

# The Functions of Code-Switching in the Chinese Speech Community in Pontianak

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**Abstract** - Code-switching is a sociolinguistic phenomenon commonly exists in multilingual areas. Code-switching happens when people switch from one language to another language in order to be understood by the other speaker. It has also some other functions and purposes. Pontianak, a capital city of Kalimantan Barat province in Indonesia is a multilingual speech community where people speak different languages. One of the majority communities is Chinese who speak more than one language. This paper investigates the functions of the code-switching of the Chinese communities and how does it work. The paper also tries to find out the distinct functions of the code-switching in Pontianak compared to other areas. The method used was using the interviews of open-ended questions. The result can be found that there are four functions of the code-switching in this research; justifying or reassuring function, emotional function, numbering function, and bargaining or business talk function.

**Keywords:** code-switching, functions, speech community, Chinese.

## I. Introduction

Pontianak which is located in the Kalimantan Barat province, Indonesia, is an area of speech community, which can be defined as “some kind of social group whose speech characteristics are of interest and can be described in a coherent manner” (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 119), of many ethnic and linguistic groups. Nevertheless, speech community somehow does not simply mean an area where people share the same language or dialect, but the people should also agree about the evaluative norms (Llamas, Mullany, & Stockwell, 2007). One of the biggest speech communities in this area is Chinese group – together with Malay and Dayak tribes. In their speech community, the Chinese people usually communicate in their mother tongue. However, Pontianak is also a multilingual speech community,

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which means that its members share a particular language as well as the norms for the appropriate use of their language in social context.

Since it acts as a multilingual speech community, it involves the activity of code-switching, which is common in an area of multilingualism. Code-switching is a change by a speaker from one language another one. Code switching can take place in a conversation when one speaker uses one language and the other speaker answers in a different language. A person may start speaking one language and then change to another one in the middle of their speech, or sometimes even in the middle of a sentence (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). There are some functions of code-switching whether as a social or emotional as well as linguistic function.

Various studies are done on function of code-switching of different area and speech community. There is a research about the code-switching and language use in childhood in African Yoruba speech community (Ayeomoni, 2006). There are also some researches about the function of code-switching in the classroom such as in schoolchildren conversations (Reyes, 2004), ELT classrooms (Sert, 2005) and the function code-switching of an English lecturer on the confidence of the students in the subject (Ling, Jin, Tong, Tarmizi, & Sahiddan, 2014).

Therefore, as seen in the previous researchers, there are more functions and purposes of the code-switching among the speech community members. However, the research particularly concerning the Chinese code-switching in Indonesia, especially Pontianak, is considered rare or is not available. As a result, the writer intends to find out the functions of the code-switching among the Chinese speech community in Pontianak. To understand more about the Chinese socio-culture and sociolinguistics, the writer will also refer to some previous research, such as a background study of the Chinese people in Indonesia (Lim & Mead, 2011). Another research about the code-switching of the Chinese-English bilinguals is also an essential reference (Li, 1996).

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Code-Switching**

In the bilingual or multilingual societies, there is a common phenomenon where the people talk in some different languages and they change or switch to two or more languages. These different languages are also called linguistic varieties or speech varieties. They also refer to the dialects or different varieties of one

language (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). The phenomenon of switching one language to another language is called code-switching. It is the use of the speech varieties, their combinations and the switching in the same conversation or sentence in the bilingual or multilingual societies or communities (Gardner-Chloros, 2009b). This phenomenon is analyzed frequently in two kinds of researches. The first includes the sociolinguistics analysis and the second is within the framework of linguistic-grammatical analysis (Auer, 1999). The grammar differences between languages including word order of nouns and modifiers in fact do not prevent the code-switching (Myers-Scotton, 2005).

