Functions of student code-switching in a Bruneian classroom

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Received 29 January 2023
Revised 31 March 2023
Accepted 4 May 2023

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate how Bruneian secondary school students employ code-switching in peer interactions. The functions of students' code-switching were analysed using Reyes' (2004) and Appel and Muysken's (2005) typologies.

Design/methodology/approach – The data collected are based on audio-recorded group discussions designed to elicit students' code-switched utterances.

Findings – The results indicate that the students used 11 functions of code-switching: referential, discourse marker, clarification, expressive, quotation imitation, turn accommodation, insistence, emphasis, question shift, situation shift and poetic.

Research limitations/implications – As the study only focusses on a specific secondary school, results from this school will not represent secondary school students in Brunei.

Originality/value – This paper hopes to provide insight into how students' code-switching can be seen in a positive light. Moreover, understanding how students use code-switching in the classroom is essential for successful knowledge transfer and for cultivating competent bilinguals, which is what the country's education system aims for.

Keywords Classroom code-switching, Function of students code-switching, Secondary school students, Classroom discourse

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Switching between codes is a common occurrence among bilinguals who share the same linguistic knowledge. Chen and Rubinstein-Avila (2018) defines code-switching as the alternate use of two languages or language varieties in a conversation. According to Grosjean (1998), code-switching requires competence in both languages. Consequently, classroom code-switching means the alternate use of two languages in a classroom environment by either the teacher and/or the students (Lin, 2008, 2013). Following her notion, code-switching in this study is used as the umbrella terms for both code-switching (inter-sentential level) and code-mixing (intra-sentential level). Macaro (2012) asserts that the practice of classroom code-switching tends to be viewed as contentious by most researchers and educators. It is believed that not only it halts students' learning of the targeted language but also seen as an indicator of students language deficiency (Mabule, 2015 cited in Hanafiah, Mono, & Yusuf, 2021).

Recently, classroom code-switching in Brunei does not receive much attention, at least to the researchers' knowledge. The trend seems to focus more on university level that is on adult speakers (e.g. Faahirah, 2016; Ishamina & Deterding, 2017; Noor Azam *et al.*, 2013) or in computer mediated conversations (e.g. Aqilah, 2020; McLellan, 2009). Nonetheless, code-switching is still a norm in Brunei (Deterding & Salbrina, 2013; McLellan, 2020). In fact, based

Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal
Vol. 23 No. 1, 2023
pp. 55-69
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2948-0426
p-ISSN: 1819-5091
DOI 10.1108/SEAMJ-01-2023-0007

on McLellan's (2020) observation, when the Bruneians were asked about their thoughts on Brunei English, they automatically thought of it as a code-mixed variety of the English language.

For that reason, the present research is interested in investigating whether code-switching appears as early as secondary school level, particularly on how it is used. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to investigate the functions of code-switching used by the secondary school students in peer interactions.

Literature review: functions of classroom code-switching

The use of code-switching in classrooms has been studied extensively, particularly for its effectiveness in helping students in language learning, especially in ESL (English as a second language) classrooms. A popular research topic is the pedagogical functions of code-switching (e.g. Chen & Rubinstein-Avila, 2018; Eldridge, 1996; Ferguson, 2003, 2009; Reyes, 2004; Sert, 2005; Then & Ting, 2009, 2011a, b; Ustunel, 2016).

Both Sert (2005) and Bhatti, Sarimah and Seriaznita (2018) shared the same belief that code-switching is a useful tool to achieve successful classroom interactions. In order to understand how beneficial the use of classroom code-switching is, it is important to explore its pedagogical implication and language learning resources. For instance, Ferguson (2003) analysed teacher's use of code-switching into three broad categories (otherwise known as macro-functions); curriculum access, classroom management discourse and interpersonal relations. These categories are then revised by Chen and Rubinstein-Avila (2018) into explanatory function, socialising function and classroom management function. Consequently, Ustunel (2016) explores both functions of students-only and teachers-only following Ferguson's (2003) three broad categories. She then explored the micro-functions used with respect to the macro-functions mentioned. For example, under code-switching for curriculum access, Ustunel (2016) explains that students use code-switching to emphasise the task, to shift between topics of the task, or to evaluate the task. In terms of classroom management, students were observed to switch codes in order to hold the floor during the task or to quote the task procedures. For interpersonal relations, students were observed to use code-switching to create humour during tasks or to express their frustration.

