

The Functions of Code-Switching in WeChat Interactions among Chinese College Students

Xiaoji Wang

Chongqing Technology and Business University
No. 19, Xuefu Avenue, Nan'an District
Chongqing, China

Zhiqiang Chen

Chongqing Technology and Business University
No. 19, Xuefu Avenue, Nan'an District
Chongqing, China

Abstract

This paper mainly investigated ten functions of Chinese college students' code-switching in WeChat interactions and made an assumption that such phenomenon is greatly influenced by students' language proficiency and the nationality of their fellows. It is found that students' code-switching is mostly for emphasis, for habitual use, for quotation and to show affection, while English proficiency and the nationality of alumnus are not necessarily related to such phenomenon. English popularization has facilitated students' application of WeChat code-switching, and in return, WeChat code-switching has reflected students' eager for further English popularization.

Keywords: functions; code-switching; WeChat; college students

1. Introduction

Code-switching, a natural phenomenon that consists of alternating two or more languages in bilinguals' discourse (Cecilia, 2007), has intrigued significant interest among many scholars for the past several decades. However, most studies have analyzed code-switching on the basis of its oral production, with few on its written production (Nur & Marlyna, 2014).

With the internalization of English in expanding circles like China, Chinese-English code-switching has been commonly used in written forms of advertisements, newspapers, TV news, interfaces of various social software like WeChat, etc. where English proper names, common nouns and sometimes even the whole phrases and sentences are imported into the written native language, which constitute a more stable variety of code-switching than the spontaneous and unpredictable code-switching in the spoken language (Shen, 2010).

The advent of internet interaction calls for more convenient and more effective communicative tools. WeChat is absolutely developed for that need. Currently, WeChat has held more than 600 million users of all ages and from different walks of life, and this number has been keeping scrambling. According to the statistics published by China Internet Network Information Center, till July, 2017, WeChat moments, similar to the status updates of Facebook, which are a sort of social service derived from the instantaneous messengers, have conquered a usage rate of 84.3%. Compared with QQ zone, with a usage rate of 65.8%, and microblog, with a usage rate of 38.7%, it can be said that WeChat has become the most popular social medium, especially among the student cohort aging from 17 to 30 (that is coincidentally the age group of college students), with the highest percentage of 24.8%.

However, no study has ever been conducted on WeChat code-switching among college students. Therefore, this study will serve to fill the research gap. It can be interesting and significant, and certain implications can be drawn for college education and electronic program developers.

2. WeChat

WeChat is a free app developed by Tencent Holdings Ltd. in 2011. The functions of WeChat are versatile, including text typing, voice recording, chatting, status updating, daily payment, petty cash reserve, etc. It integrates synchronous and asynchronous messaging features, and has been coexisted with web version.

Each user will be bound with an ID number or username and QR code after registration. Acquaintances or strangers, both can become WeChat friends by adding the target ID number or username, or simply scanning the target QR code, which serves as an invitation. If this invitation is accepted, the two acquaintances or strangers can chat with each other wherever they are and whenever they like.

The synchronous feature provides users with an instant interactive interface where users can send messages or directly chat. This feature combines both functions of phone calls and text messages. The overwhelming advantage is that WeChat is free, which enables users to exchange ideas or emotion without worrying about the time limit. Users can choose to have a voice call or alternatively have a video call, or have an interface conversation by typing and voice recording. For the latter, responses can be accessible immediately and also be postponed.

The asynchronous feature enables users to post short messages to express their feelings, thoughts, whereabouts, enquiries or any information that they want to share. Users, also updaters, can also post photos, videos or links in the status box. When users post a status on their wall, such status will appear on their friends' news feed (Nur&Marlyna, 2014). They may also tag their target friend with the symbol "@" and the receiver wanted will be notified. No matter they tag or not, and unless the users themselves shield the access, the posts are always available to all of the WeChat "shoppers" in the users' friend list. Moreover, the "shoppers" can leave their comments or simply click "like" button under what has been posted to interact with the updaters. They can even copy the posts and transfer them to their own moments, or backup the posts in their favorites.

3. Literature Review

Code-switching has been the topic of interest in linguistic research because of its specialty in natural occurrence in the use of languages by bilinguals (Ariffin&RafikGalea, 2009). What motivates bilinguals to switch codes? What are the functions of bilinguals' code-switching? Why do bilinguals turn to another language in their utterance? These have been studied widely by many researchers from various linguistic perspectives (Siti&Nurual, 2016).