The code-switching can work between the bilingual or multilingual speakers. It is considered as a conversation strategy, where the language users sociologically feel need to use more than one language for particular purposes. However, the code-switching hence is also considered as negative attitude in the term of ‘rude mixture’ where the language change – or language alteration – becomes impure. It is because the code-switching creates a new kind of language used for communication, instead of two or more ‘pure’ separate languages (Gafaranga, 2007). In line with this explanation, Wardhaugh (2006) also explains that code-switching occurs as the conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries and to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations. Further, Wardhaugh explains that “code-switching can arise from individual choice or be used as a major identity marker for a group of speakers who must deal with more than one language in their common pursuits” (2006, p. 101).

### **The Functions of Code-Switching**

Code-switching involves diglossia. It is necessary in the bilingual or multilingual societies since the members of the societies need particular purposes as the reason of their code-switching. It is explained that, “when two languages or language varieties exist side by side in a community and each one is used for different purposes, this is called diglossia.” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 158). Further, Wardhaugh explains that “a diglossic situation exists in a society when it has two distinct codes which show clear functional separation; that is, one code is employed in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set.”

(Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 89). Diglossia therefore is a condition when there are two or more separate codes or languages used in very different situation. Usually, there are two varieties of diglossia. The first is called High variety or H-variety which is used in the government, formal lectures in parliament or legislative body, media and education. The other one is a non-prestigious variety which is called Low variety or L-variety used in the family, with friends or while shopping. This phenomenon is also called as domain-based or situational code-switching (Meyerhoff, 2006).

Diglossia exists in the code-switching because it refers to the purpose of language in bilingual or multilingual societies. Even though code-switching is not necessarily diglossic, both diglossia and code-switching serve similar function in communication, which is to achieve a particular purpose in a set of conversation or communication.

There are many other functions of code-switching. Most code-switching functions are more sociological than linguistic necessity. For example, the code-switching doers in many cases try to identify themselves with their peer-group (Gardner-Chloros, 2009a) or as young-second generation immigrants in a particular country developing a pride in their mixed identity, for instance (Gardner-Chloros, 2009b).

Holmes (2013) provides a comprehensive list of functions and purposes of code-switching as follows:

- 1) Participants functions: When there is the arrival of a new person in a social situation, members of the social group will code-switch either to take positive account of the company of a new member, or to exclude the new member from the group's discussion.
- 2) Solidarity functions: Speakers sometimes code-switch to signal shared ethnicity or social group with a certain addressee.
- 3) Status functions: Speakers alternate the formal or informal standards of a language based on the status of their addressees. For example, an employee would use formal standard when conversing with his superior, but changes to a friendlier informal standard with his coworkers.
- 4) Topic functions: Speakers sometimes code-switch in order to quote a certain saying in a culture which meaning cannot be entirely translated to another language. It is known as switching for referential purpose.

- 5) Switching for affective functions: Code-switching is used to express affective meaning apart from referential function. Sometimes addressees do not need to understand the words to receive affective effect because it can be achieved by regional pronunciation.
- 6) Metaphorical switching: This function of code-switching draws on associations of both codes. Speakers who have high proficiency in more than one code will switch like metaphor to enrich communication.
- 7) Lexical borrowing: When a language reflects lack of vocabulary which can be replaced by another language, code-switching occurs. This often happens when speakers fail to find an appropriate word to be used in a second language and need to borrow from the first language.

### **Language of the Chinese**

What is called by Chinese language is a group of China-related languages spoken by the people of Han. The Hans constitute 94 per cent of the Chinese population. The non-Han languages are considered used by minority peoples of Mongols, Tibetans and other smaller minorities.

Po-Ching(2006a) states that the Chinese language is divided into a number of major dialects with their many sub-dialects. In some cases, the dialects are unintelligible but they are unified with the common script. Mandarin is China's official language and the modern standard Chinese known also as Putonghua. "It is spoken in various sub-dialect forms by 70 per cent of Hans across the northern, central and western regions of the country, but its standard pronunciation and grammar are associated with the Beijing region of north China, though not Beijing city itself" (Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2006a, p. 1). The other dialects are the seven main dialects which consist of Wu (spoken in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, including Shanghai, by 8.4 per cent of Han speakers), Xiang (Hunan, 5 per cent), Cantonese (Guangdong, 5 per cent), Min (Fujian, 4.2 per cent), Hakka (northeast Guangdong and other southern provinces, 4 per cent) and Gan (Jiangxi, 2.4 per cent). Cantonese, Min and Hakka are widely spoken among overseas Chinese communities (Mair, 1991; Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2006a).

