

LANGUAGE MIXING IN MULTILINGUAL MALAYSIA*

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Introduction

The language situation in Malaysia is extremely complex inasmuch one can find there, not only the presence of the national language *Bahasa Melayu* and that of *English* but also code alternations between Malay and English, any of the Chinese vernaculars of the area and English, an Indian vernacular – usually – Tamil and English as well as scores of other codeswitching varieties. Either language of a given pair may function as the matrix language with the other language serving as source for a number of embeddings. The writer has however limited his investigations to the occurrence of Malay-English codeswitching, since an interphase between an eastern national language and a western international language seemed to him most challenging. In general, codeswitching will be found only in the private domain but in Malaysia it is also allowed to occur in a number of different professional settings, that is, in the public domain. One finds it in university faculty meetings, in corporate meetings of the business world and at selected court hearings. The writer will here offer some examples of Malay-English codeswitching, so as to acquaint the reader with the nature of language switching in one particular environment.

1. Languages in the switching process

1.1 MALAY-English alternations

Bahasa Melayu or Bahasa Malaysia, henceforth Malay, may serve as the matrix language allowing a variety of elements from English to be embedded into it. This embedding process may involve single lexical items (insertional codeswitching), specific grammatical units (phrases, clauses, sentence) or random words groups. Most such alternations will occur within a given sentence (intra-sentential codeswitching). However, when independent clauses or free-standing sentences are selected, alternations may occur in the transition between sentences (inter-sentential codeswitching). The following examples are typical for this kind of language processing:

- a. *Tetapi kalau dibayar itu, at least, kita boleh claim sekali sebab sebelum ini tidak dibayar.*
But if that is paid we can once because before it was not paid.
- b. *Mesyuarat senat is the highest meeting at the university level, so mesyuarat pengurusan*
The senate meeting the academic administrative
academik is the equivalent to that senat at the school level.
meeting senate
- c. *It's not that to stop you but just to know what is going on sebab kadang-kadang orang*
Because sometimes people
bertanya kepada saya dan kalau saya tidak tahu ia mencerminkan pengurusan sekolah.
ask me and if I do not know it represents school management.
- d. *Saya berikan tanggungjawab ini kepada saudara, Cik Noriah.* So the others please take
I give this responsibility to you, Ms. Noriah
note,

Example *a.* shows the insertion of a single lexical item, *claim*. In *b.* the verb phrase *is the highest meeting at the university level* is inserted, obviously followed by the marker *so* before its return to Malay. In *c.* it is the full English clause *It's not that to stop you but just to know what is going on* that starts the sentence and finally in *d.* one encounters an example of intersentential codeswitching where a full Malay sentence occurs in juxtaposition with a full English sentence.

1.2 ENGLISH-Malay alternations

For reasons that we will not explore here, English was chosen to be the matrix language, whereas elements of Malay were embedded into that English sentence. Again, this occurred at the lexical, the phrasal and the clausal level:

- e. *It is not a derma anymore.*
gift
- f. *Actually, minggu keempat is missing. The whole of minggu keempat*
the fourth week the fourth week.
- g. *Kita perlukan diagnosis test that is needed as soon as possible.*
We need
- h. *Okay, Tuan Pengerusi, terima kasih. Anything else?*
Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Sentence *e.* shows the embedding of a single lexical item, that is, *derma*. The noun phrase *minggu keempat* is embedded in *f* twice. The clause *we need* appears in *g* and full sentences in both languages stand in juxtaposition to one another.

1.3 ENGLISH and MALAY in mutual juxtaposition

Actually, *d* and *h* could have been shown in this section as neither qualifies as containing a matrix sentence and an embedded element. Each language holds its own rather than one language being subordinated to the other. Two more examples of this kind of intersentential switching are as follow:

- i. *Beli ini satu. Otherwise, there is nothing wrong.*
Buy this one.
- j. *Some people would like to give, you know. So, they would complain, why don't you ask?*
Ada orang, mereka nak derma, mereka tak tahu.
There are people, they do not want to donate, they do not know.

Although the institutions where these utterances were recorded (UKM, UPM) usually opt for lexical or phrasal insertions, one can still find cases where both languages occur in juxtaposition to one another.

2. Domain where language switching is allowable

2.1 The informal domain

Earlier research leaned heavily on the language mixing practices in conversations between family members and peers. The embeddings of Malay elements into English

served as matrix, the embedding process resulted into an only slightly more liberal mode than what had been found at some of the universities included in this study. Finally, The Higher Court hearings revealed a quite different kind of codeswitched discourse. Intrasentential codeswitching was all but absent. Intersentential codeswitching, however, was the rule of thumb even though the kind of intersentential processing differed from the one witnessed at the universities as multi-sentence citations in English would be inserted into the Malay discourse when reference was made to a text (deposition, judgment, quotation, citation) that had originally been rendered in that language. This served the purpose of avoiding translations into Malay that might be legally risky. Some typical examples of codeswitched discourse as witnessed in the formal domain are the following:

- s. *Berapa* copy yang dia perlu hantar berbind (lexical/UKM).
How many that he needs to send bound
- t. Bolehlah *and also the opening will be by the Indonesian attache* (phrasal/UPM).
That is possible....
- u. *Satu formula yang saya dah belajar di pusat lain*, we must give this minimum notice of
One formula that I learned in another center,...
one week, *kerana untuk membolehkan orang untuk perancangan yang lebih awal*.
because of enabling a person to (accomplish) an earlier planning (clausal/UUM).
- v. *Dia agree* kalau MBI nak *consolidatekan account* semua sekali *all this...I don't think so*
He if wants to (vb.) all accounts at once
It can work (Merger/Corporate).
- w. In that case, *tak payah kita nak ambillah* (Phrasal/Corporate).
not difficult we want to take (it).
- w. *Rujukan telah juga dibuat kepada petikan dalam Rayden, On Divorce (Edisi ke-14) di*
Reference had also been made to the quotation in Rayden, On Divorce (14th edition) on
muka surat 56 yang berbunyi:"The burden of proving that a domicile has been chosen
page 56 that reads:...
in substitution for the domicile of origin is on the person who asserts that a domicile of
choice has been acquired in place of the domicile of origin: the intention must be proved
with perfect clearness, *yang bermaksud* [follows translation of quote]
which means (in Malay) (Intersentential/Higher Court).

3. Conclusion

It has been the purpose of the present essay to report on some of the research that has been carried out in the field of codeswitching. The Malaysian scenario has proven to be most valuable in showing how different modes and submodes of switching exist side by side in this Asian Nation where different cultures have joined together to yield a unique texture of its own. The essay describes how specific switching processes are adopted by certain speakers as they perform their professional tasks. Accordingly, the Malaysian has shown that codeswitching between Malay and English has a place, not only in the informal, but also in the formal domain. As a corollary, the essay has tried to clarify some of the notions involved when two languages join together in the conveyance of meaning.

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