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# Juggling Two Languages: Malay-English Bilinguals' Code-switching Behavior in Singapore

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**Abstract**

This paper investigates the frequency and functions of code-switching in the bilingual Malay-English community in Singapore. In this paper, recorded conversations between Malay-English bilinguals were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Code-switching has been thought of as a messy misappropriation of the language, especially in the Singaporean context where accuracy of language use is held in high regard. However, the recorded conversations show that code-switching is utilized strategically by Singaporean Malay bilingual speakers. It is observed that code-switching patterns differ inter-generationally and the linguistic choices made during code-switching by the younger speakers contrast distinctively with those of the older speakers. Since the Malays constitute the second-largest ethnic group in Singapore, insights on their code-switching patterns are relevant and timely in understanding an inherent language practice that reflects the community's relationship with their language while simultaneously navigating through an English-dominant country. Finally, this paper argues that code-switching is a communication tool undertaken by bilingual speakers during conversations with specific functions and regular frequency, and not a sign of linguistic incompetence.

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**The Impurity of Mixing Languages**

In 1982, Singapore's Malay Language Council, an organisation sanctioned by the Singapore government, launched the Malay Language Month. This was to be the first of such subsequent language campaigns in later years, the aim of which was to implement and celebrate efforts to speak 'proper' Malay. One of the reasons behind the campaign was, according to the council, to stop the Malay speakers' free mixing of words, perceived to be "polluting" the language, and feared to result in the deterioration and degeneration of the Malay language if left unchecked. The Malay Language Month, therefore, was designed to "arrest further deterioration of the Malay Language which could turn into a patois – a kind of pidgin worse than what we now know as "bazaar Malay'" (Fong, 1982).

This mixing of languages, what linguists would refer to as "code-switching", is a common and natural phenomenon. Code-switching is particularly prevalent in multilingual societies, and has been well-recorded and studied in multilingual nations around the world, including Southeast Asian states such as the Philippines (Bernardo, 2005; Sibayan, 1985) and Malaysia (Kow, 2003; Muthusamy, 2009). Unfortunately, code-switching has also often been seen in political spheres and by language purists as a bastardization of the pure and traditional language (Gumperz, 1982), and in Singapore, also thought to be used by speakers "for the sake of convenience" (Fong, 1982). But code-switching is "not a haphazard mixing of two languages brought about by laziness or ignorance" (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 107). Code-switching is a linguistic tool utilized to achieve various communicative objectives. Studies have shown that code-switching is employed to assert authority (David, 2003; Halim & Maros, 2014), to express tense, aspect or mood (Pfaff, 1979), as a personal marker of identity (Fuller, 2007; Gumperz, 1982) or class and group affiliation (Fought, 2003), to begin or strengthen relationships, to explain a lexical term (David, Hei, McLellan, & Hashim, 2009), and to display upward social mobility (Gardner-Chloros, 2009), amongst many other functions.

There has been extensive research on code-switching amongst bilingual speakers of a large number of languages. Studies have looked at code-mixing in Spanish-English bilinguals (Toribio, 2002), code-switching frequencies in French-English Canadians (Poplack, 1987), group and class markers amongst Chicano-English speakers (Fought, 2003), online code-switching in Greek-Cypriot speakers (Themistocleous, 2015), and across many countries (see e.g. Heller, 1988; Jacobson, 2001). In Singapore, there have also been studies on code-switching, though

most have been focused on the code-switching patterns in the Singaporean Chinese community. For example, Tay (1989) analyzed how code-switching and code-mixing using English, Mandarin, Hokkien, and Teochew served as a communicative strategy for elucidation and interpretation and to establish rapport and solidarity between speakers in a multilingual discourse. Kamwangamalu and Lee (1991) explored whether a matrix language existed in the code-mixed utterances spoken by Chinese-English bilinguals in Singapore. In the most recent work on this topic, albeit a good 15 years ago, Lee (2003) looked at the motivations of code-switching in Chinese-English bilinguals in Singapore.

Even though the Malay community may be one of Singapore's three major ethnic groups and there is a substantial community of Malay-English bilinguals in Singapore, there has not been a study on Malay-English code-switching in Singapore specifically looking at the functions and purpose of its usage in interactional discourse. Most studies on code-switching in Malay-English bilinguals have, in fact, been primarily conducted in Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. In this paper, we seek to analyze and understand the code-switching patterns of Malay-English bilinguals in Singapore. By looking at the code-switching patterns of participants from two different generations, we specifically seek to unveil how speakers use code-switching as a language practice to affect communication. We do this by providing a quantitative analysis of code-switching frequency and also a qualitative analysis of the functions and motivations of code-switching in these speakers.

**What is Code-switching?**

The topic of code-switching as a scholarly study gained traction in the 1970s. Since then, it has been a subject of interest to scholars who have examined it from different theoretical or grammatical perspectives, methodologies, and across languages. Depending on the approach to the topic, code-switching has also been subjected to a range of definitions. Early scholars' definitions of code-switching were concerned with what constituted different codes. Bell (1976), for example, defined code-switching as a tool that "allows its user to be seen as a chooser amongst codes whether the codes are styles, dialects or what are normally thought of as autonomous languages since any or all of these can be involved in the code-switching behavior of the language user" (p. 110). Hudson (1980), while following the definition, also included different varieties of the same language as different codes. Blom and Gumperz (1972) framed code-switching as an alternation of languages that acts as an interactional tool with social

functions and speakers can choose to switch codes when there is a change in topic or when there is a change in their perception of the other interlocutor. These early definitions tried to capture code-switching as a form of bilingual behavior which could inform us of a universal linguistic structure. These definitions also tried to fit code-switching patterns into specific taxonomies bound by strict linguistic systems. However, in reality, the boundaries between codes are not clear and there is no clear line that can show one language switching to another (Heller, 2007).

