Conversational code-switching among Mandarin-English bilinguals in Brunei

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Abstract

This study investigates Mandarin-English code-switching by Chinese bilinguals in Brunei. Based on the interviews with 20 speakers (10 females and 10 males), 286 tokens of Mandarin-English code-switching were retrieved and classified to examine the patterns of code-switching in Brunei Mandarin. The findings suggest that women engage in code-switching more than men, though the difference is not significant. Nouns (common nouns and proper nouns) and noun phrases account for more than 50% of the total instances of code-switching. In addition, discourse markers are the second frequent mixed items among Chinese bilinguals in Brunei.

Key words: Code-switching, Mandarin-English, nouns, discourse markers

1. Introduction

Code-switching is “the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate effortlessly between their two languages” (Bullock & Toribio, 2009, p. 1). Some people make a distinction between code-switching and code-mixing, so the latter “involves the transfer of linguistic elements from one language into another” (Crystal, 2003, p. 79), while code-switching may involve complete sentences, for example when someone “may start speaking one language and then change to another one in the middle of their speech” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 81). However, it is difficult to maintain this distinction consistently, so here the broader term, code-switching, will be used.

In Southeast Asia, especially among the ASEAN countries, there is a trend for the governments to pursue language education policies which promote the national language and English at the same time (Kirkpatrick 2013, p. 12). Therefore, code-switching is common throughout southeast Asia, and it has been widely documented in Brunei, especially for Malay-
English (McLellan, 2010; Deterding & Salbrina, 2013, p. 107). However, Chinese-English code-switching in Brunei has received less attention. This paper will describe the use of English in spoken Mandarin by tertiary students in Brunei.

1.1 Language uses in Brunei

Brunei is a small country located on the north coast of the island of Borneo (Deterding & Salbrina 2013, p. 1). Though it is a small country, it has a diverse population and a number of speech communities (Jones 2013, p. 80). Malay is the biggest ethnic group in Brunei, and Brunei Malay is the most common language used in social and home contexts. Standard Malay is the official language in Brunei, but it is only used in formal situations such as news broadcasting and teaching. Although Brunei Malay and Standard Malay are closely related, there are substantial differences, and Brunei Malay might also be considered a separate language (Clynes 2001).

As the second largest ethnic group in Brunei, the Chinese constitute about 11% of the country's population (Deterding & Salbrina 2013, p. 4). As most of the Chinese originate from the southern part of China, they speak different dialects such as Hokkien, Hakka and Cantonese. Though most Chinese Bruneians are able to speak their home dialects, Mandarin is actually used as the main medium of communication among different ethnic Chinese groups as their dialects are mutually unintelligible. Consequently, Mandarin has now become the lingua franca among the Chinese community in Brunei and it appears that there is a significant increase in the number of Mandarin speakers among younger people (Dunseath 1996, p. 295).

Bilingualism and multilingualism have been very common in Brunei since the implement of a bilingual system of education called Dwibahasa ('dual languages') in 1985 (Deterding & Salbrina 2013, p. 15). Before the adoption of the bilingual system, monolingual teaching was practiced in various schools. Government schools mainly used Malay as the medium of teaching, while private schools either used English or Mandarin. In the new system, as the medium of instruction, English is reinforced in a wide range of subjects from the fourth year onwards in primary schools. Nowadays, most Malay Bruneians are able to switch freely between Brunei Malay and English, while most Chinese Bruneians are able to switch freely between Mandarin, English and Malay, especially the young and educated.

1.2 Brunei Mandarin

Nowadays, Brunei Mandarin has gradually developed a distinctive identity. Though inevitably not every Chinese Bruneian speaks in the same way, their Mandarin shares some phonetic and phonological features. For example, /ɔŋ/ is pronounced as [ɔŋ] when preceded by a labial consonant (e.g. fēng 風, ‘wind’ /fəŋ/→[fɔŋ]), there is a relative absence of a neutral tone, and /y/ is pronounced as /i/ and sometimes vice versa. Code-switching between Mandarin and English seems to be developing as another distinctive practice in Brunei. Although this code-switching seems very common in Chinese communities, it is not clear if its characteristics and functions differ from those in other places throughout the world.
2. Previous research on Mandarin-English code-switching

