

# Bahasa Indonesia/English Code Switching

at USBI The Sampoerna University, Jakarta

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**Abstract**—Code switching is commonly accepted to occur in communities which use more than one language, like Indonesia in which Bahasa Indonesia and English are strongly recommended to be widely used in the college life.

When English has been a compulsory skill in Indonesia, all young generations find difficulties to practice it in a non-supporting environment. This paper is set to find the reasons behind USBI-the Sampoerna University students to have code switching and whether this activity actually supports the English learning process for them.

The research was conducted to answer the questions as follow: how many languages that the participants are using in daily activities, what are the reasons taken from internal factors for the participants to have code-switching in the conversations, and what are the reasons taken from external factors for the participants to have code-switching in the conversations. Qualitative and quantitative researches were conducted to have genuine opinions from the participants by using questionnaire containing list of questions with short essay answers.

The findings have shown that about 35% of participants is able to speak 3 languages and 33% is able to speak 2 languages. As for the opinions, most participants say that they have code-switching because it is simpler than using other languages in expressing ideas.

The research, however, is limited to its scope and only based on 54 participants at USBI-The Sampoerna University.

**Keywords**—Code-switching, external factors, internal factors, conversations.

## I. INTRODUCTION

GENERALLY, *Code-switching is believed as the practice of using different language variations in a single conversation.* Having fluent in more than one language, bilingualism or multilingualism, is a common thing for people in Indonesia because Indonesia has more than 300 ethnic groups with more than 700 different languages (Lewis, et.al. 2013). Moreover, instead of having these local languages, they need to be able to use English as an international language to be able to communicate with foreign people and broaden their social networks. Therefore, in most cases, it is common to have them switch languages they know while communicating with others.

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This paper focuses on this phenomenon which commonly happens in Jakarta at Universitas Siswa Bangsa Internasional (USBI the Sampoerna University) where young adults with different cultural backgrounds meet.

There are some reasons which are categorized into internal factor and external factor behind this phenomenon which will be discussed further in this paper.

## II. THE CODE-SWITCHING PHENOMENON AT USBI—THE SAMPOERNA UNIVERSITY

Universitas Siswa Bangsa Internasional, Jakarta, was formerly known as Sampoerna School of Business and Sampoerna School of Education. It was officially launched on 1 April 2013 with four faculties: Faculty of Business, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Art Design and Media, and Faculty of Science and Technology; while the two faculties mentioned earlier have been established for about 4 years.

Like many other universities in Indonesia, USBI is a place where young graduates from senior high schools in different regions meet. They come with their different cultural background, including different local languages, and they are united by using the state language, Bahasa Indonesia, and the global language, English.

Therefore, the phenomenon, that is commonly happening to bilinguals, code switching, is a really interesting topic to be discussed because they have different explanation when they were asked, “Why are you switching languages?” This is in line with what Carol Myers-Scotton (1993) mentioned that people use different languages in different occasions (as cited in Mesthrie, 2000; p. 164), and also when they meet different people.

## III. METHOD

This paper is intended to prove the statement mentioned by Carol Myers-Scotton (1993) that there are different reasons why people switch languages (as cited in Meshtrie, 2000; p. 164). I chose open-questionnaire as a medium because their genuine opinions will be shown.

There is an advantage and disadvantage of using this method. The advantage is that we can find out the real reasons; whereas the disadvantage is that there are various answers which are quite difficult to be categorized into one thing which makes it difficult to use quantitative method.

There were also mini qualitative and quantitative researches done at USBI with a questionnaire asking how many languages they understand and why they switch languages when communicating with others. The questionnaire was given in three media: paper, online via Edmodo.com, and Chat Messenger via WhatsApp and Blackberry applications. There are 54 participants in total; 2 participated via WhatsApp Application, 8 participated via

Blackberry Application, 7 participated via Edmodo.com, and 37 participated via paper. They are multilingual since they are able to speak Bahasa Indonesia, English, local languages, and/or other foreign languages (namely, Mandarin, Turkish, French, etc.)

The data was taken in 2014 and calculated using a spreadsheet. The steps are as follow:

1. Distributing Open Questionnaire
2. Categorizing the answers
3. Putting the similar answers into one category
4. Calculating the total of answers

#### IV. FINDINGS

**IV.1.** Based on the data collected from 54 participants; there are 19 students who can speak three languages, mainly Bahasa Indonesia, English, and one local language. 18 students are able to communicate two languages fluently, that are Bahasa Indonesia and English.

Faculty:  
Mobile Number:

1. How many languages can you speak? Please mention the languages.  
(If more than 1, go to the next question)

2. What are the reasons for you switching your languages?  
For example:

a. In a discussion in the English class, instead of using English, you are using your mother tongue. What are the reasons?

b. In social media, like Facebook or twitter, instead of using Bahasa Indonesia, you are using English or local languages to update your status. What are the reasons?