Over the years, other scholars have tried to provide a more precise definition and description of code-switching, which inadvertently becomes confusing as they try to segment discourse into distinct turn-taking moments. The main point of contention is the distinction between *code-switching* and *code-mixing.* In general, scholars agree broadly that code-switching refers to the alternation between languages, while maintaining the grammatical characteristics unique to each language. Code-mixing, on the other hand, refers to situations where there is convergence between the two languages, such as the adoption of suffixes, or other inflectional or lexical morphemes. However, the segregation of these two creates confusion because often, these two processes occur jointly during the span of discourse (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Hamers & Blanc, 2000). Hence, the concept of code-switching has been largely understood under the general term of the alternation of two or more languages in the same conversation, where switching can occur between turns of different speakers during the conversation, between utterances in a single turn, or within a single utterance, and codes can also include different varieties of the same language (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Milroy & Muysken, 1995; Myers-Scotton, 1993). In this paper, we take the above as the working definition of code-switching that underlies the analyses that we carry out. We hold the belief that discourse is fluid and not rigid or formulaic in nature, and thus, code-switching during conversations is not restricted to rigid turn-taking moments.

Gumperz (1971) is one of the first scholars who shifted the focus from defining codes in code-switching to thinking about code-switching as an interactive tool used by bilinguals. More importantly, as Gumperz (1982) highlighted, code-switching functions roughly the same way across different language situations. Past research on bilingual speech behavior has in fact revealed that there are regularities in the ways that bilinguals switch codes (e.g. Gumperz, 1971; Jurgens, 2015; Pfaff, 1979; Poplack, 1987; Themistocleus, 2015). Poplack's (1987) comparison of two English bilingual communities, for example, shows similar categorical functions of code-

switching use during discourse. Furthermore, Poplack's (1980) study on Spanish-English speakers reveals that code-switching forms an integral part of the community's linguistic behavior. It is also observed that bilingual speakers frequently code-switch intra-sententially, with sequential fragments of alternate languages that are grammatical to the language of origin (Poplack, 1980, 1987). This ensures the linear coherence of sentence structure of the speaker, without omitting content. This has also been observed in a variety of bilingual communities, for example, Finnish-English (Poplack, 1987) and Tamil-English (Sankoff, Poplack, & Vanniarajan, 1990), where speakers show a general tendency to switch codes intra-sententially.

Gumperz (1982) also developed a taxonomy that has helped shape future discussions of code-switching in discourse. Blom and Gumperz (1972) further formulated a typology that distinguished between situational and metaphorical code-switching. This distinction helped account for the ways in which domains contribute to a bilingual's language use, and explain the ways in which bilinguals utilize their linguistic resources based on domains. Since then, there have been an increasing number of code-switching studies that define it as a conversational strategy with distinct functions (e.g. Auer, 1984; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Zentella, 1997). Myers-Scotton (1993), for example, has shown how code-switching is a way for multilingual speakers to index social relationships and which offers users flexibility in expression through the languages employed. Similarly, Gumperz (1982) discussed code-switching as a strategy and a personalization function in which users can switch codes to manipulate the conversation or create a desired meaning. In addition, speakers can also switch between languages depending on the context, conversational participants, and linguistic situations. Gumperz's (1982) typology of code-switching functions has since been continuously expanded and supplemented by other studies, and now includes functions such as persuasion, reiteration, or message qualification (e.g. Kow, 2003; Poplack, 1980, 1987).

The most recent expansion of the typology can be seen in Halim and Maros' (2014) study on the functions of code-switching in Malaysian Malay-speaking youths. In this study, Malaysian youths were found to employ code-switching skills as strategies to assert their identity, express their membership in a particular group, or represent the society's current dominant language in both oral and written discourse. There have also been a number of studies on the functions of code-switching in Malay across different domains, both informal and formal. David's (2003) study on code-switching in Malaysian courtrooms showed that even in such

formal domains, code-switching has become a habitual practice. The study noted that speakers code-switched strategically, for situational reasons, depending on their interlocutor, or to emphasize a point in their argument. In another study also using a typology of code-switching functions, Kow (2003) focused on pre-schoolers in the classrooms of Malaysia. Kow observed that even pre-schoolers can and will code-switch to fulfill different communicative functions. Kow (2003) listed some of the discourse functions that code-switching can fulfill, further expanding on the list of functions as mentioned earlier. Some of these functions are: compensating for the lack of a lexical term in one language, clarifying a misunderstanding, creating a communication effect, emphasizing a point, expressing group solidarity, or even excluding a person from the conversation. Code-switching can therefore be seen to provide its speakers with an innovative strategy during communication to fulfill or achieve certain nuanced communicative goals.

While past research on Malay-English code-switching, such as that mentioned above, has come up with a list of code-switching functions, little has been done to show how frequently these functions are employed. For instance, David et al. (2009) focused on the functions of code-switching in the family domain amongst Malay-English bilinguals in Malaysia while Ariffin and Husin (2011) looked at the attitudes and frequency of the phenomenon in classrooms. In Brunei, Martin (1996, 2005) investigated the language shift and code-switching amongst the Belait community and showed how code-switching happens in the classroom. Code-switching in Indonesia, on the other hand, has been investigated in relation to region and tribal languages (e.g. Goebel, 2002; Sumarsih, Bahri, & Sanjaya, 2014; Supiani, 2016).

As shown above, studies have been done on code-switching by Malay speakers in Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia, but there has been comparatively little research looking at code-switching in the Malay community in Singapore. A small number of studies have shown that the Singaporean Malay community engages in code-switching at home and, increasingly, on social media platforms as well. For instance, Soon et al. (2014) observed that there was a predominance of code-switching in blog entries of the Malay community, covering a medley of different topics. According to this study, bloggers who blogged in Malay were compelled to code-switch because it was assumed that their readers would be more comfortable with the dual-language style, and also in part due to their lack of competency in some particular lexical domains. In another study looking at how code-switching happens in the Islamic religious

classrooms in Singapore, Ong and Chew (2013), showed how code-switching is used as a tool to clarify instructions by capitalizing on the common language between students and teachers. While Singapore's Malay community may be perceived to be similar to those in Malay-speaking nations mentioned above, one must note that Singapore has very different language policies and educational systems from other Malay-dominant nations such as Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. Sociolinguistically, Singapore's Malay community has also been reported to be experiencing a language shift from Malay to English, especially amongst youths (see Cavallaro & Serwe, 2010; Chong & Seilhamer, 2014). The biggest difference in Singapore lies in the premium placed on the English language that affords its speakers and anyone proficient in it to have social mobility in Singapore. The lingua franca and working language of Singapore is also English, unlike her neighboring Malay-speaking nations. It is therefore likely that code-switching patterns of the Malay-English bilinguals in Singapore would differ from those in countries like Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia.