Additionally, Eldridge (1996) identified seven functions of code-switching used by the Turkish-English bilingual secondary students. The functions include code-switching for equivalence, floor-holding, metalanguage, reiteration, group membership, conflict control, alignment and disalignment. Eldridge's classification is widely used in research of the same field (e.g. Amorim, 2012; Sampson, 2012).

In the study of code-switching used by Spanish-English bilingual schoolchildren, Reyes (2004) found that both older and younger students code-switch in social talk and science talk mainly due to *topic shift*, *clarification* and *emphasis*. Moreover, the use of code-switching by older students indicates their awareness of their peers' linguistic competence via the use of *turn accommodation*.

In spite of that, past studies on the analysis of functions of classroom code-switching are not limited to the typologies specifically created for classroom discourse. There are also studies which utilise the general typologies of code-switching. For instance, Appel and Muysken (2005) classification on the function of code-switching.

Martin (1995), an earlier study on Bruneian classroom code-switching, found that teachers use standard Malay and Brunei Malay in content classes with complex vocabulary to supplement the English instruction. For instance, code-switching through translation was provided for difficult words or phrases. The students, on the other hand, mainly used their L1 (Malay) in either standard or colloquial form to answer their teachers despite the teachers using English. These results imply that teachers and students cannot handle English lessons monolingually and had to resort to L1 in order to ease the process of teaching and learning. This was due to the fact that the bilingual education system had just started and there were

limited teachers who were fluent in English then. As this study was more than a couple of decades old, it is worth re-investigating the use of classroom code-switching in Brunei, particularly how the students use code-switching now.

Methodology

Participants

A total of 23 year 9 students with the average age of 14; 1 years old participated in the study and all of them were Malay-English bilinguals. The rationale behind selecting year 9 students to participate in this study was because by this level they have received approximately 10 years of formal English and Malay learning. Since the students were below the age of 18 years old, written informed consent was distributed to their parents and guardians prior to the experiment. Plus to maintain students' anonymity, they were labelled as S1, S2, S3, etc.

Data collection

Data were obtained from students' recorded discussions where they were given three topics to discuss provided by the researcher. Refer to Table 1 below to see the topics provided and its rationale. The recording sessions were done during periods called *Intervention Period* [1].

Research procedure

Before the group discussion started, students were divided into four groups, with five to six students in each group and they participated in all three discussions. They were allowed to nominate their friends as their group members, with whom they should remain for all three discussions. The students were tested in the school laboratory since it has proper accommodation suited for the experiment.

Pre-recorded instructions were presented on a *PowerPoint Slide* via a projector and a speaker to provide visual and auditory aids, respectively. This is to ensure instructions are executed clearly. The topics of the discussion and provisional prompts are also presented via *PowerPoint Slide*. Prompts provided aim to keep the conversation going should the students have difficulty keeping up with the conversation. The students are given 10 minutes to discuss based on the topic given and the discussion will be recorded via an audio-recorder placed at the centre of each table.

Data analysis

The discussion was transcribed word per word, including verbal and non-verbal conversations (e.g. expressions such as laughter and hesitation). Code-switched utterances were identified based on Jacobson's (1996), cited in McLellan (2009) three out of five classifications of code-mixed spoken interaction: (1) main language-English with some

Discussion	Topic	Rationale
Discussion 1	Favourite movie	An easy and general topic to get the students to warm up to the activity. Non-academically oriented topic to mitigate students' anxiety to contribute
Discussion 2	Technology: Android vs. iPhone	An opinion-based topic to allow students to think and voice their preferences. This topic might increase the chances of students code-switching as they need to articulate their varying opinion
Discussion 3	Online learning	A discussive topic for the students to think critically while presenting their experience

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 1.
Topics of discussion and the rationale

Malay, (2) equal language alternation of Malay and English and (3) main language-Malay with some English. The identified utterances were then extracted to *Microsoft Excel* and coded based on the typologies as described in the following Table 2. However, the main aim of this research is only to identify the functions of code-switching used by the students; therefore, all types of code-switching will be included in the function analysis.

Adapted framework from Reyes (2004), and Appel and Muysken (2005) are summarised in Table 2 below. The reason for choosing both of the typologies was that Reyes' study was similar to the present study which investigates students' functions of code-switching in peer interactions. Therefore, similar functions are expected to be portrayed by the students in the present study. Appel and Muysken's typology was also used to guide in the analysis as the second framework for functions that were not included in Reyes' such as *referential, expressive, poetic* and *phatic* functions.