Image 1 Questionnaire Paper

**IV.2.** Based on the data collected from 54 participants, there are 2 major factors for them switching languages, internal factor and external factor. The internal factors are represented in 18 categories, and the external factors are represented in 13 categories.

#### IV.3. Internal Factors

People will have internal factors in doing something. It comes from the mind inside that triggers the body to do the intended activity. In relation to switching English to any other languages, USBI students have various reasons, such as lacking vocabulary, needing the result quickly (in a discussion, for example), or in a matter of being nationalism. For internal factors, there are 102 hits from 18 categories some of which are explained below.

##### *Switching from L2 to L1*

There are two major reasons for these students to switch languages from English to Bahasa Indonesia in an English discussion triggered by internal factors.

##### **Reason 1.** *It is simpler to use the mother language.*

There are 25 participants mentioning the same idea with this reason, that is having a conversation with a language in

which used by both interlocutors are indeed easier than using the 'foreign' language. Therefore, in the classrooms, students may use the language which are more accepted by their peers when having some discussions.

Many students give up talking in English even before they start to discuss something because their mind is set "using English is difficult" without even trying it. There are also reasons behind this, most of them are afraid if some will judge their 'bad' language, again, without even trying it. It is all in the mindset.

##### **Reason 2.** *I don't know the word.*

There are 15 participants saying that when they have got stuck with a vocabulary that they forgot, then automatically they will switch the language into the language that everyone knows without putting too much effort in recalling the vocabulary.

It will be much better for them to directly change the language which most students in the discussion can understand (namely Bahasa Indonesia) instead of asking their friends what the English word for it (Schmitt, 1997, as cited in Cook, 2001, p. 408).

##### *Switching from L1 to L2*

There are two major reasons for them switching languages from Bahasa Indonesia to English or any local languages or any foreign languages in social media where they are supposed to use Bahasa Indonesia triggered by internal factors.

##### **Reason 1.** *It is simpler and more understandable.*

There are 13 participants agreeing that using English is far much easier and has deeper meaning instead of using Bahasa Indonesia. To Indonesians, expressing something in Bahasa Indonesia in most of the time needs more words than using English.

This is one of the reasons why they are using English in expressing their thoughts in social media, especially when they use Twitter where the words are limited to only 160 characters.

##### **Reason 2.** *It is to practice or to train language skills.*

There are also 13 participants who say that they switch Bahasa Indonesia to English as the medium to practice or train language skills. This is a really good thing to do with social media. All students can actually benefit using social media to improve their language skills. If they like it, they will ask their friends to give comments or feedback to the language that they use.

##### **Reason 3.** *It is a medium to ask for feedback.*

This reason is actually mentioned as one of their reasons. It has 4 hits. Students really need feedback from others and teachers when they are giving opinions or submitting assignments. Moreover, when they are using L2 in their daily activities, then they have more time to practice L2 outside the classroom.

##### **Reason 4.** *It is a medium for teachers to deliver some assignments.*

There are 4 participants who mention that it is a good medium for teachers to deliver some assignments. In this case, code-switching will help teachers in delivering tasks or assignments to students who do not understand the instruction well after the teachers repeat the instruction in L2 for several times.

#### IV.4. External Factors

People also have external factors that force them to do something. It comes from the people and the environment around them. These factors are influencing them to do the things they like or dislike. However, the results can be positive or negative, and it all depends on the doers whether they want to have positive result or not. Code-switching from Bahasa Indonesia to any other languages, USBI students have various reasons, mainly because they consider the interlocutors. For external factors, there are 75 hits from 13 categories, some of which are explained below.

##### *Switching from L2 to L1*

There are only two reasons for them switching languages from English to Bahasa Indonesia in an English discussion triggered by external factors. There are 26 hits saying that "it is because others can respond faster/ it is more understandable/ it is easier to communicate", and there are only 5 hits saying that "I follow the language of majority". These things are really common in Indonesia. We tend to make life easier, instead of making it more complicated. In an English discussion, the students' focus is the result, while the teacher's focus is the process. That is the reason why they come up using Bahasa Indonesia where they are supposed to use English. They want to make others in the group respond faster so that they can have the result of discussion fast. This is also related to the next reason that they will follow the language of majority. Because they are here in Indonesia, they will use Bahasa Indonesia to discuss. There is a great chance for them to speak English when the language of majority is English, for example when they are in the UK, the US, or Australia later on.

##### *Switching from L1 to L2*

There are two major reasons for them switching languages from Bahasa Indonesia to English or any local languages or foreign languages in social media where they are supposed to use Bahasa Indonesia triggered by external factors. The reason "I am afraid to be seen outdated and I want to be seen as cool or fancy" with 13 hits. A good image is clearly seek by almost 1/3 participants. They want their friends think that they are cool and fancy by using English in social media. However, some also argue that there are some words or expression that cannot fit in Bahasa Indonesia, and those will get much deeper meaning if written in English. This reason has 2 hits. The next reason is "I want only some people understand it" with 7 hits. This is said dominantly by students who switch languages into local languages. While the minor reason is "it is to respect readers and testimony", "it is to increase curiosity of readers", "it is to invite others indirectly to learn English" with 1 hit each.