This paper will analyze the code-switching data based on an adapted version of the typology of functions provided by Poplack (1980) and Kow (2003), together with the quantitative approach put forth by Poplack (1987). However, these functions will be adapted to suit the data set collected from the Singaporean Malay-English bilingual speakers.

**Methodology**

In order to examine the frequency of code-switching in Singapore's English-Malay community, approximately four hours of spontaneous conversations were recorded. An exhaustive examination of their code-switching functions was performed qualitatively, and tabulated according to these functions. The quantitative analysis of the functions of code-switching was adopted from Poplack (1987), and adapted according to the data. These functions have been counted and tabulated for the frequency of their occurrences in the conversations.

**Participants**

A total of twenty participants took part in the study and were divided into two different age groups. All participants involved in the study were Singaporeans who were Malay-English bilinguals and had at least 12 years of formal education. Ten participants engaged in the study were between the ages of 20 and 29 and the other ten were aged between 50 and 69. Participants were grouped with three or four people from the same age group to participate in a group

conversation. The conversations were then recorded and transcribed. The reasoning behind the separation of generations is that previous studies have shown that despite previous descriptions of Malay as a language resilient to language shift in Singapore's community (Stroud, 2007), Cavallaro and Serwe (2010) noted that English use among Malay Singaporeans has in fact been steadily increasing at home. The percentage of English as a home language for Malays has more than doubled from 1990 to 2005. Chong and Seilhamer (2014), in their paper, found that Malay participants aged 18 and 26 self-reported to be using English predominantly in their everyday activities. What is particularly pertinent, as observed by Cavallaro and Serwe (2010), is that Malay speakers alter their language choices according to the interlocutor. Generally, when speaking to someone older, the Malay language would be used more frequently than when speaking with siblings. In this regard, it becomes important to also look into possible differences between participants of different age groups.

Participants were solicited via the authors' social network, and respondents participating in the same conversation were in the same social network as well. All the participants were reported to speak Malay at home. While the older participants had different educational backgrounds and levels, the younger participants consisted of four working professionals and six undergraduates. The recorded conversations were held in public spaces such as cafés and restaurants and once at home, usually over a meal. Participants were instructed to hold their conversations as normally as possible and were not told which language to use. Each conversation lasted an average of 40 minutes. Conversational topics were left to the participants to decide and they ranged from personal stories to discussions of social issues. Each conversation was then transcribed and analyzed (see Appendix A for a short transcription of the old Malay speakers' conversations, and Appendix B for the young Malay speakers' conversations).

The analysis that follows will discuss, in order of frequency, the functions of code-switching in the Singaporean Malay-English bilinguals. Additionally, the analysis will also provide a generational comparison between the young and old speakers so as to ascertain if there is a difference between the two groups of speakers.

**Analysis**

Table 1 below shows the frequency of the code-switching functions in the young and old Malay-English bilinguals.

**Table 1. Frequency of functions of code-switching in the young and old Malay-English bilinguals in Singapore**

|  | YOUNG | OLD |
|---|---|---|
| *Functions of code-switching* | **%** | **%** |
| Grammatical categories | 12.7 | 16.4 |
| Seeking affirmation, clarification | 15.4 | 8.2 |
| Topic/domain association | 11.4 | 11.6 |
| Create a communication effect | 14.0 | 7.6 |
| Practicality | 8.3 | 11.3 |
| Proper names | 6.1 | 12.4 |
| Repetition, translation, explanation | 8.3 | 9.6 |
| Expression | 10.1 | 5.5 |
| Temporal categories | 4.0 | 5.5 |
| Terms of affiliation | 6.1 | 2.4 |
| Reported speech | 2.6 | 1.4 |
| Acquired terms | 0 | 3.1 |

From Table 1, it is clear that there were no distinct similarities in the patterns of code-switching functions for both generations. Both groups had their own unique patterns of code-switching, and did not favor one choice prominently over the others. The older generation code-switched the most in grammatical categories, and when using proper names. The young participants, on the other hand, tended to switch codes more frequently when seeking affirmation, clarification and when they intended to create a certain communication effect (at 15.4% compared to 8.2%). Interestingly, code-switching for acquired terms was almost non-existent amongst young speakers, while it was in fact employed by the old speakers. Another interesting point to note is that both generations switched codes at nearly the same frequency when associating with a certain topic or domain. These will be discussed in more detail in the later sections.

**Table 2. Syntactical occurrences of code-switching**

|  |  | YOUNG | OLD |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | % | % |
| Intra-sentential |  | 81.3 | 80.5 |
| Sentential |  | 11.1 | 14.7 |
| At turn boundary |  | 7.6 | 4.9 |

There was also no discernible difference in the syntactic locations of code-switching between the two groups of speakers. As can be seen from Table 2, more than 80% of code-switching for both groups occurred intra-sententially. It is important to note that these occurrences were fluently executed, with a smooth transition from one language to another. These intra-sentential switches were not flagged by false starts, hesitations or lengthy pauses, and appeared to be indicative of the speakers' highly developed linguistic skill in both languages.

Perhaps the most striking observation drawn from the analyzed recorded conversations is the difference in code-switching direction between generations. The speakers from the older generation tended to code-switch into English, while maintaining large parts of their conversation in Malay. For the participants in the younger generation however, most of their conversations were conducted in English, and code-switching was done in Malay. This pattern can be seen in the examples provided in the section below[8]. The following section will be organized according to the highest combined percentage of code-switches.