The classification of functions of code-switching is solely based on the researcher's interpretation therefore there is no external validation included within the study. However, it is suggested in future studies to incorporate an inter-rater to make the results more reliable.

Results

Data revealed a total of 11 functions of code-switching used by the students in the group discussions. See Table 3 below for reference. The functions include *referential*, *discourse marker*, *clarification*, *expressive*, *quotation imitation*, *turn accommodation*, *insistence*, *emphasis*, *question shift*, *situation shift* and *poetic function*. *Clarification*, *emphasis* and *question shift* were not observed in the Discussion 2. Additionally, the remaining five functions were also not observed in all three group discussions: *representation of speech, topic shift, person specification, phatic function* and *other*.

Referential function

The first and most prevalent function observed in the students' discussion is *referential function* with which made up 49% of the code-switched utterances observed. In this research, the function includes switching codes that involve lexical issues (1) to compensate for the lack

Functions	Descriptions
Quotation imitation	To imitate the tone of a speaker
Turn accommodation	Speech accommodation to take turns between speakers
Topic shift	Switches occur in order to change the topic of the conversation
Situation shift	To indicate on/off-topic in academic work
Insistence	Switches indicate persistence by repeating the same content but to a different language
Emphasis	Code-switching is used to put on emphasis on a specific command
Clarification	Speaker code-switches to give more information to clarify an idea or message
Person specification	Switches occur when the speaker referred to another person during the conversation
Question shift	To indicate the switching in language when the speaker has a question
Discourse marker	A linguistic element that does not necessarily add to the content of the utterance but acts as a marker or the context in which the utterance is taking place
Representation of speech	Speaker code-switches to represent the speech
Other	Unidentified function
Referential function	Speaker code-switches due to lack of lexical knowledge or lexical equivalence
Expressive function	Speaker code-switches as a result of their mixed identity which incorporates their emotions and feelings
Poetic function	Speaker switch codes in order to insert puns or jokes
Phatic function	The code-switches reflect the tone of the conversation

Table 2.
Adapted functions of code-switching from Reyes (2004) and Appel and Muysken (2005)

Rank	Functions	Discussion 1	Discussion 2	Discussion 3	Total
1	Referential function	63 (62%)	44 (59%)	20 (25%)	*127 (49%)*
2	Discourse marker	12 (62%)	11 (15%)	7 (9%)	*30 (12%)*
3	Clarification	3 (3%)	–	17 (21%)	*20 (8%)*
4	Expressive function	7 (7%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)	*14 (5%)*
5	Quotation imitation	2 (2%)	5 (7%)	6 (7%)	*13 (5%)*
6	Turn accommodation	2 (2%)	5 (7%)	6 (7%)	*11 (4%)*
7	Insistence	1 (1%)	3 (4%)	7 (9%)	*11 (4%)*
8	Emphasis	1 (1%)	–	9 (11%)	*10 (4%)*
9	Question shift	9 (9%)	–	1 (1%)	*10 (4%)*
10	Situation shift	1 (1%)	3 (4%)	4 (5%)	*8 (3%)*
11	Poetic function	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	1 (15%)	*4 (2%)*
	Total	*102 (100%)*	*75 (100%)*	*81 (100%)*	*258 (100%)*

Source(s): Table by authors

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of code-switching functions observed in the group discussions

of lexical equivalence in the matrix language [2], or (2) lexical items that students exclusively learnt in the embedded language.

When it comes to code-switching for *lack of lexical equivalence in the matrix language*, students are often observed to switch codes when they could not retrieve the targeted word. As a result, students resort to code-switching to fill in the lexical gaps. This is a rather common reason for most bilinguals to code-switch as they lack the vocabularies in the relevant registers (Hoffman, 1991). For example, in (1), the conversation shown is in Malay. The student then switched to English to mention the word 'noob' to describe his friends' behaviours. The switch in code in the utterance indicates that S21 only knows the word in English but not its Malay equivalence. Moreover, the word 'noob' seems to be a trend for Bruneian youths to describe a person as being inexperienced.

(1) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*
S21 *au*, noob *bah orang ah*!
(yeah, the person is noob!)

