

Malay-English Codeswitching Patterns in Brunei Face-to-Face and Facebook Conversations: A comparative study

Najiah Nayan

James McLellan

Universiti Brunei Darussalam

james.mcLellan@ubd.edu.bn

This study breaks new ground by comparing patterns of codeswitching in two discourse types: face-to-face conversations between educated Bruneians, and discussions in a public Facebook forum “Cerita-cerita panas Brunei”.

Codeswitching, or language alternation, has been the focus of research interest for over twenty-five years. In Brunei Darussalam, as in neighbouring Southeast Asian nations, the alternation is frequently between varieties of Malay and English, two powerful languages in this highly multilingual region.

Codeswitching is normally regarded as an indicator of informal language use, most frequently occurring in face-to face conversations. But the advent and rapid growth of social media affords opportunities for challenging and redefining the traditional distinction between spoken and written modalities.

Three informal conversations were recorded and transcribed, with prompts in Malay-only, English-only and codemixed English and Malay. The Facebook group discussion, on the other hand, could not be controlled, so a purposive sampling approach was in order to collect a comparable quantity of data to the face-to-face conversations.

The quantitative findings include the preferred main or matrix language in the two modalities, the most frequently codeswitched constituents, and interactive aspects, e.g. whether a turn in main-language English generates a reply with the same or a different code choice.

Qualitative analysis includes a comparison of the use of discourse markers between the two data sets, and the words and phrases which cannot easily be classified as belonging to one or other language: so-called bicodal words like ‘terstuck’ and ‘mengomplen’ (me- : Malay prefix + complain: English verb).

A brief conclusion relates the findings from this study to the conference subtheme “influences of regional and local languages on Southeast Asian Englishes”.