**Grammatical categories.** In this category, code-switching is used to substitute grammatical functions such as intensifiers, conjunctions, possessive forms, fillers or prepositional terms of one language with those of another.

|  | (1) | **I saw one, <u>yang</u> mulia jay is it?** |
| Farah(YNG) | | I saw one, CONJ mulia jay is it? |

|  | (2) | **Then <u>yang Nabilah punya</u> is what?** |
| Maria(YNG) | | Then CONJ Nabilah POSS is what? |

|  | (3) | **Termasuk kad semua. <u>Then</u> dier ader kek, berkat la.** |
| Rosa(OLD) | | Inclusive of cards everything. Then they have cake, door gifts too. |
|  | (4) | **Udang penyet takde, takde <u>that one</u> ah?** |
| Musa(OLD) | | Udang penyet don't have *that one* ah? |

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[8] The conversational transcripts are taken from different speakers. Speakers are given pseudonyms and labelled "YNG" to refer to speakers of the younger generation, while "OLD" refers to the speakers from the older generation. The actual transcript is in bold, with the English gloss directly below it.

As can be seen from the data above, grammatical category code-switching does not fulfill any conversational goal for the speaker and can be done on the phrasal level (e.g. in (2)) or at the word level (e.g. (1) and (4)). The grammatical substitution does not negate the statement's meaning and when applied wrongly, can render the sentence grammatically incorrect. This is evidence that while code-switching is spontaneous, it also plays a grammatical function in bilinguals' conversations. It is also consistent with Poplack's (1980, 1987) study on Spanish-English and French-English speakers. In Poplack's work, bilingual speakers switched seamlessly between languages and were seemingly unaware of the switch. Furthermore, the switched item or phrases fit grammatically into the utterance, and if used differently, would make the sentence grammatically unsound.

**Seeking affirmation/clarification.** This category refers to code-switching instances that provide emphasis so as to seek affirmation or clarification. In (5), the speaker switched from English to Malay in order to clarify her question which was previously misunderstood.


(5)        **No, no but *dorang berbual pasal ape?***

Mary(YNG)        No, no, but what did they talk about?



 In (6), the speaker uses English primarily, but uses "tau" and "kan" in Malay as affirmation markers.

(6)        **It is. She's like trying to get the numbers down la, 10 sets *tau*!**

Mary(YNG)        **That's a lot *kan*?**

            It is. She's like trying to get the numbers down DISC PART, 10 sets did you know! That's a lot right?


The same happens with the Malay speakers from the older generation. The transcript in (7) shows the older Malay speaker switching from Malay to English for the purpose of clarifying her statement by giving more information about the venue of the reception.


(7)        **Er *atas, atas, atas*. Eh sorry, *jemputan atas*. <u>But it's here also,**

Aish(OLD)        **and that side.</u>**

Er, (it's) upstairs, upstairs, upstairs. Eh sorry, the reception is upstairs. But it's here also, and that side.

**Topic/domain association.** Topic/domain association refers to the language switch speakers make when they speak about a specific topic or domain. A notable feature from the data (see Table 1) is the close similarity, both at approximately 11%, in both groups' tendency to switch when they associated a language with a topic or domain, most prominently when it came to religion and technology. It is important to note that code-switching happened topically, and did not pertain only to specific religious or technological terms. This is better illustrated in the examples that follow.

| | |
|---|---|
| (8) | **Eh, do you guys like run in your _tudung_? Like exercise?** |
| Maria(YNG) | Eh, do you guys like run in your _hijab_? Like exercise? |

| | |
|---|---|
| (9) | **HAHA So no, they send, they actually send the _niat_ there at** |
| Jane(YNG) | **the Whatsapp group.** |
| | HAHA So no, they send, they actually send the "intention" there at the Whatsapp group. |
| Mary(YNG) | **Like the _doa_ la?** |
| | Like the prayer DISC PART? |
| | **Ya. _Ni, niat mencari ilmu dari mengajar_=** |
| Jane(YNG) | Ya. This, "intention" is to receive knowledge from lessons= |
| | **So you _kene bace_?** |
| Mary(YNG) | So you have to read? |

| | |
|---|---|
| (10) | **OH MY GOD! We have like _DOA sebelum mengajar, doa_** |
| Jane(YNG) | **_selepas mengajar_ and then _doa – biler_ time with the students.** |
| | **Like when the class starts, we have to read.** |
| | OH MY GOD! We have like prayers before teaching, prayers after teaching and then prayers – during time with the students. Like when the class starts, we have to read. |

In the examples above, the young Malay speakers switched to Malay when they referred to religious terms such as "prayers", terms with religious connotations (as in (9)), and the Muslim woman's headscarf. In (8), Maria(YNG) switched to Malay to refer to a Muslim headscarf, or commonly known as "hijab". Similarly in (9), Jane(YNG) code-switched to the Malay term "niat". The term "niat" can be loosely translated to having sincere and holy intentions, and it is a word that is sometimes used in a prayer. However, we see that code-switching went beyond word-only substitutions as they also occurred at the phrasal level. This is exemplified in (9) and (10) where speakers switched to Malay despite having the English equivalents to the terms.