Alternatively, there are occasions where students would borrow common English phrases that are uncommon or may not be available in Malay, the matrix language. For instance, 'scene by scene' or 'on the way' as seen in (2) and (3). In (2), S11 used the phrase 'scene by scene' to describe his friend's method of storytelling while he maintained the rest of his description in Malay. Similar code-switching pattern is observed in another student who also used the English phrase 'on the way' as he spoke about his friend who was going to purchase a new mobile phone. See (3) for reference.

(2) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S11 <scene by scene *bah ia bagitau ani*
(PAR he tells this) (literal translation)

(3) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*
S21 *Si* {first name} *pun lah* on the way
({first name} is also going to buy one)

Another pattern for the students to use this function of code-switching is through the use of *superordinate terms*. In the context of present study, *superordinate terms* refers to a bigger

category or the theme of the conversation. To illustrate, see (4) below where S14 and S15 were discussing the pros and cons of using either Android or iPhone as mobile devices in Discussion 2. This is expected especially if the conversation is in Malay and students are expected to switch to English to mention technological terms such as 'keyboard' and 'screen protector'. Plus, terms like 'keyboard' and 'screen protector' are widely known in English only.

(4) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*

S14 *banar pulang* iPhone *atu payah sama ia kalau main* game *buleh panas* keyboard *atu kadang-kadang*. . .
(actually, it is difficult to play games on an iPhone. The keyboard sometimes gets overheated.)

S15 *Bukannya inda pakai screen protector kan? Mesti pulang pakai* screen protector *karang pacah* screen*-nya yang banar-banar*.
(Doesn't it need to have a screen protector? You have to use a screen protector. If not, the screen will be damaged.)

This indicates that although the students are conversing in mostly Malay, there are still instances of code-switching. In this case, students would switch to English to mention the terms or phrases they exclusively learnt in English.

Discourse marker

Discourse marker function of code-switching are the second most observed function used by the students. Similar to referential function, there are multiple patterns on how the students utilise this function of code-switching. The first one is through the use of English linking words such as 'so' and 'then' in Malay conversations in order to create a cohesion or to signal transition between information. Example is as illustrated in (5) below.

(5) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*

S12 then *cana buleh?*
(then how come?)

S11 so *kami semua inda suka cigu punya telefon*
(so, we all don't like teacher's phone)

S12 *sebab kamu ada Chrome untuk BTS atu* so *kamu boleh macam ke website-website lain*
(because you have Chrome [extension] for BTS so you can go to other websites)

Consequently, there is also a tendency for the students to use a Malay linking word in an English conversation, as seen in (6). The student used *jadinya* which is a Malay equivalent to 'so'.

(6) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*

S4 *jadinya* iPhone only have AppStore? To download *bah*.
(so, iPhone only ha[s] AppStore?)

The next pattern observed in this function is the use of Malay fillers in English conversations. An instance of Brunei Malay filler *anu* which Clynes (2001) considered as a hesitation marker can be observed from the data obtained. Example can be seen in (7) where the student used *anu* as a verbal cue for thinking out loud or pausing.

(7) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S22 My favourite movie is *anu* Don't Listen.

Consequently, there are also observations on the students' use of Malay word *apa* ('what') or phrases *apa namanya* ('what is it called') and *apa lagi ah* ('what else') as gap fillers. This is to indicate that they were not done talking or pausing to think of what more to add to the conversation. See (8) for reference.

(8) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*
S15 Android is more (. . .) easier than iPhone and uh *apa namanya*
(what is it called)
iPhone. . . Android even though Android have no beautiful camera (. . .)
but the battery is *apa* not die too. . .
(what)
S14 (. . .) last longer
S15 *auwah*. The battery is last longer than iPhone (. . .)

Data revealed that, in terms of discourse particles, students tend to use *bah* and *lah* in English conversations. The *bah* particle is a unique feature of Brunei English and is multifunctional. Its purpose is to build rapport and solidarity (Conrad, Ozog, & Martin, 1990; Deterding & Salbrina, 2013; McLellan, 2020). In the present research, the students used *bah* as an alternative to 'okay', as shown in (9). In that context, S5 was previously discussing her favourite movie when S4 interrupted and jokingly stopped her from continuing with the statement "*bah bah,* move on".

