people a range of sentiments related to the celebration of Ramadan and Idul Fitri.

2. ask for forgiveness, here are the examples;

**if 1 star falls every time we make mistakes i bet the sky is now dark
already so lets lighten it up again by forgiving. I do apologize I've made.**

Wassalamu'alaikum

**On this blessed day, let's give each other, let love fill our heart and let
peace lead our soul..Maafin gw y...**

Since Ramadan and Idul Fitri are days of forgiveness, the writers use code switching with this media for asking forgiveness. They acknowledge that on those special days

when they forgive each other, their sins with each other are cleansed and they are without sin just as they were at birth.

3. to open and end salutation

It is very common for Indonesians to switch code to English when opening and closing salutation in informal writing. This also occurs in email communication. These are some examples of code switching use for opening and closing salutations found in these emails,

Opening salutations: **Dear friends, Dear all, Dear ...**

Closing salutations: **Regards, Cheers, Best regards, Warm regards**

There are also other discourse functions of code switching using quotation and repetition in these emails to reinforce, to mark emphasis what the writers have mentioned, even to clarify the message that has already been transmitted in one code but which may not have been understood. These different functions represent code switching may provide linguistic choices for a given situation (Mc Convell, 1988).

The reasons for switching

From the interviews to five respondents, there are four main reasons for Indonesian students in Australia to switch their language. The first reason is due to real lexical need and appropriateness. Three respondents mention this reason, as they cannot find a good equivalence of meaning in Bahasa Indonesia. The respondents consider that some expressions in one language cannot be satisfactorily translated into another language, and are more appropriate to one language than another. For instances, Bahasa Indonesia does not have specific terms to express opening and closing in informal context, Indonesians just use borrowing words such *Hai* from Hi, or *Helo* from Hello, for that reason the Indonesian students usually use opening and closing in English. In addition, the respondents find English is communicatively efficient, more complete and simpler. As such, it is an effective medium to be used in expressing certain expressions which tend to be longer when it is expressed in Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, the respondents prefer to switch particular sentences or phrases in English.

Another reason, the respondents switch code without attempting at any particular interactional goals or intention. They simply do it because of habitual action. As Coulmas (2005) stated that people switch from one language to another is potentially

influenced by social environment, it is not surprising that the respondents switch their language frequently. This phenomenon occurs since the respondents are studying in Australia and use English in their daily life. Other significant reason is that the Indonesian students in performing a code switch in English because of a directness in expressing a feeling. The respondents consider it is more comfortable to use English instead of Bahasa Indonesia in some cases, especially when they want to express their feeling. These motivation implies that there are linguistic and social explanations of why this switching might occurs (Wardhaugh, 2002).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that code switching is a crucial phenomenon for a multilingual society. It plays a significant role in governing the social interaction of the community because it has a very wide spectrum of socio-pragmatic implication. Since code switching is becoming increasingly common in more parts of the world, it is essential to understand how code switching, as a communicative strategy, functions in various settings, that is, across various linguistic and cultural systems. These examples from this study have provided proof that code switching not only exists, but is also very common in bilingual contexts.

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