Code-switching here serves to illustrate certain concepts in Islam whose purpose will not be better served if they are translated into English. This is perhaps not surprising, given the relationship between Islam and the Malay language in Singapore. In Singapore, the Malays are primarily Muslims, and those who are not would most likely still be familiar with Islamic religious rules, contexts, and terms. The current consensus still holds Malay Muslims to be a monolithic category and there is no clear division between religion and ethnicity. In fact, this definition and categorization of Malay-Muslims was first recorded by the British in British Malaya, and it was said that the most important aspect of a Malay is that he/she had to be Muslim (Khoo, 2006). As a result, there is a close correlation between the use of Malay and the Islamic practice in Singapore. Recent scholarly articles (e.g. Aman, 2009; Bakar, 2015; Ong & Chew, 2013) have also observed that young, primary-school-aged Malay students use mainly Malay in the domain of religion, and that the community believes that Islam must be learnt in Malay. As such, it is also said that it is precisely the use of Malay in religious instruction that has played an important role in maintaining the use of Malay in Singapore (Kassim, 2008). As religious classes and sermons are regularly held in Malay, speakers are likely to assume that the interlocutor understands them due to the close association between the language and the topic. However, as can be seen in (9), the code-switching in this study went beyond the specific religious terms. Even non-religious terms such as "receiving knowledge from lessons", "have to read", and "before teaching, prayers after teaching" were referred to in Malay, suggesting therefore that the domain association is a trigger for the code-switching to occur.

For the older speakers, it was observed that they had a tendency to switch from Malay to English when the topic was associated with technology. In (11) and (12) respectively, the speakers were talking about the functions of a phone or a lamp.

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| (11)   | **Eh-*Kenapa* you <u>mute</u>?** |
| Irah(OLD) | Eh- Why did you mute (the phone)? |

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| (12)   | ***Boleh* <u>on</u>. *Boleh* <u>on</u>.** |
| Ain(OLD) | Can (switch it) on. Can (switch it) on. |
|        | ***Boleh* <u>on</u> *ke*? Oh, ah ah, *ader* <u>off</u>.** |
| Aisha(OLD) | Can (switch it) on is it? Oh, ah ah, there's (an) off (switch). |

There was clearly an association between English and technology, making English the language of technology. The lexical terms 'mute', 'on', and 'off' have their Malay equivalents. However, the examples in (11) and (12) show that the speakers still code-switched into English. It is clear that speakers did not switch codes due to the lack of suitable terminology in the other language, but rather, the switch was made based on topics. This pattern was consistently seen in the data collected from both the young and old participants. Youths almost always spoke about religion in Malay while the older speakers kept the technological jargon in English.

**Communication effect.** This function refers to code-switching when it is used to emphasize a topic, persuade, exaggerate or to tease or joke with friends. For example, in (13), the speaker switched from English to Malay to emphasize how incredibly easy on the ears someone's accent was.

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| (13)   | **There's this ah person I follow and his English is super *<u>sedap</u>*** |
| Nur(YNG) | ***<u>tau</u>*. Like *<u>sedap</u>*er than mine!** |
|        | There's this person I follow (on social media) and his English is super lovely to listen to you know! Like nicer than mine! |

And in (14), we see the speaker choosing to switch into Malay when persuading his friend to try something new.

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| (14)   | **HAHAH! So funny! *<u>Cuba la… Cuba pergi!</u>* Bukit Gombak** |
| Lyn(YNG) | **used to have! But I don't know-** |

HAHA! (That's) so funny! You should try… Try check it out! Bukit Gombak used to have (it)! But I don't know-

This function was not restricted to only the young speakers. When the older participants intended to create a communication effect, they also code-switched into English to exaggerate (in 15) and to tease their friend about their romantic life (in 16).

| | |
|---|---|
| (15) | ***Sebelah sana, you kena jalan <u>all the way there!</u>*** |
| Aish(OLD) | Over on that side, you have to walk all the way there! |

| | |
|---|---|
| (16) | **HAHA!** ***Bagus jugak, <u>boleh beli letak kat rumah</u>*****. Candle light dinner.** |
| Ain(OLD) | HAHA! Not a bad idea, I can buy and place it at home. Candle light dinner |
| | **HAHA! Ain** *nak* **<u>candle light Encik Sufi? HAHA! Anniversary?</u>** |
| Fitri(OLD) | HAHA! Ain, you want (to have a) candle light dinner with Mr. Sufi? HAHA! Anniversary? |

**Practicality.** This function refers to speakers who code-switch when the language can accurately describe a feeling or an action succinctly without compromising the nuanced meanings a language conveys. In (17), the speaker used the word "leper" as an adjective to mean "flat" or "a lack of volume". However, the original definition refers to the depth of a plate, specifically to mean "shallow", yet the meaning of "leper" has evolved to generically mean "flat".

| | |
|---|---|
| (17) | ***Ya lah, pasal* before-<u>*balik rumah*</u><u>, ah then *leper*</u>*, lepas mandi*, it's still like <u>*leper*</u>.** |
| Lyn(YNG) | Ya DISC PART because before – going home, ah then (my hair has no volume), after taking a shower, it's still like (has no volume). |

Mutual understanding of terms or phrases is also exemplified in (18), where both speakers understood the social stratification, privileges, and status the term "anak menteri" carries.

| (18) | **Oh it's the _anak menteri_** |
| Ana(YNG) | Oh, it's the politician's child. |
| Imah(YNG) | **OH! He is _anak menteri_?** |
| | OH! He is a politician's child? |

Being an "anak menteri" or a Malaysian politician's child sets the tone that the person comes from an elite background. It may also imply negative characteristics, such as being materialistic or entitled. The same went for the older speakers, as shown in (19) and (20), where terms like 'fastfood' or 'factory outlet' were in English, and not Malay.

| (19) | _Sini takde_ <u>fastfood</u> _ke_? |
| Musa(OLD) | There's no fastfood places here? |

| (20) | _Yang tuari_ **you** _pergi_ **Bandung you** _pergi_ <u>**which factory outlet?**</u> |
| Ain(OLD) | The other day you went to Bandung, you went to which factory outlet? |

**Proper names.** This category refers to code-switching instances where speakers choose to stick to the proper name of a place, event, festival, regardless of the language, as evident in (21) and (22).

| (21) | **Guys, you must understand how much this girl posts on her** |
| Nur(YNG) | **Instagram! I can't scroll down unt-until _hari raya_!** |
| | *Hari Raya is the annual Muslim festival that marks the end of Ramadan, known internationally as Eid. |

In (22), the speaker did not change the name of a nursing home, and in fact, the term "nursing home" also appeared in English.