(9) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S5 And then she dies. She dies so she. . . took someone else's baby . . .
[all students laughs]
S5 And then. . .<
S4 <*bah bah* move one
(PART)

Additionally, *bah* also functions as a pragmatic particle in the study as a means of emphasis. For instance, (10) looks at a conversation between two close friends where S4 added *bah* at the end of her utterance to indicate an emphasis.

(10) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*
S4 jadinya iPhone only have AppStore? To download *bah*
(So iPhone only have AppStore? To download PART)
S5 *au*, I think so
(yea, I think so)

On the contrary, observations drawn from the students' discussion include *lah* (a common feature in Southeast-Asian English) in which it is used as an emphasiser as shown in (11). The example demonstrated how the student confirmed his friend's favourite character, the killer clown in the movie 'It', so the suffix *lah* here is used to emphasise the preceding noun, the 'killer clown'.

(11) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S20 The killer clown, of course. The killer clown *lah* tu.
(PART)

There is also an observation where a student used the Malay prefix *si-*. (12) shows how the student added the prefix *si-* to 'Chloe', the character name she is describing. It is common occurrence in Brunei Malay to add the person prefix *si-* in front of a person's name.

(12) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S5 *Si* Chloe. She's like the main character.
(PART)

Clarification
The *clarification* function of code-switching is rather straightforward; students code-switch to clarify a message, elaborate or give examples. However, this function can only be observed in Discussions 1 and 3. (13) illustrates how code-switching helps the student to describe her favourite movie's plot clearly. She first started the conversation in English; then switched to Malay to elaborate on her message further. She then switched back to English to add extra information and to Malay to give reasons.

(13) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S5 Okay so basically the mom *banarnya bagi ubat* (. . .) for her to
(actually give medicine)
numb her legs so *anaknya inda dapat kemana-mana*
(her child cannot go anywhere)
and then after. . .>
S3 <Okay done
S5 (. . .) that she killed her mom. Yeah.

Expressive function
In expressive function, students switched codes in order to show off their bilingual skills or to express their mood and emotions. This function seems particularly useful in Discussion 3 for the students to provide a more precise explanation. For example, in (14), the conversations are packed with Malay and English code-switches, which portray the speakers' bilingual identities.

(14) *Excerpt from Discussion 3*
S5 well successful-*lah tapi kalau* (. . .) if there's online class I would do better this year *[pa]sal* last year *ada ugama pun jua.* And then, like *atu kepisan tu* time *ada ugama. Ugama lagi be*-file *banyak. Ugama lagi be*-file-file. *Tabal lagi. Banyak tu* file *ku di rumah.*
(well, it was successful but if there's [an] online class I would do better this year because last year I had *Ugama* also. And then, like that was crazy when I had *Ugama*. *Ugama* has many files too. Ugama has files upon files. And they're thick. There's so many of my files at home.)

Two interesting observations were drawn from the data where the students utilise code-switching to avoid mentioning taboo words. Hence, the use of code-switching here functions as a euphemism. This unique observation is only prevalent in Discussion 1, where the students described the plot of their favourite movies. In (15), S11 shifted from Malay to English as a euphemism for the word 'naked', rather than concluding his sentence in Malay with the Malay

equivalent word for 'naked', which might be deemed exceedingly vulgar, particularly in an educational context. Additionally, in (16), the student used the word 'something' to describe the improper behaviour. These imply that code-switching is used as a euphemism for taboo words. This code-switching behaviour is relatively common in bilinguals, especially in cases where certain items in a particular language may trigger negative connotations (Hoffman, 1991).

(15) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S11 <*pasal ia* naked
(Because he was) naked

(16) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S8 *dorang buat* something [giggle]
(They did) something [giggle]

Quotation imitation
This function is rather straightforward under which the students switched codes in order to imitate or quote someone in its original spoken form. A unique switch observed is where the students used Korean word 바보 /pɑ:bɒ/ to say the words 'stupid' or 'silly' in their English discussions. Apart from the students being Malay-English bilinguals, they seem to have a passive knowledge of Korean. (17) indicates that the switching from English to Korean is for the purpose of quoting. Myers-Scotton (1993, p. 139) describes bilinguals' use of code-switching in spoken form to achieve "an aesthetic effect".