To date, researches on functions or reasons of code-switching in various situations are ubiquitous. To name but a few, Blom&Gumperz(1972), Scotton&Ury(1977), Gumperz(1982), Hoffman(1991), Malik(1994), Zentella(1997), Auer(1998), Flyman-Mattsson and Burenhult(1999), Simon(2001), Sert(2005), Montes-Alcalá(2007), San(2009), Shin(2010), Modupeola(2013), Nur and Marlyna(2014), Anna(2016), etc. have been working in this area for over a couple of years. All of them summarized the functions of code-switching, some even contributed to pioneering propositions. Here functions defined by Hoffman, Malik, Nur and Marlyna will be explicitly expressed in detail, because they clearly clarified 10 genres.

Hoffman (1991) categorized code-switching usage into 10 functions, which are: a. to talk about a particular topic, b. to quote somebody else, c. to provide emphasis about something, d. to make an interjection by inserting sentence fillers or sentence connectors, e. to repeat in order to clarify, f. to express group identity, g. to show intention of clarifying speech content for interlocutor, h. to soften or strengthen a request or command, i. to meet a real lexical need or to compensate for lack of an equal translation, and j. to exclude others when a comment is intended for an exclusive audience.

Three years later, Malik (1994) also developed 10 communicative functions including: a. lack of facility, b. lack of register, c. to show affection of the speaker, d. habitual experience, e. semantic significance, f. to emphasize a point, g. to show identity with a group, h. to address a different audience, i. to attract attention, and j. for pragmatic reasons.

In recent years, based on the seven code-switching functions defined by Gumperz(1982), Nur and Marlyna (2014) further discussed the functions of code-switching on Facebook status updates. 10 functions are mentioned as follows: a. switching for quotation, b. switching for addressee specification, c. switching for reiteration, d. switching for message qualification, e. switching for clarification, f. switching for emphasis, g. switching for checking, h. switching for indicating emotions, i. switching for availability, and j. switching for principle of economy.

From the categorization mentioned above, it can be generated that despite of the differences, all of them agreed that quotation, emphasis, clarification, repetition, affection, and habitual experience are coincidentally used by speakers for code-switching. Thus, these functions will be undoubtedly included in the following example analysis.

4. Methods

4.1 Instruments

In this study, questionnaires and screen captures were employed to analyze the functions of code-switching in WeChat interaction. The questionnaire was carefully designed and rectified before being sent out. And instant interactive messages, recordings of dialogue on WeChat interface, or moment updates, were provided by the students and they have agreed to publicize these information.

4.2 Participants

Participants investigated are college students from College of International Business in Chongqing Technology and Business University in China. The students from this college have a comparatively higher average English level than their peers from other colleges in such universities. This college has a total of 2000 students, and the international students account for nearly 1/20 of the total number. In order to alleviate international students' communicative barriers during the period of adaption, Chinese students will be invited to serve as "communicators" or daily "helpers". Plus foreign teachers here are more than those in other colleges. Therefore, students here also have more opportunities to use English both orally and literally.

4.3 Assumption

Since the participants have superiority in English proficiency and have more opportunities to exchange with foreigners, we suppose that WeChat code-switching among college students are greatly influenced by their language proficiency and the nationality of their fellows.

4.4 Data Collection

Investigation was conducted during the break between two classes. The questionnaires were delivered to each student. They were required to finish the questionnaire independently and to their fullest consideration. The questionnaire is recognized as effective and can be used to analysis only when all the questions are finished. Totally 160 questionnaires were sent out, 145 were collected and proved to be effective. After that, some students were randomly asked whether they would like to publicize the details of their conversation or updates. They were promised that these details would only be used for this study and would be kept confidentially. Most of the students agreed and their details were categorized in concordance with different functions. However, not all of the details were adopted but some typical ones were introduced to serve as the examples. To ensure the authenticity of the article, these examples were kept intact and fresh. Therefore, there may be some grammar mistakes or misspellings in the examples.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 1

Questions	N	Mean	SD
How often do you code-switch in WeChat?	145	2.29	.781
How often do you code-switch to communicate with foreigners?	145	1.79	1.006
How often do you code-switch for quotation?	145	2.07	.887
How often do you code-switch for emphasis?	145	2.29	1.020
How often do you code-switch because there are no proper Chinese expressions?	145	2.03	.931
How often do you code-switch to call attention?	145	1.82	.948
How often do you code-switch for repetition?	145	1.95	.953
How often do you code-switch to show off English proficiency?	145	1.60	.776
How often do you code-switch out of habit?	145	2.20	.997
How often do you code-switch for exclusion?	145	1.66	.916
How often do you code-switch to show affection?	145	2.03	.931

As shown in Table 1, the largest number of students code-switch for emphasis ($M=2.29$), which suggests that their purpose of utterance is mainly to make themselves understood. They also often code-switch for habitual reasons ($M=2.20$). Additionally, there is also a fairly high percentage of students who code-switch for quotation ($M=2.07$), which implies that on one hand, students are afraid of making a stupid mistake, on the other hand, it is exclusively easy and costs nothing to copy rather than thinking by themselves.