| | |
|---|---|
| (22) | ***Dier kesian laki dah meninggal. Tinggalkan dier dalam <u>nursing</u>*** |
| Ali(OLD) | <u>**home, Sunshine Welfare Association of**</u>= |
| | She's a pity, her husband passed away. Left her in a nursing home, |
| | Sunshine welfare association of= |

**Repetition/translation/explanation.** Poplack (1987) referred to this function as speakers who switch codes when they are explaining or translating, as exemplified in (23), where Nur(YNG) explained that the stall owner had given Ana(YNG) the wrong pasta sauce.

| | |
|---|---|
| (23) Ana(YNG) | **I asked for mushroom.** |
| Nur(YNG) | **Really? HAHA** |
| Ana(YNG) | **And then she put cream. So**= |
| Nur(YNG) | =<u>**she** *salah taruk* **ah.**</u> |
| | She made a mistake PART. |

Similarly, in (24), the speaker began with English, but went on to explain why she had stopped cutting her hair and allowed it to grow out, and the further explanation was given in Malay.

| | |
|---|---|
| (24) | **First time ever! Cause** <u>***malas nak gunting nak buat aper***</u>**.** |
| Farah(YNG) | First time ever! Cause I'm lazy to cut it, what to do… |

In example (25), the speaker was translating the word "memanda" to the listener. Since both speakers were equally fluent in English, the most economical method to define the word was to translate it into English.

| | |
|---|---|
| (25) | ***Apa makna memanda?*** |
| Rosa(OLD) | What's the meaning of 'memanda'? |

|  | **Hmm** *macam* <u>admiral</u> *gitu*. **<u>Admiral.</u>** |
|  | Hmm it's like an admiral. Admiral. |
| Fitri(OLD) |  |
| (26) | **<u>So instead of you start at seven o'clock, you start at eight</u>** |
| Ali(OLD) | **<u>o'clock.</u>** *So you habis pukul dua belas, dier habis pukul* |
|  | *braper?* |
|  | …you end at 12, he ends at what time? |

**Expression.** Poplack (1987) referred to this function as the point "where the switch calls attention to or brackets the English intervention by the use of expressions" (p. 226), and (27) and (28) illustrate this aptly.

| (27) | **I think before marriage,** *dier cam baik***, then after marriage** |
| Farah(YNG) | **the** *<u>tanduk semua keluar</u>* **ah.** |
|  | I think before marriage, he was nice, then after the marriage his |
|  | devil horns started to show ah. |

| (28) | **Y'know? Like it's** *<u>merepek-meraban</u>* **what all these stuff.** |
| Mary(YNG) | Y'know? Like it's a bunch of gibberish what all these stuff. |

In (27), Farah(YNG) made use of the phrase "tanduk semua keluar", a common local slang, to refer to someone's devilish ways. The term "tanduk" refers to horns. In (28), for example, the phrase "merepek-meraban" is an expression used in Malay specifically to mean "a bunch of gibberish". As can be seen, this is an expression that does not have a close equivalent in English.

The older participants also often used "okay" or "dah okay" to refer to situations that were acceptable, as seen in (29) and (30).

| (29) | *Makanan sekarang dah* <u>okay</u>*. <u>Dah</u> improve la.* |
| Ain(OLD) | The food now is pretty okay. It has improved. |

| (30) | *Tak- pasal dier cakap, pelamin* **in,** *pelamin* **and décor <u>all in, so</u>** |

| Aish(OLD) | **it's okay.** |
|---|---|
| | No – because they said, the dais is included, dais and décor are all in, so it's okay. |

**Temporality.** The data also shows that speakers switched codes when they spoke about temporal categories. In example (31), Farah used the Malay preposition "daripada" when recalling the past.

| (31) Farah(YNG) | **Oh you didn't know eh?** |
|---|---|
| Maria(YNG) | **I didn't know.** |
| Farah(YNG) | ***Daripada* primary school I think.** |
| | (It was) since primary school I think. |

Temporal categories such as months and days were also referred to in English by the older speakers, as seen in (32) and (33) below.

| (32) | **Next month *Angah pun nak pergi luar negara.*** |
|---|---|
| Ain(OLD) | Next month Angah wants to go overseas too. |

| (33) | **HAHA. Saturday, Sunday *dah kene kerja?*** |
|---|---|
| Aida(OLD) | HAHA. Saturday, Sunday already have to work? |

**Terms of affiliation.** Speakers also switched codes when they referred to kin, and this function is referred to as "terms of affiliation". For the young participants, they used Malay terms of affiliation to refer to their kin, for example in (34), where "mother" and "younger sibling" were referred to in Malay. This was perhaps done to mark respect and community affiliation or it could also be habitual.

| (34) | **But she live with her *mak*? YKNOW! I've never seen her** |
|---|---|
| Maria(YNG) | **family before? I've only seen her *adik*.** |
| | But she lives with her mom? YKNOW! I've never seen her family before? I've only seen her younger sibling. |

Interestingly, the reverse happened with the older generation speakers. In (35), English was used for kinship terms, and this was perhaps done to mark intimacy and emphasize their special relationship or bond.

(35)
Ain(OLD)

**_Telur asin lagi_ eh? Then next time I can bring my husband dating.**

Salted eggs again? Then next time I can bring my husband along.

(36)
Aish(OLD)

**You-you _saudara dekat boleh la_. My husband _punya saudara tak boleh._**

You-you close relatives are fine. My husband's relative can't do it.

**Acquired terms.** Interestingly, from the data, it was observed that Singaporean Malay speakers have acquired and used new terms that are specific to their community and culture. This, we refer to, as "acquired terms". Both the terms "rabak" and "lepak" have evolved to hold very different connotations from the words' original meanings, which are "tattered" and "to lounge" respectively. In (37), the speaker used the term "rabak" as an adjective to show how something negative had worsened. The word "lepak" is used to connote a sense of aimlessness and lax behavior.