(17) *Excerpt from Discussion 3*
S8 cos we're dumb
S12 we are dumb
S7 바보(stupid)
S8 바보[laugh]

Turn accommodation
In this function, students switched codes in order to take turns that can accommodate the other students. This then allows them to participate in the conversation. Alternatively, code-switching is also used to reciprocate to the language that is understood by the previous speaker as seen in (18) below. S21 was initially speaking in English. When told by his friend to speak louder he replied to him in the same language, Malay. Thus, the switch.

(18) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S21 My favourite movie is . . . [inaudible]
S22 {first name}, *cakap bah basar-basar*
({first name}, speak PART louder)
S21 *au wah au wah.*
(Okay PART Okay PART)

Emphasis
Switching in code made in this function is to put an emphasis on a specific command. Additionally, there are also observations made where the students used this function to either

encourage their members participation or to discipline certain behaviour displayed. This mimics the functions of code-switching that is normally found in teachers, code-switching for classroom management (Ferguson, 2003; Chen & Rubinstein-Avila, 2018). Observe (19) below how the student used this function of code-switching where S12 switched from Malay to English to command his friend's contribution.

(19) *Excerpt from Discussion 3*
S12 no more express we talk about online learning
S11 I hate online learning because I need to look at my screen all day
S12 {first name}, *cakap wah*!
({first name}, say something!)

Insistence
The insistence function of code-switching is typically observed in the same repeated utterance but in different languages each. In (20), S20 asked his friend whether he prefers face to face learning. He then repeated the same question in English to insist on the questions asked.

(20) Excerpt from Discussion 3
S18 I like face to face teacher. Face to face study
S20 *tapi ko suka kah*? Do you like it or not?
(But do you like it?)

Question shift
In (21), the example shows how the student was initially speaking in English then switched to Malay to ask her friends about the lists of genres available. Therefore, the purpose of code-switching here is for the students to ask questions.

(21) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S4 The genre is . . . [whispers] *apa saja?*
(what else?)

Situation shift
This function indicates switching made between codes in order for the students to talk about academic-related matters and non-academic related matters. To illustrate, see (22) below. S5 used Malay when she talked about personal matters which were on her upset stomach. She then switched to English when she asked a member in her group to add on to their discussion.

(22) *Excerpt from Discussion 1*
S5 *atu saja kan? Sakit parut ku eh!*
(that is all right? My tummy hurts!)
S4 Siapa lagi?
(Who else?)
S5 Do you have one?

Poetic function

Interestingly, the *poetic function* of code-switching in the study indicates students' creativity by integrating both languages (Malay and English) to tell jokes, mockery, or puns. To illustrate, in (23), the students were talking about 'Apple' (the technology company from the United States). S9 mentioned that she preferred 'Apple', the company, in Malay, then her friend, S8, mocked her and said she liked 'grape', an actual fruit. S10 joined the jokes and mentioned she liked 'watermelon', the fruit. The conversation was predominantly in Malay except for the mentions of the company name and the fruit names.

(23) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*

S8 *cam aku liat ramai orang* iPhone, iPhone, iPhone
(like I saw many people use iPhone, iPhone, iPhone)

S9 *aku* [suka] Apple
(I [like] Apple)

S8 *aku suka* grape *pulang*
(I like grape)

S10 *aku suka* watermelon
(I like watermelon)

The same style of discourse is later repeated by the same speaker, S8, later in the discussion. In (24), S8 described a hypothetical reaction to a hypothetical situation of someone handing out an iPhone for free. She described that people would have stars in their eyes similar to those in how anime characters or cartoons would typically react to indicate excitement. Thus, the code switches to English to mention 'star'. The word 'star' here is reduplicated which is common in some Malay words to emphasise on the plurality. This implies that bilingual speakers can express themselves creatively via the use of both languages within the same discourse.

(24) *Excerpt from Discussion 2*

S8 cam kalau urang membagi inda kan ko tulak cam mata mu ada star-star
(like if people gave you [the phone] you're not going to decline. Your eyes will stars)

Another creative way of how the same student, S8, uses this function of code-switching is by adding the superlative suffix -er to the Malay word *pemalas* (lazy). This is to emphasise the meaning of the word (*pemalas*). See (25) for reference. This illustration indicates how code-switching does not necessarily imply a lack of competency in either language but rather the opposite, where the student combined an English morpheme with a Malay root word.