#### V. CONCLUSION

People do have different reasons for switching languages when they are bilingual or multilingual as what Vivian Cook emphasizes that "Code-switching is a highly skilled activity" (2001: 408). For me as a lecturer at USBI, I sometimes switch language to Italian to sign that they

should finish the discussion activity. My reason is to get their attention by hearing a "strange" language. In another time, I will also switch English into Bahasa Indonesia because I want the students get the exact meaning after several attempts; therefore, my decision to have code-switching is mostly triggered by external factor that is considering the target interlocutors. For most students at USBI, they are mostly initiated by internal factors, for example it is much simpler to use the mother language in a discussion. Those reasons are actually effective in increasing the L2 fluency to students because they save more time by switching the language into the language that most of interlocutors understand better when they are trying to remember the words they are going to use.

However, Willis suggested that we as teachers are not suggested to restrict the use of mother language in the class (as cited in Cook, 2001, p. 406). I agree with this statement, we need to encourage them to use the target language. If they do not know the vocabulary they need, they can ask their friends or keep expanding vocabulary by consulting to a dictionary.

Each person has full authority in using code-switching in their daily life. However, when this becomes a habit and the people are actually in the process of learning the target language then it will become the obstacle for them in increasing the target language competence. I may suggest for language learners, especially USBI students, to not easily give up in using the target language particularly in the discussions.

Everybody in the group discussion is learning the same language; therefore, encourage yourself to use the target language as much as possible so that you can reach the target language competence that you want. Therefore, the language that someone uses depends on the context and the goals that he wants to achieve.

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**Appendix 1**  
**Open-Questionnaire**  
 Please fill in the questionnaire below.  
 You can participate into this questionnaire either in English or Bahasa Indonesia.

Name: |

No.	Name	Questions 1	Question 2a	Question 2b
1.	Ivana Jesslyn	2 languages English & Bahasa	It's easier to communicate with our friends using Bahasa, such as to give our thoughts about the problem, etc.	Updating our status in social media using English somehow make us looks 'smarter' and so the words on the status look more sophisticated, more catchy, and cooler.
2.	Naufal Devandrana	2 languages Bahasa Indonesia and English.	Sometime it's hard to explain something in English, sometime I'm afraid that people won't understand me if I'm using English, or maybe I forget some vocab. I'm switching to Bahasa because I know that people around me will understand me better when I use Bahasa instead of English.	Try to use English as often as possible to improve my English and so that I'm familiar with English in newspaper, TV, or other mass media.
3.	Sashinka Lintang	I can speak four languages, but I'm only fluent in Bahasa and English.	Because sometimes speaking with friends in bahasa is more comfortable in a way of understanding each other.	Because sometimes the feelings I want to portray in social media I can only explain in English.
4.	Karen Novelin	6 languages Bahasa Indonesia, English, Mandarin, Korean, French and Hakka (Chiness dialects)	Because sometimes I'm afraid that my classmates might not understand what I'm talking during the discussion	Because many of my friends are foreigner, so it is better for me to use English to put English status also for showing my English capability to them
5.	Mira Muliati	I can speak 3 languages	Sometimes, It's easier to express opinion using mother tongue, especially when we don't know the right word to say in English.	I feel that some words or sentences are better to be said using other languages. Sometimes, there are no special reasons; I just feel like using other languages. I rarely update my status though
6.	Karina Hardini	I usually speak Javanese, Japanese, Mandarin, Dutch, English, Bahasa Indonesia	It's just a habit, Miss, hard to control.	Using English makes it more dramatic #lol
7.	Giovani	Bahasa Indonesia, English, French, Mandarin	It becomes a habit	English make it classy
8.	Shahnaz Fairuz	Usually I speak Bahasa Indonesia but I can speak Javanese, Maduranese, and English. I've learned Japanese, Mandarin, and Dutch. So, I know some vocabularies in thus languages. But now, I keep improving my English and also study France languages.	I wanna practice what I've learned. Improving my skill and get more fluent. And somehow, I try to use some English word during a conversation with my friends. It looks cool :D	Sometimes I use English when I'm twitting my tweet on twitter. And I used to tweet in Korean and France. :D #gaul And you know, when I'm getting angry with someone, I used Javanese word for saying "a bad" word. #peace (^^)v
9.	Putri	Usually I speak Bahasa but because of I've been lived for 3 years in Malang (High School) I can speak Javanese, Kupangnese and English. But I still learn mandarin and want to learn French.	Because if I meet Kupangnese or Javanese I think it would better if I using their language. :D	I use English to update my status because it is looks cool, but sometimes I use Kupangnese too if I want. For example reply chat to my friends who can speak Kupangnese too :D