The Chinese language is coined as Sinitic language. However, the term dialect in Chinese is still confusing for the linguists since there are many unintelligible

varieties. There are many unintelligible varieties in one province where using one dialect only. In fact, there are perhaps hundreds of Sinitic languages in China (Goddard, 2005).

### **Language and Chinese Dialects in Pontianak**

The Chinese dialects used in Pontianak, the capital city of West Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, is predominantly Hakka (Kèjiā) and Teochew (Cháozhōu), though Mandarin is also very popular nowadays. There are more young Chinese generations who learn Mandarin in the language course or university for some purposes, such as business, going or studying abroad, or even for cultural identity purposes.

The high concentrations of Hakka speakers are located in eastern and northeastern Guangdong Province in China. Significant populations are also found in Fujian, Jiangxi, Guangxi, Hunan, and Sichuan Provinces. Today Hakka speakers are predominantly in Kalimantan (Borneo), especially West Kalimantan. The number even outnumber any Hakka speaker in Indonesia (Lim & Mead, 2011).

Teochew speakers were originated from Fujian Province in China, but relocated to eastern Guangdong Province, possibly beginning as early as the 10th century AD. Teochew speakers settled along Sumatra's east coast, in the Riau Archipelago, and in western Borneo, particularly around Pontianak. In western Borneo, Teochew speakers tended to settle in urban areas and become traders, versus the Hakka who went into mining and agriculture and later became small-time traders in the interior (Lim & Mead, 2011).

Among the Chinese community in Pontianak the use of several languages and dialects, such as Chinese, is necessary to communicate with others. Other codes or languages are also essentially needed, such as Malay and Indonesian. It is because some Chinese can only speak one dialect and they have to switch the language variety into another one in order to be understood. In this case, one can switch to Malay-Chinese accented or to Indonesian not just to be understood but also to identify himself or herself as a part of the Chinese community (Fat, 2008).

### **III. Methodology**

#### **Participants**

##### *Demographics*

A total 10 self-selected people participated in this study. These participants come from various backgrounds such as kindergarten teachers, employees of a company and entrepreneurs who live in Pontianak, Kalimantan Barat and know each other. They come from the Chinese background who speak Indonesian/Malay and Chinese (Hakka, Teochew) well. The mean ages are between 22 to 30 years old.

#### **Language background**

These participants live in Pontianak where two main Chinese dialects – Hakka and Teochew – are spoken actively. However, Indonesian is also spoken actively since their jobs as teachers, employees and entrepreneurs are necessary for them to communicate in Indonesian.

Information regarding the participants' language background was obtained from the participants themselves. These participants are fluent both in Indonesian and Chinese. Even though all of the 10 participants are fluent in Chinese and understand each other well when they are communicating using the language, Indonesian and Malay are most used and is more preferable as the first language, before they use Chinese.

#### **Design and Procedure**

The participants were told that the researcher was interested in their conversation. Therefore the researcher conducted interview with open-ended questions “so that the participant can best voice the experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings”(Creswell, 2012) and recorded their conversation. In this case, the interview would be a focus group interview which can be explained as “the process of collecting data through interviews with a group of people, typically four to six. The researcher asks a small number of general questions and elicits responses from all individuals in the group. Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely

yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218).

The interviews were done in various events. The group did not always gather around in one place. The researcher conducted the interview separately though within the group but with the same members or participants.

The interview was done to collect the data concerning the functions of their code-switching including where, when and in what condition did this code-switching take place. The researcher also recorded and made notes when the participants naturally switched code when they were communicating to each other.