An equal percentage lies in the purpose to seek proper English expressions and to show affection (M=2.03). Comparatively, the functions of communicating with foreigners and showing off English proficiency are not that highlighted.

5.1 To communicate with foreigners

Code-switching can be regarded as active or passive behavior for the user. Since the participants are college students studying together with exchange or international students. They may have at least several foreign friends. To keep in touch, English is the only bond to bridge the gap between them.

Example 1

Andy: Thanks for treating us this delicious Italian pizza with an endless savour. Be cool! Man, have a nice vacation! I really learned a lot. We'll miss you so much. Keep in touch!

Example 2

Skylee: I'm really appreciate to have a 4-hour talk with u, which indeed gives me a lesson about confidence as well as effort stuff. Thanks for ur teaching for the whole semester! There must be certain changes between Andy and me when we meet next time. Hope everything goes well in Shenzhen!

The above two examples are concerned with the same occurrence. Two students, Andy and Skylee, were posting their thanks to their foreign teacher. Besides, they also posted pictures in which they had dinner together. The reason why they often switch to English is that they attach great importance to foreign friends. This is a way to show their respect to them.

Example 3

Much Ado About Nothing in Shakespeare globe-had to stand for the whole play like in the old times. This is a capture from a student who was then in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre for sightseeing. Since she has been there before, the updates she posted were to arouse her memory of the city and call for her old friends there.

5.2 For quotation

Quotation is mostly used to cite the remarks of famous scholars or celebrities, or even the poems or expressions from a book, either for mapping the inner thoughts of the user or just a random act.

Example 1

ZaiZhongguo, Ban Shashier Dou Hennan, DanshiMeiyou Shier Banbucheng.

ZaiOuzhou, Ban Shashi Dou Hen Rongyi, Dan ShijishangShashi Ye Banbucheng.

In China, everything is difficult, but nothing is impossible.

In Europe, everything is easy, but nothing is possible.

The English words are quoted from Matthew Price, one president of Procter & Gamble Company, by a student to show the same opinion on things in China and in Europe.

Example 2

Chi HuoguoHaishi Chi Chuanchuan, ZhenshiNanyiJueding!

To be or not to be? This is a question!

English meaning:

To eat hotpot or spicy skewer, it's difficult to decide.

To be or not to be? This is a question.

The sender of the above message was thinking what to eat. The famous quotation was used as a metaphor here to suggest that it's difficult for her to choose between hotpot (Huoguo) and spicy skewer (Chuanchuan) because both are quite popular and delicious.

Example 3

You can either travel or read, but either your body or soul must be on the way.

Shanghai De Qiangua.

English meaning:

You can either travel or read, but either your body or soul must be on the way.

Don't want to leave Shanghai.

Apart from the quotation, the student also posted a picture of Shanghai railway station to express that she was tearing herself away from Shanghai, the city she likes so much. The quotation is the depiction of her inner cockles.

5.3 For emphasis

Some students would like to switch to English when they want to emphasize particular occurrence or what they think is important to them. Often these updates are marked with capitalized words or repeated symbols.

Example 1

DiyiciMoni BP YihuizhiBianlun, TongxiemenJianzhi BEYOND MY EXPECTATION, HEAR! HEAR!

English meaning:

The first simulation BP parliamentary debate, my classmates are absolutely beyond my expectation, listen, and listen.

The above information implies that the student felt surprised at his classmates' performance in that debate. Maybe he meant to learn from his classmates or just set this as a good example and express his admiration for his classmates. He was so surprised that he could not help posting this on his WeChat.

Example 2

MUSIC is your job, LISTENING is my thing. Chen Suozhang C'mon in ~ OuzhouShouzhuanAmusitedan @ 2017.10.24 Qiandao! DaaiXinge #Shui Lai JianYueguang# He # Haidan# It was WORTH STANDING for 4 hours!!!

