

A Sociolinguistic Study of Code Switching Among Overseas Indonesian Students on Facebook Comments

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This aim of this study is to examine the use of code switching on Facebook comments. This study investigates the types of code switching that occurred on the Facebook comments of overseas Indonesian students, the shifts of code switching between female and male students, and the reasons why overseas Indonesian students use code switching. The study respondents were overseas Indonesian students who had already signed up as Facebook users. A qualitative approach using descriptive methods was used. The data were analysed using the theory developed, which identifies the types of code switching on Facebook comments and the shifts of code switching between female and male on Facebook comments (Holmes, 1995). The reasons why overseas Indonesian students switched code on Facebook comments were analysed by using theory about the differences between females and males when using code switching (Lakoff, 2005) and theory about types of code switching that occur on Facebook comments: intersentential switching, intrasentential switching and tag switching (Hoffman, 1991). Intrasentential code switching is used at the maximal scale on Facebook comments. This study shows that there are differences between the use of endearment words such as 'baby', 'dear' and 'honey'. While the expectation was that these terms would be used more frequently by females, in fact males used them more frequently. Five reasons for code-switching were discovered on Facebook comments: real lexical need, expressing group identity, softening or strengthening request or command, talking about a particular topic, and showing solidarity.

Key words: *Code switching, Facebook comments, shifting, sociolinguistics.*

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, most people in the world speak more than one language because of internal and external factors, such as ethnical and cultural backgrounds, intermarriage and career opportunities. People who can speak two languages are bilingual, while more than two languages make them multilingual. Because of their ability to speak several languages, people have a tendency to mix and switch the languages. This tendency to mix and alternate between two or more languages in a single conversation is called code switching.

Code switching occurs when the speakers shifts from one language or code to another language or code. In other words, code switching can be defined as the use of two or more languages in the same context or speech event, and it is comprehensible to all speakers who share the same language – for example, Santy’s ‘*Nggak papa, I love you too!*’

Santy seems more comfortable about expressing her emotions in English. She has switched some personal words into English so that she does not sound so melancholy. In Bahasa Indonesia, the statement ‘*Aku cinta kamu*’ can only be said by a person to his/her special friend. On the other hand, in most English-speaking countries, saying ‘I love you’ or ‘I miss you’ to a father, mother, brother or sister, a close friend or even a teacher is very common. In other words, there are some expressions that are inexpressible in Bahasa Indonesia, but can easily be expressed in English.

The phenomenon of code switching has become an interesting topic to be discussed – especially code switching in Facebook comments. Since this social network first appeared in 2004, it has gained a huge membership, and may lead members – who are mostly teenagers and adults, including overseas Indonesian students – to begin imitating the way they communicate with each other. Aside from the reasons why they choose Facebook to communicate with each other in their daily lives, they constantly post and comment on Facebook. Most use Facebook as a form of media to communicate with each other. People who have Bahasa Indonesia as their first language and English as another language, and who study overseas, often code switch their first language into English when they are writing comments on Facebook.

This research aimed to explore the phenomenon of code switching by learners of English as a foreign language on Facebook, especially overseas Indonesian students who broadly appears on Facebook.

Code switching on Face book has many interesting aspects, particularly in relation to the reasons why code switching is used by male and female students. It is hoped that this



research will enable differentiation of code switching between male and females on Facebook comments.

Related to this, the researcher expects that this investigation will contribute to the field of linguistics more generally, particularly the field of sociolinguistics.

Related Work

Several theories relate to this research. There are seven reasons for bilinguals to switch their languages: (1) talking about a particular topic; (2) quoting somebody else; (3) being emphatic about something; (4) interjection; (5) repetition used for clarification; (6) intention of clarifying the speech content for the interlocutor; and (7) expressing group identity (Holmes, 1992). The use of code switching between males and females occurs because females tend to be more polite than males, and also tend to share and communicate their personal information such as feelings, experiences, fears, and happiness (Holmes, 1995). On the other hand, males tend to talk about sport and technology, and compare their knowledge and experience.

Two important points are discussed here. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. A qualitative study involves description and analysis rather than simply analysing figures. Mayring (1995) has developed a procedure for qualitative content analysis that includes a procedural model of text analysis and different technique to apply it. Sociolinguistics is concerned with the relationship between language and the context in which it is used. In other words, it studies the relationship between language and its context.

The three types of code switching were differentiated into tag-switching, intersentential code switching and intrasentential code switching (Poplack, 1980: 86). Code switching is the mixing by bilinguals (or multilinguals) of two or more languages in discourse (Holmes, 1995). This use of two languages implies some degree of competence in both languages, even if bilingual fluency is not yet stable (Poplack, 2000). The term 'gender' rather than 'sex' is commonly used in sociolinguistics study, because sex is classified by biological characteristics of being male or a female, whereas gender is socially constructed, involving the whole scope of psychological social and cultural differences between males and females (Wardhaugh, 1992).