#### **IV. Finding and Discussion**

The discussion involved the Chinese transliteration into Roman alphabet. There are two commonest Romanization systems are Wade-Giles and the *Pinyin* (Hu & Allen, 2005). The most common and straightforward transliteration of Chinese characters into western is *Pinyin*. However, since the codes used are not Mandarin Chinese, there are some sounds which are not recognizable in Mandarin. Wade-Giles, as the result, is used by the writer to cover the sounds of the Teochew and Hakka codes. The sentence of a dialogue would be translated into English. The Chinese sentences, phrases or words would be italicized.

There are three categories to code the language use of the participants. They are:

- 1) Indonesian/Malay only: All phrases in one turn were Indonesian/Malay, with no code-switching to Chinese.
- 2) Chinese only: All phrases in one turn were Chinese (whether Teochew or Hakka), with no code-switching to Indonesian/Malay.
- 3) Mixed language: Both languages were used within the same turn (one word or more).

It was found therefore that the code-switching was often used in line with Holmes’s code-switching functions (Holmes, 2013). For example the participant and solidarity functions where the participants would switch to the Chinese whenever they met a new member of social group in order to make the intimate, familiar and warm situation.

Some participants explained that there are some phrases in Teochew Chinese which cannot be entirely translated into Indonesian or Malay.



For example, when the day was cloudy and it seemed going to rain heavily, they would say:

A : Sepertinya mau hujan. (It seems going to rain).

B : Bukan lagi. *Ou ti am ti*. (Sure it is. It is very cloudy. Literally means the sky is dark, the earth is dark.)

In this case, they code switch to make a topic function.

In different case, some participants worked as kindergarten and elementary school. Most of their students were also Chinese. However, since the schools were national and public school, the language use was Indonesian. The code-switching occurred when many children need to be persuaded to do something. Since the students were children and their mother tongues are Chinese, the participants who worked as teachers should code switch into Chinese by implementing affective function.

For example a teacher asked a student why she looked sad and quiet during the class by switching into fully Chinese: *Co ni me la?* (What happens? What is wrong?). The use of this phrase and warm intonation is used to get the affective function of code-switching.

However, despite these there were some unique cases where the code-switching was used to function as:

#### 1) Justifying or reassuring function

The function of the code-switching is to justify or reassure a particular meaning or expression. The code-switching also strengthens the meaning or expression delivered by the speaker in the form of Chinese sentences, phrases or words.

For example, in a conversation, two participants were discussing a place for hang out. To show the respondent about the place which was located in an obvious place, one speaker switched code to fully Teochew Chinese to reassure the respondent.

Lika : Pernah ke Chocobean gak? (Have you ever been to Chocobean?)

Selvia : Dimana itu? (Where is it?)

Lika : Yang dekat rumahmu (The one near your house)

Selvia : Yang mana?(Which one?)

Lika : *Ken ken le kai chuei a*. (reassuring: the one near your house!)

Another example of the code-switching justifying and reassuring function was the phrases in Chinese. These phrases used in order to justify and reassure the expression. By switching the code into Chinese, the speaker did not have to repeat the expression as it is usually practiced in linguistic situation when a person wants to reassure his or her information or expression.

Sherren : Menurutmu bagaimana makanan di sana? (What do you think about the food there? How does it taste?)

Ivan : *Ho ciak* kok. (It is surely good, delicious)

## 2) Emotional function

Usually the participants switched important and 'strong' phrases into Chinese. In this case most phrases were in the negative meaning since the emotional function concerning the anger or another negative feeling or emotion. For example the phrase *bo eng* which literally means 'not good' but it used as code-switching action when the speaker intended to show anger or distrust or dislike to a person's negative or unkind attitude.

Another phrase example is *lau je* which is used to express a particular emotion in addressing a procrastinator, a person who is slow is slow in doing something and procrastinating.