English meaning:

Music is your job, but listening is my thing. Mr. Chen has come to Amsterdam, the first European station, on October 24, 2017. I am here. Much love for his new songs like Who Will Come to Cut the Moon and Echinoidea. It is worth standing for 4 hours.

The student has been to Europe for short-term exchanges and attended Eason's concert. Eason is an exclusively popular singer in China, and this student is one of his diehard fans. She has never missed his concerts in the mainland of China. The concert in Amsterdam was another feast of ears for her in foreign countries. That's why she was so excited to emphasize that it is worth standing for so long to enjoy Eason's music.

Example 3

Yuanyuan: Wanshengjie, Xiang He XingbabaNanguaNatie.

Lili: Zhongguode Ye You PUMPKIN SPICE Ma? WoYiweiZhiyouMeiguoCaiyou.

Yuanyuan: Nononono. ZhongguoMeiyou. 😞

Lili: 😞

English meaning:

Yuanyuan: The Halloween is coming, do you want to drink pumpkin spice latte in Starbucks?

Lili: Is there pumpkin spice in China? I guess there's pumpkin spice only in the USA.

Yuanyuan: No. There is no pumpkin spice in China.

Lili: Well then.

This is a short interface conversation between two students who were talking about coffee. Maybe pumpkin spice latte is their common preference, because it has been emphasized by code-switching. When Lili asked "Is there PUMPKIN SPICE in China?", she was surprised and pleased. But later both of them revealed their bits of disappointment since there is no such coffee in China. Therefore, from this perspective, emphasis is used to express feelings of surprise, satisfaction or disappointment.

5.4 To seek proper English expressions

Some students choose to switch to English because there is no proper Chinese expressions which exactly mean the same thing in English. Whatever their English level is, naturalized English is often pursued by students.

Example 1

Nvhaizi Yao Xiaoxinle! TengxunKeyiYijianXiezhuang La! Make-up killer is on its way...OMG...

English meaning:

Watch out girls! Tencent can now erase makeup from photos. Make-up killer is on its way... OMG...

The scrap is an exclamation from a girl student. In China, virtual makeup app is becoming increasingly popular among both males and females of almost all ages in taking a selfie. But now Tencent Company has developed a new function that can reverse over-edited deceiving pictures, which is described as a make-up killer. "OMG",

occurred at the end of the sentence, further manifests her disapproval of the compelling news. Also, OMG, here used as a tag switching, is much more widely accepted in its English form by Chinese people.

The reason why she switched to English is because there is no direct translation of make-up killer in Chinese. Usually the Chinese meaning of killer is seldom used. Likewise, “I will kill you” doesn’t often occur in both oral and written Chinese, either.

Example 2

DiyiciTuichi Shier XiaoshiGuoZhongqiu, MeiyuYuebing, Jiuchi Moon Pie (XiexieGaoLaoshi), Zai Tang YidunHuoguo, Shang YifanYueliang, Ye KeweiJiajieKuaile La. Buguo, Dang Wo He TongtongZaiCaoposhang, ZaiShuxiaoxiaJutou Wang Mingyue Shi, Haishi You YiguNongnong De SinianZhiqingYongshangXintou.

English meaning:

For the first time, there is a twelve-hour delay in celebrating Mid-autumn Festival. No moon cake, but there is Moon Pie (Many thanks to Mr. Gao), and hot pot. And then we enjoy the moon, it is the so-called “Happy Mid-autumn Day”. But, when Tongtong and I were enjoying the shining moon from the hill and between the trees, we felt a strong sense of homesickness.

The sender was in America during the Mid-autumn Festival. She didn’t take moon cake, but instead, she had moon pie, not exactly the same as moon cake, but could maybe serve as a moon cake. So the student directly used Moon Pie, which was printed on the cover of the package. This would be more proper because the audience could immediately know what a moon pie is from the picture posted.

Example 3

ZuijinXuedao college sweetheart ZheYike, warm up JieduanLaoshi Wen Women BanzhangShui Tan Lianai Le, BeiDajiaQihongZhanqilai De NanhaiziYoudianXiuse, BianNaotouBian Tan Lianai De Ganshou, Ye Mei ShuoShenmeTebiede, Dan NanhaiShuozheShuozhe, Zuozai Ta Pangbian de little girlfriend JiuMomo De Lianhongle.

English meaning:

Recently, when we were learning the lesson College Sweetheart, during the period of warming up, the teacher asked who has been in love in our class. A boy was hooted up, he was a little bit shy, and actually he didn’t say anything important. But he was peeking at the girl beside him while speaking, and the little girl blushed immediately.