Language evolves rules from every aspect of its circumstances – such as who the speaker and listener are, the place where the language is used, the intention of the speaker, the mood of the speaker and the norms of the society. Language varies according to its uses as well as its users, according to where it is used and to whom, as well as who is using it. For example, women seem to be alert to the fact that what they say may threaten their 'face' (Poplack, 2000). In other words, woman are used to taking their feelings of sensitivity and solidarity

into account in their language use, while men's speech tends to be more matter of fact. Such differences may also be reflected in the way men and women respond to something.

Sociolinguistics Analysis

Data 1

David: '@Bang Carles: Do u need some anti-aging? As woman needs ... *kalau mau di sini ada.*' (31 July 2011, 3:10 am)

The code switching in the comment 'Do u need some anti-aging? As woman needs' is intersentential, since this comment occurs in the sentence. This type of switching occurs at the level of words within sentences and it can be in the middle of sentences, clauses or even words. Most code switching exists at the intersentential level, especially from Bahasa Indonesia to English. One of the reasons for code switching is to talk about a particular topic. Based on that data, this is a comment from a male Facebook user, whereas such a comment would commonly be made by females as they are familiar with beauty and fashion. Females are considered to be beautiful if they have a slim body, light skin and youthful look. In order to have a younger look, they apply anti-aging products to their skin. As we know, anti-aging is commonly used by females, and the term 'anti-aging' is also familiar and more interesting for females than males. There is a difference between females and males considering their background experience. The data shows a shift in the topic in that comment since a male Facebook user uses the word 'anti-aging'.

The analysis found two topics in the male comments that could be categorised as intersentential shifting in vocabulary. Females tend to use certain adjectives such as 'pretty' and 'nice' with a higher frequency than males do. There is also a more frequent expression of endearments such as 'dear', 'honey', 'lovely', 'cute', 'sweet' and so on by women, but only very rarely by men. The results show that endearment words such as 'dear' and 'love' are written by male Facebook users.

Data 2

Fiddy Sembada: 'Have a safe journey and good luck, dear! *Salam buat semuanya yang ada di Indo.*' (17 December 2011, 6:44 pm)

In this example, the code switching 'have a safe journey and good luck, dear' can be classified as intersentential because it involves a switch at a clause or sentence level in different languages. There is a difference between females and males expression of their feelings due to their backgrounds. The data shows a shift in vocabulary. The word 'dear' is written by a male Facebook user. The word 'dear' means 'close to the heart'. In that

comment, 'dear' is addressed to a male friend. It means they are intimate and express their feelings. The data illustrate that males are accustomed to saying 'dear' not only to their girlfriends but also their male friends. This indicates that he expects his friend to enjoy this endearment. Moreover, he shows that he dares to express his feelings and to acknowledge a supportive and intimate relationship. Males rarely use endearments such as 'baby' and 'dear' to their male friends. Further, they rarely use such terms to express their relationships. Talking about feelings and showing emotions are more commonly the domain of female conversations.

Data 3

Sarah Febriyanti: 'Fuck dissertation, *pusing*, *lieur*, *capeeeeeeeee!*' 19 August 2011, 3:33am)

The code switching in that comment is 'fuck dissertation', which is a type of tag switching. On Facebook comments, this involves the switch that occurs at the level of words in another language. In this example, the tag code switching is carried out by inserting the English phrase 'fuck dissertation'. One of the reasons for code switching is to talk about a particular topic. Based on that data, the comment 'fuck dissertation' is made by a female Facebook user. Females rarely tend to be rude – it is more commonly a feature of male speech. In the data, Sarah wants to express her stress since she is frustrated with her dissertation. When she says 'fuck dissertation', it means she wants to express that she is angry and stressed. The data also show that, as a female, she uses the phrase 'fuck dissertation' to strengthen her emotion. 'Fuck dissertation' would normally be a feature of male speech. Sarah wants to express her emotion along with a sense of actual action. The comment shows a shift in politeness in her comment. From the data, we can see that female speakers use offensive or taboo words and slang. Taboo words are often considered offensive, shocking or rude. The meaning of 'fuck' is very rude and indecent. RF has written 'fuck' to reflect her anger. Female Facebook users would generally be more polite than their male counterparts, but this comment includes a code shift, since 'fuck' is seen as a word that should be used by males because females are more polite than males.

Conclusion

The results show that males use more endearments, such as 'baby', 'dear' and 'honey' than females. Females use 'fuck' and 'shit' in their comments, where these would normally be used by males. The shifts between females and male in their comments include shifts of vocabulary, shifts in politeness and different topic, and shifts in question tags. They are thus an indication of comments not in keeping with the speaker's gender.



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