

Mixing two unrelated languages: Congruent lexicalization in Malay-English code-switching

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Bilingual speakers often engage in code mixing, that is the use of lexical items and grammatical features from two languages in one sentence (Muysken, 2000, p. 1). Malaysia is no stranger to the phenomenon of code-switching as it is a highly multilingual country. The study offers a new perspective on Malay-English code switching based on Muysken's (2013) four-way typology. It fills an important gap in our knowledge about the ways in which two unrelated languages can be mixed. The current study analyses the speech of two lecturers, Azma and Ali, who were observed and video recorded for seven weeks and a total of 15 hours recordings were captured. The recordings were then transcribed and analysed using the Computerized Language Analysis (CLAN) programme (MacWhinney, 2000). Although the most intimate form of code-switching, Congruent Lexicalization (the use of words from two languages in a shared grammatical frame), is expected mainly in related languages, the results show that Congruent Lexicalization is the most common pattern for Azma and Insertion is the most common type to emerge for Ali. We focus specifically on the switching of Malay function words, such as the relative pronoun *yang* "which/who/that" and modal verbs, such as *kena* "must" in (1):

- (1) Stated main idea yang you kena create sendiri.
Stated main idea that you must create alone.
"Stated main idea that you must create on your own."

This type of switching could be related to the fact that word order is similar in many cases which may have facilitated the occurrence of Congruent Lexicalization. Furthermore, the data show multi-word switches and one-word switches. Multi-word switches consist of various grammatical elements which include not only function words but also a mixture of function words and content words. The switches of function words take place in both directions, from English to Malay, as in (2) and from Malay to English, as in (3):

- (2) You kena ada factual support to actually justify or to strengthen your testimony.
You must have factual support to actually justify or to strengthen your testimony.
"You must have factual support to actually justify or to strengthen your testimony."
- (3) So kalau you boleh nampak kat sini.
So if you can see at here.
"So if you can see here."

These examples show that switching of function words is not as restricted as in other language pairs, in which content words can come from either language while function words are limited to the matrix language, as discussed in Muysken (2000). We conclude with a reflection on what it means for languages to be related and how similarities and differences between languages affect the type and the frequency of code-switching in data sets.

References

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