Actually, although there are corresponding Chinese expressions about College Sweetheart and warming up, students would rather use English directly. Since the audience, most of them are college students, have the same academic background, this is more easily understood. Another code-switching, “little girl”, is preferred, because the word little expresses the shyness of both the girl and the sender. Anyway, both of them are at a young age, the loving affairs for them are new and exciting. But if “little girl” is expressed in Chinese, the latent meaning is lost.

5.5 To call attention

If special meanings are to be expressed, or target viewer is wanted, students would choose to code-switch or “tag” the person. Sometimes students would also switch to English in notifying, advertising, and vote initiating.

Example 1

Mingtian (Zhousan) Xiawu 5:30 NanquCaochang, Grand Final Liuxuesheng Yuan VS GuojiShangxueyuan, WurenzhiZuqiusaiWeimianZhizhan! Wei Liuxuesheng Yuan YiqunZhanwubusheng De HaizimenJiayouZhuwei! Fighting!

English meaning:

Tomorrow (On Wednesday) afternoon, on the playground of south district, at 5:30 pm, there will be a grand final between College of International Education and College of International Business. This is a five-player soccer defense! Cheer for the invincible students from College of International Education! Fighting!

This is a competition notification posted by a student from the VAICE (Volunteer Association of International Cooperation and Exchange) to call for students’ participation. The phrase “Grand Final” was expressed in English in order to catch the viewers’ eyes. “VS” and “Fighting” also strengthened the tension between the two parts.

Example 2

DanshengoumenZhuyila, ShuangshiyiYoulaila! China’s Singles Day, or the annual online shopping carnival-the “Double Eleven”-is coming. MayunYouyaoDalaoYibi La. Are you ready to “chop off your hands”?

English meaning:

Attention, singles! The “Double Eleven” is coming again! China’s Singles Day, or the annual online shopping carnival-the “Double Eleven”-is coming. Jack Ma will make a fortune again. Are you ready to “chop off your hands”?

Each year, most of the young generation would cheer for the Double Eleven Day, because it’s a feast for singles. But later Alibaba group named this day the shopping day, and there is a big discount in goods online. Actually, the Double Eleven Day has become a shopping celebration for both singles and couples. Therefore, several days before the Double Eleven Day, students would like to post such calling to serve as a hint or notice. The respondent told me that there are also some students who post such information to remind themselves not to buy anything on that day. Anyway, whatever purpose is, such updates do have managed to call others’ attention.

Example 3

Cui LaoshiZhidaode DuiwaiJingjiMaoyiDaxue MTI XueshengZhengzaiZuo “ZhongguoYuyanFuwuGongsiShiyongJiqiFanyi De Diaocha”, Management personnel, Middle-level managers and language users from Translation Companies, Localized Companies, and Language Technology Companies, please fill the questionnaires. Only 3 minutes. GanxieZhuanfa, GanxieTianxie.

English meaning:

Mr. Cui’s MTI (Master of Translating and Interpreting) students from University of International Business and Economics are making a survey about machine translation used by China’s language service companies. Top managers, middle-level managers and language users from translation companies, localized companies and language technology companies, please fill the questionnaire. It only takes three minutes. Those who would like to forward the above information and have finished the questionnaire are appreciated.

This is an initiative of calling for voting from one of my students. I was wondering why she posted such questionnaire. Later she explained that the original “author” was her best friend from University of International Business and Economics. She was just a forwarder. Right below the text information, there was also an access to the website address where potential viewers could easily complete the questionnaire online within several minutes.

5.6 For repetition

One function of code-switching in WeChat, like classroom utterance, is to repeat the same meaning in another language, occasionally for clarification, for emphasis, or for formative symmetry.

Example 1

BubiYongraoyuChaoyueTongbeiHuoXianbei, Qing NuliChaoyueZiji. Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself. Zhen BuxihuanGuozao De Nannannv, Xiang DakaiYigeHeidong, Ba TamenQuandouRengjinqu.

English meaning:

Don’t bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself. (Repeat) Really don’t like those noisy boys and girls, if there is a black hole, I want to put all of them into it.

The sender was to express his hatred against people who are clamorous. He repeated the first sentence in English once again seemingly to tell viewers not just to compare with others but to improve themselves. Here code-switching can be seen as a repetition for emphasis.

Example 2

Shanghai JiaoyujuYaoqiuLiangweiSiliXuexiao Xiang JiazhangDaoqian. YinweiTamenYaoqiuXueshengJiazhangCanjiaZhiliCeshi, Bing ZhenduiJiazhang De Zhiye He Jiaoyu Beijing ZuoFangtan. Shanghai’s education bureau ordered two private primary schools to apologize for asking parents of prospective students to take intelligence tests, and for interviewing them about their own parents’ professions and educational backgrounds.