(37)
Nur(YNG)

**But even then damn _rabak_! It was like, I was thinking damn _lepak_!**

But even then (it was) very extreme! It was like, I was thinking (it's very) lax!

Another acquired term is the word "combine", which is used to refer to the specific situation of both bride and groom sharing a wedding ceremony. It is customary for Malay couples to hold separate ceremonies, one each for the bride and groom. However, the high expense of holding a wedding in Singapore has created a new trend of having one "combined" wedding, instead of two separate ceremonies. The use of this acquired term can be seen in (38).

(38)
Rosa(OLD)

**HEHE then _dorang cakap nak_ combine.**

HEHE then they said (they) want to combine.

| Fitri(OLD) | **Combine?** |
| | ***Kalau*** **combine,** ***restoran tak boleh la… Sempit kan?*** |
| Rosa(OLD) | If they combine, (the) restaurant can't DISC PART… Not enough space right? |
| | **Ah ah,** **combine,** ***restoran tak boleh.*** |
| Ain(OLD) | Ah ah, combine, (the) restaurant can't (do it). |

## Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has explored the frequency and functions of code-switching in English-Malay bilinguals in Singapore. From the data we described earlier, it is clear that code-switching is spontaneous and pervasive. Code-switching clearly also has distinct discourse functions, and the functions observed are: grammatical categories, seeking affirmation/clarification, topic/domain association, creating a communication effect, practicality, proper names, repetition/translation/explanation, expression, temporal categories, terms of affiliation, reported speech and acquired terms. The data presented on code-switching in the English-Malay bilinguals also reflect how the multilingual nature of Singapore's community has played a significant role in the way conversational interactions are conducted. It is clear from the data analyzed that the Malay community regularly taps their additional language as a resource. Both the young and old participants code-switch intra-sententially at least 80% of the time in conversations, and this is clearly a reflection of the ubiquitous nature of code-switching in the community. From the conversations, it is also clear that both languages, Malay and English, are interwoven seamlessly into conversations and are not treated as two mutually exclusive entities.

An interesting pattern observed from the data is the different manner in which the younger and older groups code-switch. The older participants tend to code-switch from Malay to English, and the younger participants are primarily English-dominant, code-switching from English to Malay. This speaks in large part to the matrix language frame model put forth by Myers-Scotton (1993). The matrix language framework theorizes that only one variety would provide the grammatical feature, while the embedded language would provide largely content morphemes. An overview of the data collected shows that the embedded language for the different generations differs between English and Malay. This intergenerational difference in

code-switching also serves as a key indicator of the language shift occurring within the community as well. As reported by Cavallaro and Serwe (2010), the number of Malays using English at home is steadily increasing. Tan (2014) has also argued that English can be seen to be the linguistic mother tongue of many young Singaporeans, the Malay community not-withstanding. The younger speakers seem to be more comfortable conducting a large part of their conversations in English as opposed to Malay. The code-switching patterns, as observed in this paper, serve as further evidence for language shift from Malay to English in the Malay community in Singapore.

The data presented is emblematic of the fluid nature of code-switching and it does not follow a fixed syntax and structure in an informal setting. Past definitions (Bell, 1976; Blom & Gumperz, 1972; Hudson, 1980; Milroy & Muysken, 1995; Myers-Scotton, 1993) of code-switching have framed it to be an alternation of languages while maintaining the grammatical characteristics unique to each language. However, as seen from the code-switching patterns of the Malay community in Singapore, it is clear that grammatical categories have not been maintained by the speakers. Malay and English are used interchangeably and without strict adherence to grammatical structures in either language. Clearly, code-switching is done as a communicative tool with specific functions, and not merely as a grammatical tool as most would argue. This lends credence to Matras' (2009) definition of code-switching as the use of more than one language in the course of a single communicative episode. This definition provides a broader encapsulation of the phenomenon without restrictions, while acknowledging that code-switching patterns are varied across different communities.

Early definitions of code-switching have also tried to capture it as a type of bilingual behavior reflecting a universal linguistic structure. Typologies and frameworks developed based on code-switching have tried to fit bilingual speech habits into a singular universal framework. Yet studies on code-switching in bilingual speakers have shown that not all communities conform to the same typologies, framework or even definition of code-switching. Gumperz's (1982) taxonomy has been constantly modified to fit the community, while Myers-Scotton's (1993) matrix language framework has been challenged by other studies which argue that code-switching utterances may not "display superordinate-subordinate relationship", but instead reflect an equal usage of the two varieties (Jacobson, 2001, p. 60). However, the data collected from this study has not shown a clear code-switching structure or syntax. Instead, similar to what

Heller (2007) and Poplack (1987) have observed, code-switching does not have clear boundaries or lines where speakers switch languages. Malay bilingual speakers in our data switch languages in between turns, within utterances, and between speakers during conversations. The seemingly non-systematic structure of the code-switching data presented therefore throws into question the concept of a universal linguistic system. Instead of focusing on the grammaticality of code-switching, the data presented here shows that it is the community of speakers that provides the answer to understanding the phenomenon. As Alvarez-Caccamo (1998) has also suggested, language as a social practice, and by extension code-switching, is socially significant and needs to be understood in the context of other forms of language contact phenomena occurring in the community (Heller, 2007). In the current world of complex and diverse multilingual communities, it would be remiss to approach code-switching as a universalist grammatical exercise.

This paper has also highlighted the effective bilingual capabilities of Singapore's Malay community and how the community is effective in tapping into both of their linguistic repertoires to achieve strategic communicative goals. In this light, this paper challenges the idea that code-switching is suggestive of a person's lack of proficiency in the language. To label and make assumptions about the way a community speaks without taking into consideration social changes would only further alienate the community which the language represents. As mentioned earlier, the difference in code-switching patterns in both generations is emblematic of the language shift the community is experiencing. While we have seen how the old and the young speakers code-switch differently, this paper did not look into the interaction between the older and younger speakers. This is an area which can be explored further to understand code-switching when the "dominant" languages differ.