The Chinese is the largest diaspora in the world (Lee & Li 2013). Since the early 19th century, large-scale immigration from the southern part of China has resulted in many bilingual generations across the globe. English, especially in the form of code-switching, is making inroads into the discourses of various social groups (Li 2011). Li, Milroy and Pong (1992) investigates a corpus of 23 hours of spontaneous conversation involving 58 Chinese-English bilingual speakers in 10 families in the northeast of England, and it is found that social networks play an important role in analyzing the behaviors of code-switching in three generations. It also illustrates the uses of different language choices through the perspectives of sociolinguistics. In New Zealand, Ng and He (2004) conducts a corpus study on Mandarin-English code-switching in a small number of tri-generational families, and it is found between-turn code-switching occurs more than within-turn code-switching, and the ratio of between- to within-turns code-switching is higher for grandchildren than for either their parents or grandparents. In addition, Chen (2006) focuses on the code-switching in magazine advertisements in Taiwan. In this study, she lists the ten most frequently-used English expressions mixed with Mandarin in 226 sentences, and reveals that noun phrases account for nearly half of the total English expressions. In a multilingual society like Malaysia, Lau et al (2011) examine the mixing of English in Chinese entertainment newspapers and collect over 1000 sentences of code-switching. The most frequent English words are common nouns, followed by proper nouns, adjectives, verbs, and abbreviations (p. 12). In addition, reduplication of English adjectives such as "sweet sweet" and "cute cute", which are grammatically incorrect in English but acceptable in Chinese grammar, are inserted into Chinese sentences.

3. Methods

3.1 Speakers

Twenty Chinese Bruneians were recruited for this study, ten females and ten males. At the time of the study, they had a mean age of 21 years, ranging from 19 to 23 years, and all were tertiary students. Of the 20 students, 12 were from Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD), seven were from Institut Teknologi Brunei (ITB), and one was from Kolej IGS Brunei Darussalam (IGS), a private tertiary institution in Brunei. Subjects will be referred to using letter-number identifiers and R refers to the researcher of this paper. For example, F1 refers to Female number one. Though one male subject (M5) did not want to reveal his age, he mentioned that he was doing his degree in ITB at the time of recording, so we his age was between 19 and 23. Native or near native Chinese was an essential requirement for inclusion in this study, as we are looking at the behaviors of code-switching in proficiently spoken Brunei Mandarin.
3.2 Data

A face-to-face interview was conducted between each subject and the researcher, a native from China who has lived in Brunei for four years but speaks little Malay. The subjects were asked to talk freely about their recent travelling experiences or their daily activities. Each interview lasted about six minutes (average 6.3 minutes). The interviews were recorded in a quiet office at UBD or a quiet room at ITB. The speech was directly recorded onto a Sony laptop computer at a sampling frequency of 44,100 Hz, with a high-quality University Sound US692 dynamic microphone positioned a few inches from the mouths of the speakers.

The interviews can be considered casual speech as they were conducted in a relatively relaxed atmosphere. The participants spoke fast and tended to use a fairly informal style of speech, such as laughing, use of gesture and slang.

The interviews were transcribed into text format for analysis. Segments of Sentences containing English words were extracted and they yielded a total of 286 tokens of code-switching from the 20 speakers. Repetitions of English words in one stretch of speech (most of the time not a complete sentence) are considered one token of English word. All the tokens of code-switching were sorted to find out the ten most frequent English expressions and they were divided into different categories for further analysis.

3.3 Results and analysis

Of the 20 speakers, only one (F9) avoided code-switching completely. The instances of code-switching found for each speaker are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Instances</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Instances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M4</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F7</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>M7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>M8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>M9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Instances of code-switching for each speaker
It was found that the female speakers engage in code switching more than the males, with 187 tokens being from female speakers and just 99 from the male speakers. However, 102 of the female tokens were by a single speaker, F7, and when these are removed, there is no difference between the incidence of code-switching between the two genders (t=1.39, df=17, 2-tailed, ns).