(25) *Excerpt from Discussion 3*

S8 I became lazy. Ten times lazier [laugh] ten times *pemalas*-er [laugh]
(lazier)

Discussion

A rather fortuitous finding was the students' frequent use of Malay (students' L1) as the matrix language in their conversations. A possible explanation for this is that despite the study being carried out in the actual classroom, the nature of the discussions is still informal. Therefore, students' speech behaviour might reflect how they usually talk among themselves.

This is especially the case for Discussion 1, where students ought to be excited to discuss their favourite movie and in order to present their ideas as fast and concisely as possible they resort to Malay. The students' inclination to use Malay as the matrix language is consistent with Reyes (2004), who found that children frequently use their L1 (Spanish) in a more cognitively challenging task. However, in the case of her study, she explained that children might feel compelled to finish their work on time or answer the questions in addition to the activity being a cognitive task. Therefore, to overcome this, children then resort to their L1.

Data revealed that the *referential function* of code-switching was the most yielded function in the students' group discussion. Apart from being a common occurrence in ESL students this use of code-switching implies how having two linguistic repertoires helps students to achieve successful interactions by making full use of their two language resources. In previous studies, this particular function is widely observed in classroom code-switching research (Amorim, 2012; Alinda, 2019; Chen, 1996; Eldridge, 1996; Joanna, 2014; Kemaloglu-Er & Özata, 2020; Sampson, 2012; Sheeren, 2014; Sumartono & Tan, 2018). Eldridge (1996) termed this as *equivalence* which means students would switch code in order to mention specific terms that are only available in the other. As for the case of present study, students switched codes from Malay to English to mention technological terms (e.g. keyboard and screen protector) or common phrases (e.g. on the way) that are only available or exclusively learnt in English.

The students' use of code-switching in this study indicates a possible sociolinguistic awareness where students are aware of cultural sensitivities. (15) and (16) revealed how a few students switched from Malay to English as a 'neutral code' to avoid saying terms considered indecent in Malay. The Malay culture can be described as conservative, emphasising modesty in speech and behaviour. As a result, certain behaviours or topics are considered taboo. Western culture, on the other hand, is more accommodating because some terms do not have negative connotations as they do in Malay. Consequently, for students to openly express their ideas and emotions, they resort to switching to English while keeping the remaining conversation in Malay without jeopardising their culture's ideals. Therefore, code-switching in this case is achieved through euphemism. Similar observation is made in Chen's (1996) study, where students used English terminology to avoid using words or phrases with negative connotations in Chinese society. A more recent study conducted by Khoumssi (2020) also revealed that French-Moroccan bilinguals use code-switching as euphemism as an alternative to referring to some words that are considered taboo or socially unacceptable in some cultures. This method is used to avoid using terms with negative connotations in particular cultures, such as the Malay culture, which is the focus of current research. In this circumstance, switching from Malay to English provides a politeness strategy and avoids mentioning taboo words.

Furthermore, the present study also demonstrates how students use code-switching to express their bilingual creativity. Code-switching's poetic function is described as switching codes for "aesthetic purpose" (Sheeren, 2014, p. 9). As a result, to convey some joke or mockery, as seen in (21), (22) and (23), this function certainly needs knowledge of both languages. Therefore, this too could imply that code-switching is not an indicator of linguistic incompetency but rather an advanced use of code-switching.

Conclusion

To conclude, the use of student code-switching is highly purposeful and does not indicate the lack of language competency. This is evident from the 11 functions of code-switching observed in present study that is used by Bruneian secondary school students in peer interactions. The functions include *referential, discourse marker, clarification, expressive, quotation imitation, turn accommodation, insistence, emphasis, question shift, situation shift* and *poetic function*. Students' use of code-switching not only shows off their ability to manipulate and alternate between languages but also indicate their sociolinguistic

awareness. Students are also sensitive to their peers' linguistic ability thus resorting to the language said friends are accustomed to in order to encourage participation or contribution.

This study also offers pedagogical implications where code-switching is necessary in order to achieve a successful learning environment for teachers to

(1) build the communication gaps with the students to maximise students' comprehension

(2) utilise students' knowledge of both languages in order to provide new information or concepts in an attempt to ensure a smooth learning process

(3) encourage students to express their thoughts freely to enhance classroom participation and interactions.

Notes

1. 'Intervention period' is an allocated period conducted once a week for either Mathematics, English, or Science subjects, usually to recap or revise difficult lessons.
2. Matrix Language is the base and dominant language observed in code-switched utterances where elements of embedded language are inserted.

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