English meaning:

Shanghai’s education bureau ordered two private primary schools to apologize for asking parents of prospective students to take intelligence tests, and for interviewing them about their own parents’ professions and educational backgrounds. (Repetition)

The student forwarded this news from China Daily and repeated it in English to state a social phenomenon. He didn’t publicize his personal opinions because he wants to hear more different views on such phenomenon. The

repetition explicitly signifies that he attaches great importance to China' education as he himself is one of the cohort.

Example 3

Day 86+95 gym. Physical exercise is undoubtedly a very good way to relax your body and brain. Good night.
Daka 86+95 Tian. JianshenWuyi Shi ShenxinFangsong De HaoFangfa. DajiaWan'an.

English meaning:

Day 86+95 gym. Physical exercise is undoubtedly a very good way to relax your body and brain. Good night.
(Repetition)

The sender of the above message keeps updating her status on WeChat every day. She told me there is no special reason for her code-switching, but using bilingual expression comes to be her preference. Also, she has made it as a symmetrical format, each time the only thing for her to do is to complete such format.

5.7 To show off English proficiency

Code-switching can sometimes be used to distinguish oneself from others, especially for users of different educational backgrounds or different generations. Psychologically, this is to seek self-fulfillment.

Example 1

Jigsaw and ribs made up the freaking chilly day!!!

Comment: TianXiu?

Response: Tianxiu Shi Sha?

Comment: Tiantian Dou ZaiXiu

Response: Shi.

English meaning:

Jigsaw and ribs made up the freaking chilly day!!!

Comment: Show day?

Response: What is show day?

Comment: Show off every day.

Response: Yes.

This piece of news was sent by a student to depict her daily life. On one hand, she comes from a rich family, most often she would post pictures of delicious food cooked from deluxe hotels. On the other hand, she has been learning English both in college and in New Oriental, a reputable training institution in China. So she prefers to post pictures with descriptions in bilingual languages.

Example 2

WoTian Na. Ke...Kepa...

Comment: boy next door

Response: Hahahaha, yes, you turn around more.

Comment: Hahaha, HuiTongnian.

English meaning:

Oh my God, Sc...scary...

Comment: boy next door

Response: Hahahaha (laughter), yes, you turn around me.

Comment: Hahaha. Destroy your childhood.

This short conversation displays young students' concern about the loving affairs between boys and girls. Actually, there is grammar discrepancy in the sentence "you turn around me". Yet, the student told me that this is exactly their way of daily communication.

Example 3

Laocai: when they first bloom, they're white, they also emit a strong odor and their temperature rises.
ShenmeYisi.

TZT: Qiangda De Laoren

Laocai: Yinwei strong older?

TZT: Dui A.

Laocai: Chuangzaoli He XiangxiangliBucuo.

Laocai: how about this

TZT: find the center of the flower...

Laocai: magnifies the scent of the flower Na Zhege Ne?

TZT: emm...short insect! Duanchong?

Laocai: Wo Dou DabuchuZhegeCi...shlter of the insect

TZT: WoYiding Shi HuozaiMengli

Laocai: Ni You XiafanLaidaoRenjianGuo Ma?

TZT: Dui A, DujieChenggong

English meaning:

Laocai: When they first bloom, they're white, they also emit a strong odor and their temperature rises.

What's the meaning?

TZT: Strong older.

Laocai: Because of strong older?

TZT: Yes.

Laocai: Great creativity and imagination.

Laocai: How about this?

TZT: Find the center of the flower.

Laocai: What's the meaning of the phrase magnifies the scent of the flower?

TZT: emm...short insect! Short insect?

Laocai: I cannot type this word in my phone... shelter of the insect.

TZT: I must be living in the dream.

Laocai: Have you ever been to the earth?

TZT: Yes.

The above is a conversation between two good friends on WeChat interface. Both of them are freshmen, and they are enthusiastic about English. So they constantly switch to English in their communication. Code-switching has provided them with an easy access to "play" with language. WeChat code-switching has facilitated those who are searching for a platform to show off their English proficiency. But this doesn't mean all of them are good at English. Frankly, their English proficiency can be at any level. So the function here is mainly for psychological fulfillment.