3.3.1 Syntax

Table 2 shows the categorizations of these 286 instances, displaying the most frequent words first.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common noun</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper noun</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conjunction</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclamation</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrase</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete sentence</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preposition phrase</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb phrase</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb phrase</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Categorization of the English expressions

Code-switching can be structurally divided into two forms: inter-sentential code-switching and intra-sentential code-switching (Myers-Scotton 1997), which are similar to the classification of between-turn code-switching and within-turn code-switching (Ng & He 2004) or maybe code-switching and code-mixing. Inter-sentential code-switching involves switching between language at sentence or clause boundaries, while intra-sentential code-switching refers to switches of a word or a phrase within one sentence or clause. In the present study, insertions such as sentences and incomplete sentences (see Table 2) are considered as inter-sentential code-switching. Of the total of 286 instances of code-switching, 281 involve single words or phrases, and just five involve whole sentences. We can see that long sentences of code-switching rarely occur in this study, and the longest sentence has just six words (see example 1 below). The other four sentences have only one or two words (see 2-3). Example 1 and 2 are complete turns, while example 3 is not.

(1) F4: You say these few days, right?

(2) F1: Yes, definitely.
In this study, incomplete sentences are not necessarily clauses, but they are structurally longer than the boundary of phrases, and they are grouped as inter-sentential code-switching (see 4-5).

(4) F1: That's why 很多 人 都 用 地铁。

That's why many people use the MRT. (MRT "Mass Rapid Transit)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English expressions</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Studios</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And then</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But then</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.6%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. The ten most frequent English words
(Note: debate produced only by F7 is excluded here)

The first and second most frequent common nouns shared by other speakers (F1, F5, M4, M9 and M10) are *hotel* (six tokens) and *side* (four tokens), as shown in 7 and 8.

(7) M10: 楼上 有 个 hotel.

upstairs have classifier

There is a hotel upstairs.

(8) F5: 大多 是 我 爸爸 那边 的 side.

most are I father there possessive

Most of them are on my father's side of the family.

3.3.3 Proper nouns

According to Auer (1998, p.17), nonce borrowings are one the most frequently mixed codes in bilingual conversations. Nonce borrowings are often content words, in particular place nouns. In the present study, proper nouns are the second most frequent category of code-switching. Place nouns such as KL (Kuala Lumpur) and Universal Studios are included here, though it is not clear if they really should be classified as code-switching (see 9-10).

(9) M9: 我 去年 年尾 有 去 KL 玩。

I last year year end have go play

I went to KL for a vacation at the end of last year.
3.3.4 Reiteration

There are occasions where English words are repeated to emphasize their meanings. However, repetition in one utterance of a sentence is only considered one token of code-switching (see 11).

3.3.5 Discourse markers

Over the years, the definition of discourse makers remains controversial, and their categorizations vary depending on different perspectives. There is little consensus on whether they are a syntactic or pragmatic category, on which types of expressions the category includes, or on the relationship with other posited categories such as connectives, interjections, modal particles (Degand, Cornillie & Pietrandrea 2013, p. 5). Generally, words and expressions such as well, like, OK, you know and I mean are common discourse markers in spoken English. They usually occur at the start of a sentence or a clause, and provide cohesion to the conversational structures.

In bilingual contexts, discourse markers can function within four realms: interpersonal, referential, structural and cognitive (Maschler 1998, p. 137). Table 4 shows the types of discourse markers employed in conversational code-switching.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realms</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Perceptions verbs</td>
<td><em>You know</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbs of saying</td>
<td><em>I'm saying</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreement</td>
<td><em>Yeah</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagreement</td>
<td><em>No</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>Deictics</td>
<td><em>Now</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Causal</td>
<td><em>Since</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consequential</td>
<td><em>So</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contrastive</td>
<td><em>But</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Conjoining</td>
<td><em>And</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Order of actions</td>
<td><em>First of all</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introducing actions</td>
<td><em>Like</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeating actions</td>
<td><em>again</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Realizing new information</td>
<td><em>Oh</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explaining oneself</td>
<td><em>I mean</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Compared with Table 3, it is apparent that apart from nouns and noun phrases, most of the frequent code-switching in this current study falls into the four realms of discourse markers. The most frequent particle *yes* is one of the common discourse markers in bilingual contexts. It can serve not only the function of agreement, but also signal understanding and framing (Fischer & Alm 2013, p. 50). In our study, *yes* was sometimes pronounced as [jɛə] *yeah* or [ja:] *ya*, which are very common in conversational speech. It can occur in various positions, not restricted to the start of sentences or clauses. (12) below indicates the function of agreement in the conversation. However, in (13), the speaker is more like talking to herself, and the second *yeah* is as a framing signal indicating that the topic is about to end.