The Teochew Chinese also recognizes the phrase *siao nang* which literally means 'a crazy person'. This phrase often used by the participants when they code-switched in a conversation. This phrase has rather 'lighter' emotional function. It was used when the speaker did not agree what a person did. However, the expression is more like cracking a joke. For example, a person is doing something considered silly or stupid, the other replied with, *siao nang a* (you are insane, you are crazy).

## 3) Numbering function

This is the most often used code-switching function. According to the interview, the participants often switched the code of numbering into Chinese because the numbers in Chinese were considered much simpler than of Indonesian or Malay. Numbers, including prices, are an important element in Chinese life and culture (Fat, 2008). The system of number in Chinese is quite unique yet simple. The numbers ranging from eleven to ninety-nine are combinations of members of the basic set one to ten (Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2006b).

For example there was a buyer-seller conversation of one of the participants:

Merry : *Beli gula no kilo* (I need (want to buy) two kilos of sugar)

Seller : *Cek kilo cek buan. No kilo no buan.* (Ten thousand (Rupiah) for one kilo. It becomes twenty thousand (Rupiah) for two kilos).

Merry : *Kopi cek pau.* (One sachet of coffee, please)

Seller : *Buan ngow.* (It is fifteen thousand (Rupiah)).

It can be seen that by switching the numbers and price, the conversation run smoothly and naturally.

#### 4) Bargaining/business talk function.

Usually the speakers switch the code into all Chinese when it got to the more intense or serious matter. As it is known that there are not all of the Chinese are 'gifted' with their Chinese physical characteristics. Some Chinese do not look like Chinese. Somehow, this unique situation can make a big different when it comes to the business talk. A seller when knowing that the buyer 'candidate' is a Chinese, or at least Chinese descendant via physical characteristics, would give the best price compare to the non-Chinese buyer.

The problem comes when a Chinese buyer does not have that characteristic. The seller will simply consider this person as a non-Chinese, therefore the business talk will not run as it is expected.

An example of how a code-switching run in a business talk or conversation.

Lika : *Baju ini berapa harganya?* (How much for this dress?)

Seller : *Delapan puluh ribu dek.*(Eighty thousand (Rupiah))

(*Dek* from *adek* is a word used to address a younger person. Literally means 'little sister' or 'little brother').

Lika : *Alaa ... hiok kui, Cek. Boi hiaw kiam ho wa!*(Oh my. That is too expensive. Can you make it into sixty (thousand Rupiah?)) (*Cek* in Chinese is used to address a much older and more mature person. Literally means 'uncle').

Seller : (Realizing that the buyer code-switching into Chinese, answered it in Chinese also). *Boi hiaw, Lek. Bo than le kui ma. Chit buan ho la.* (I can't. I only take a little profit with this price. But I give you seventy thousand (Rupiah) then.) (*Lek* in Teochew Chinese is addressed to a much younger girl. Literally means 'little sister')

Lika : *Oh, ho la.* (Okay then).

It can be seen in this conversation then, the price is easily bargained when using Chinese. The seller had the trust with the buyer since he realized that the buyer was also a Chinese. Both of them understood the business condition that made the buyer was honest by saying that the price did not give him high profit. Therefore, as the result, the seller gave the best price to the buyer.

## V. Conclusion

The code-switching of the speech community in Pontianak has several functions. The general functions of the code-switching such as social functions, as always, take the biggest portion. Other functions concerned with the lexical matters, whenever the Chinese speaker is unable to find the appropriate words, phrases or expression in Indonesian or Malay, he or she automatically switches to the mother tongue.

However, there were different functions found in this research. First, justifying or reassuring function, where the speaker would switch the code into Chinese to strengthen the information or expression. Second was emotional function where the code-switching happened when the emotion or feeling took place. This code-switching function was in the form of Chinese phrases or expressions which were considered 'strong' in delivering the message. Third was numbering function, where the use of numbers is very necessary for the Chinese. The last was bargaining/business talk function which was another important element in the social function of code-switching. This research therefore is beneficial in enriching the code-switching researches especially those concerning Chinese communities.

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