5.8 Out of habit

Code-switching is occasionally used for habitual experience, especially for students and teachers who are learning and teaching English as a foreign language. Usually, WeChat code-switching can be seen at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence, like OK, OMG, AFTER ALL, and so on. Also these words or phrases are very simple.

Example 1

Yige 888 De, Yige 999 De, Yige 919 De, YigeBaida.

Ni XuanNage?

There is no doubt

WujiaZhiRui! Ni ZhideYongyou!

O Bu, BuhaoYisi, Shi Wode!

All after all

Yuan Yu Zhishou Li Huanghun, Yuan Yu ShangyueGuXingchen.

ZidongBixin.

Egnlish meaning:

One is 888 yuan, one is 999 yuan, one is 919 yuan, and another is free.

Which one do you choose?

There is no doubt,

Rui is priceless, you deserve it!

Oh no, excuse me, she is mine!

All after all,

I would hold your hand till the end, I would enjoy the moon with you every night.

These lines were chosen from a boy student who loves his girlfriend very much. That's why he was always revealing his affection between lines. "There is no doubt" and "All after all" were used as a transition in his "status". He told me that such word or phrase code-switching was not uncommon in his peers because it has been their habit. "It's never easy to get out of that habit once you have got used to it", he said.

Example 2

“Sunday with dear Asia”

JintianShangkeHuijia De Lushang, YiweiSubuxiangshi De Nvhai Chao WoWeixiaoKuawoPiaoliang, HaiJianyiWoKeyiDapeiYitiaoSijinShenme De. Anyway, GanjueShenghuoChuchu You Qimiao De ShiqingFasheng☺

English meaning:

“Sunday with dear Asia”

Today, on the way home after class, one girl, I didn't know before, smiled at me and praised that I am beautiful, and she also suggested that I can wear a silk scarf. Anyway, it seems that it is full of surprises everywhere in life. (Smile)

This is a sentiment expression from a girl, who is indeed very beautiful. She used code-switching at the beginning as a subject or topic. Actually the subject had nothing to do with the message below, but since she has got used to adding some English words before she updates any information, it comes as no surprise.

5.9 For exclusion

Sometimes WeChat users would like to include or exclude certain person in specific information. For inclusion, they generally choose to name that person, while for exclusion, they would code-switch to English.

Example 1

SuiranWoPingshiMeiyouSongniLiwu

Danshi

Hope this is the best present for you

English meaning:

I didn't give you any gift before

But

Hope this is the best present for you

The above information can be regarded as code-switching for exclusion, because the gift was for the sender's boyfriend. Although the student didn't name her boyfriend, words between lines have implicitly excluded others. “Hope this is the best present for you”, here “you” is marked with special meaning.

Example 2

MeiwenXuankan

Shijie Da Butong, Zengli Yi Dute

Unique Gift Giving Traditions from Around the World

English meaning:

Periodicals of selective works

The world is totally different, so the gift is unique.

Unique gift giving traditions from around the world

The sender may target his message at those who are interested in reading or who have read the article he mentioned. This article is written in English, so he meant to strike a chord with peers by code-switching. For those who don't know English or don't like reading, they may have been excluded from this message. Anyway, this is more polite than shielding the message against others.

Example 3

JintianZhenshiKaixin De Yitian

45 mins body step + 45 mins aerobic dance. Nice experience with Qianqian.

Mark it. First time to watch a film with you.

English meaning:

Today is a happy day.

45 minutes of body step and 45 minutes of aerobic dance. Nice experience with Qianqian.

Mark it. First time to watch a film with you.

This short recording of daily experience was from a student who loves dance. She seldom code-switches, but when there is a certain person wanted, she would do that. Maybe the person she targeted was a foreigner that only by code-switching could it make sense. “Qianqian” and “you” mentioned by the student actually implicitly serve as an exclusion of other viewers.

5.10 To show affection

Code-switching can be used to show either love or hatred for certain occurrence or person. WeChat has provided users with public and private platform to express their emotion.

Example 1

JintianZhenshiBuzouyun
 The only two shits I bought on Black Friday
 Freakin chilly and hungry
 Super ugly and shitty
 NEVER GONNA BE HERE AGAIN!!!
 English meaning:
 How unlucky I am today
 The only two shits I bought on Black Friday
 Freakin chilly and hungry
 Super ugly and shitty
 NEVER WANT TO BE HERE AGAIN!!!

Right after the Double Eleven Day in China, here comes the American Black Friday. This student was the witness of the crazy shopping day. But unfortunately, she was not satisfied at what she had bought at all. The expression “Never want to be here again” has vividly depicted her dissatisfaction at her experience that day.