(12) R: **Chinatown** 我们叫**唐人**街。

    we call **Chinese road**

    *We call it Chinatown.*

    F2: **唐人**街，**yes!** Hehehe

    Chinese **road**

    *Yes, it is Chinatown. [laughter]*

(13) R: 我以前看到的都是四个人。

    I in the past see possessive all are four classifier people
I used to see that there are four of them.

F7: 哦，四个，那个是世界比赛的。

Oh, four classifier that classifier is world competition

Yeah, very formal four classifier

Oh, there are four of them, but it is an international competition, and it is really formal, yeah. Four of them is formal, yeah.

There is one instance of disagreement using no in the study (see 13).

(13) R: 那里 的东西便宜吗?

There possessive thing cheap question particle

Are the things cheap there?

F2: 那里的东西，不便宜。

There possessive thing not cheap

No, things there are not cheap.

The second most frequent English expression is OK, which can also be considered a discourse marker signaling agreement (see 14).

(14) F5: 我们讲，OK啊，去去去。

We say interjection go go go

We said, OK, let's go.

In addition, OK can indicate approval and acceptance (see 15).

(15) M4: OK，去购物啊!

Go shopping interjection

OK, let's go shopping.

Ok can also used as a framing marker that introducing a new topic (see in 16)

(16) F5: OK，到时候一到，我的两个朋友就很怕。

Arrive time one arrive my two classifier friend then very afraid
OK, they were very afraid once they arrived.

Another frequent discourse marker is so, functioning as consequential marker in conversations. Together with then, and then, and but then, they are all connectives in sentences (see 17-20).

(17) F7: So 我们 真 不 知道 他们 会 问 什么。
We really not know they can ask what
So we really have no idea what they will ask.

(18) M4: Then 去 参观 参观 一 下。
Go visit visit one down
Then we paid it a visit.

(19) M9: And then 现在 就 懒惰 去 找 名。
Now then lazy go find name
And then I was too lazy to give it a name.

(20) M4: But then 其实 只是 那 几 间 hotel.
Actually only that few classifier
But then there were just that few hotels.

4. Discussion

Though people in Brunei speak a wide range of languages and dialects, the patterns of language choice among different ethnic groups are consistent. Certain language choices might be restricted to some speakers due to social values and a similar social network (Li, Milroy & Pong 1992, p. 64). Generally, Malay Bruneians tend to mix Brunei Malay with English, while Chinese Bruneians tend to mix Mandarin with English. The extent to which they might also use Malay in some situations is unclear. In the current study, there are some occasions where the speakers switch to other dialects or languages other than English. There is one instance where a female speaker (F5) who used the Hokkien word "angmo" (Caucasian) during the interview, and one instance where a male speaker (M10) switched to Malay word "lorong" (lane). As Ho and Wong (2006, p.389) notes that, in a bilingual speech community, code-switching happens irrespective of whether the host language is Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil, as long as the speaker and
interlocutor share a common language such as English. It is possible that the speakers in this study switched to English because they assumed that the researcher could not speak Malay.

There are many reasons for people to switch to another language during the stream of speech. Code-switching may serve to translate, clarify, elaborate, or emphasize a message that has been previously expressed in another language (Ng & He 2004, p. 29). For example, the speaker might not be able to find an equivalent word in one language, or they try to make the addressee better understand their meanings. We cannot determine the reasons here, so this will be left in a topic of further research.

5. Conclusion

This study has investigated the code-switching behavior in Mandarin-English bilinguals in Brunei. It has been shown that use of English words is very common in the Mandarin spoken by tertiary students in Brunei even when the researcher always speaks Mandarin. It allows us to gain insight into the patterns of code-switching and language choices in conversational contexts. Nouns and noun phrases are the most frequent insertions, followed by various discourse markers. However, only tertiary students involved in this study, and it is unclear whether the patterns and choices are different from other age groups. In addition, bigger corpus study of code-switching is needed to investigate the difference between females and males. By including more subjects into the study, it is possible to throw light onto the extent to which bilinguals tend to mix another language into their spontaneous speech.
References