It must also be noted that this study was conducted with a small number of participants, and the participants in each group had known each other for years and their conversations were recorded in informal settings. Much like what was observed in other studies (Brown & Fraser, 1979; Fishman, 1965), language behavior observed in informal settings, while more natural, also differs rather significantly from language use in more formal settings. Code-switching is also dependent on the participants' background, attitudes towards the languages, and many other factors which would undoubtedly affect the frequency and its role in conversations, and this is

one area which can be looked into in future research. And if so, it can most certainly shed light on the way speakers construct their linguistic and social identities through code-switching.

As can be seen, code-switching is prevalent and pervasive, and while this paper has highlighted the code-switching behavior of Malay-English bilinguals in Singapore, it would be of interest to also compare this to the other two linguistic communities in Singapore – the Chinese-English bilinguals and the Tamil-English bilinguals. And with that, we may then be able to fully appreciate the complexities of a multilingual linguistic ecology, and only then can speakers and authorities understand code-switching as a communicative device, and not a linguistic defect.

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**Appendix A**

Example of transcript (Old Malay-English bilingual speakers), Broad English transcription in italics.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rosa | Sempit lah. Kalau nak buat combine, tak boleh la - I think. Kalau buat sendiri |
| | *The room is a little tiny. If you want to do a combine wedding, you can't – I think. You can do it solo.* |
| | |
| Ain | But that one, is ah makanan dier is quite okay. |
| | *But that one, the food is quite okay.* |
| | |
| Rosa | Ah betul, Desa Kartika makan is quite okay. Then this one, dier punya package is quite - inilah, comprehensive jugak la. Termasuk kad semua. Then dier ader kek, berkat la. |
| | *True, Desa Kartika's food is quite okay. This one, their package is quite – comprehensive, you can say. Inclusive of invitation cards. And they provide cake and doorgifts too.* |
| | |
| | |
| Ain | Oh, ni termasuk berkat semua la? |
| | *Oh, it's inclusive of a door gift?* |
| | |
| Rosa | Ah, berkat, pelamin. Thats why. |
| | *Yup, doorgift, a wedding dais. That's why.* |
| | |
| Aisha | Oh, okay la. |
| | |
| Fitri | Ah. |
| | |
| Aisha | Tapi kalau dah combine, tak boleh la. |
| | *But if you want to combine, I don't think you can.* |
| | |
| Rosa | Mine, memang, tak boleh la. So I was- tengok la! Tunggu cam mana. cakap nak combine, combine ajer la. |
| | *Mine, definitely can't! So I was – we'll see! Wait and see! They say they want to combine, then we'll combine.* |

| | |
|---|---|
| Aisha | You-you saudara dekat boleh la. My husband punya saudara tak boleh<br>*You-if it's your close relatives then it's fine. My husband's side is too big.* |
| Ain | Jangan macam dier ni nyer ipah. berduai-duai, tak payah<br>*Not like his in-laws, too many of them, don't even bother.* |
| Rosa | Immediate immediate ajer.<br>*Immediate family only.* |
| Ain | Ah, immediate immediate tu sudah. Cakap satu kepala dua puluh ah! Sometimes, never pay that much of money also!<br>*Yes, immediate family only. One person is $20! Sometimes, never pay that much of money also!* |
| Rosa | Mmm hahah |
| Ain | Ni dua puluh plus plus ader?<br>*Is this inclusive of tax and service charge?* |
| Rosa | Mungkin ah.<br>*Maybe.* |
| Fitri | I thought nett? |
| Ain | Nett ah? |
| Rosa | Kalau kita nak tukar aper, mungkin kene keluar.<br>*If we want to change anything, maybe it'll be more.* |
| Fitri | Tapi, kalau termasuk berkat okay lah. Considered reasonable la.<br>*But, if it's inclusive of doorgift, then it's okay. Considered reasonable.* |

# Appendix B

Example of transcript (Young English-Malay bilingual speaker), Broad English transcription in italics.

| | |
|---|---|
| Jack | Then, you can just cabut la I think<br>*Then, you can just leave I think.* |
| Mary | You can - my sister was talking about that, then like= |
| Jane | =she's quite unhappy about that? |
| Mary | Ya, she's quite unhappy about it la. Then she's like<br>OH MY GOD why are you taking so much of my time Y'know? Like it's merepek-meraban what. All this stuff. UNNECESSARY right?<br>*Ya, she's quite unhappy about it la. Then she's like*<br>*OH MY GOD why are you taking so much of my time Y'know? Like it's nonsensical what. All this stuff. UNNECESSARY right?* |
| Jane | Ya |
| Mary | Then like, apparently got, some, got some Wak Tanjong people who go over. Like Isabel? Shafiqah? And Hani? And they were like telling my sister also, that "Ya this doesn't happen at Wak Tanjong at all" I think if it happens, I'd be like "Okay BYE?" |
| Jane | Ya so we were like - Does your sister teach at Wak Tanjong before? Al-Maarif is it? |
| Mary | Maarif. I think- after your teaching, you can just - cabut ah!<br>*Maarif. I think- after your teaching, you can just - leave ah!* |
| Jane | Ya then do you, do you start a briefing and a debriefing? Do you have a briefings and debriefings? |
| Mary | Ya, we got briefing in the morning. BUT, dorang selalu lambat!<br>*Ya, we got briefing in the morning. BUT, they're always late!* |
| Jane | HAHA |
| Mary | So it's basically like, "Ok, today we're doing Math and Science and these are the worksheets" That's it la. |
| Jane | =but must bace doa and stuff like that ah?<br>*=but must say some prayers and stuff like that ah?* |
| Mary | Tak!<br>*No!* |
| Jane | OH MY GOD we have like DOA sebelum mengajar, doa selepas MENGAJAR and then doa - biler time with the students. Like when the class starts, we have to read<br>*OH MY GOD we have like a prayer before lessons, a prayer for after lessons and then a prayer- during our time with the students. Like when the class starts, we have to read* |
| Mary | OH REALLY?! |