Example 2

TingzheostJianzhi Shi Huiyisha! Zui'ai De Tangdun, Mei YigeRenwu Dou Name Xianhuo De Tangdun, Duo XiwangYongyuanBuhuiWanjie. Zhunbei N Shua! Brilliant careers, rich lives, are seldom led without just an element of love.

English meaning:

It is absolutely a flurry of memories while listening to ost. My favorite Downton, each character occurs vividly in my mind. How I wish there is no end to Downton. And I am ready to review it for several times. Brilliant careers, and rich lives are seldom led without just an element of love. This episode reflects the sender's love for Downton Abbey. Her depicting of the characters is also vivid. Code-switching of the last sentence serves as a conclusion for her affection for the drama, as well as her longing for true love in it.

Example 3

[Us and Them] my down abbey chamber orchestra of London. ZaiXixifoTuranTingdaoZheshouShizai Shi BunengGengKaixin Le!

English meaning:

[Us and Them] My Downton Abbey chamber orchestra of London. I can't be happier anymore to suddenly hear the song here.

The above is a good example to showcase the sender's affection for Downton, because she has consecutively posted this information twice. It is widely known in her class that she has been following the TV series, Downton, for several years. That is why she feels so happy while listening to the theme song. Code-switching here is a restoration of Downton and manifestation of her fondness of it.

6. Conclusion

In sum, WeChat code-switching is very popular among college students and has different functions. Within the ten functions discussed above, emphasis and habitual usage of code-switching come to be the major reasons. Quotation is another important function. Code-switching is also frequently used because sometimes there is no better foreign language to express the exact meaning. Surprisingly, WeChat code-switching is becoming a new way for young students to show their affection for certain person or occurrence, while only a small percentage of students would code-switch to communicate with foreigners, and even a smaller percentage of them code-switch to show off their English proficiency. This proves that the assumption aforementioned is invalid. English proficiency and the nationality of alumnus are not necessarily related to college students' code-switching in WeChat.

References

- Anna, V. Z. (2016). The study of the perception of code-switching to English in German Advertising. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 236, 225-229.
- Ariffin, K., & Rafikgalea, S. (2009). Code-switching as a communication device in conversation. *Galea*.
- Auer, P. (1984). *Bilingual Conversation*. Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Blom, J. P., & Gumperz, J. J. (1972). Social meaning in linguistic structures: Code-switching in Northern Norway. In J. J. Gumperz & D. H. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication* (pp. 407-434). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Flyman-Mattsson, A., & Burenhult, N. (1999). Code-switching in second language teaching of French. *Working Papers* 47, 59-72.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoffmann, C. (1991). *An introduction to bilingualism*. London: Longman.
- Modupeola, O. R. (2013). Code-Switching as a teaching strategy: Implication for English Language teaching and learning in a multilingual society. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 14, 92-94.
- Montes-Alcalá, Cecilia. 2007. Blogging in Two Languages: Code-Switching in Bilingual Blogs. In *Selected Proceedings of the Third Workshop on Spanish Sociolinguistics*, ed. Jonathan Holmquist, Augusto Lorenzino, and Lotfi Sayahi, 162-170. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Malik, L. (1994). *Socio-linguistics: A Study of Code-switching*. Anmol Publications.
- Nur S. H. & Marlyna M. (2014). The Functions of Code-switching in Facebook Interactions. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* (118), 126-133.
- Stapa, S. H., & Khan, N. N. B. S. (2016). Functions of code-switching: A case study of a mixed Malay-Chinese family in the home domain. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 24(February), 181-194.
- Shen C. X. (2010). A Study of Chinese-English Code-switching in Chinese Sports News Reports. *Cross-cultural Communication*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 165-175.
- Shin, S. Y. (2010). The functions of code-switching in a koreansunday school. *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(1), 91-116.
- San, H. K. (2009). *Chinese English code-switching in blogs by Macao young people* (Master's Thesis, The University of Edinburgh). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1842/3626>.
- Sert, O. (2005). The functions of code-switching in ELT classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. XI (8). Retrieved April 21, 2012 from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Sert-CodeSwitching.html>.
- Simon, & Diana Lee. (2001). *Towards a new understanding of codeswitching in the foreign language classroom: Codeswitching Worldwide*, Bd. II.
- Scotton, C. M., & Ury, W. (1977). Bilingual strategies: the social functions of code-switching. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 1977(13), 5-20.
- Zentella, A. C. (1997). *Growing up bilingual: Puerto Rican children in New York*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.