SYNERGY OF DIVERSITY THROUGH CODE SWITCHING IN A MALAYSIAN MOVIE

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Abstract

Code switching, the use of more than one language in discourse, has become habitual in multilingual Malaysia and is constantly used not only in various domains but also in both formal and informal contexts. This widespread use of code switching in real time interactions is also reflected in movies. This paper examines the occurrence of code switching in the well-known Malaysian movie *Sepet*. The patterns and functions of code switching will be analysed using Myers Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language Frame Model as a point of reference. Although the viewing time of the movie is 1 hour and 40 minutes, the transcribing of dialogues where code switching occurs took 40 hours. The findings will be discussed.

Keywords: code switching, Sepet, Matrix Language Frame

Introduction

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country with a population of 23.27 million, who use 140 languages and dialects (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2010). Of the total population, *Bumiputeras* (sons and daughters of the soil), who are "Malays" and other indigenous groups, comprise 65.1%, Chinese 26.0%, and Indians 7.7%. While Malays who are the Muslim majority consider them selves "indigenous," non-Malays, such as the Chinese and the Indians, are described as non-*Bumiputeras*, or more controversially, "immigrants" since most of them arrived and settled in Malaya during the colonial period beginning 1786. In East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak), the non-Muslim indigenous groups form the majority of the

population. The Chinese and Indians came as immigrants in 1900s to work in tea, coffee, pepper plantations and mining (David and Dealwis, 2009).

Within each group, a variety of languages and dialects are spoken. For example there are 29 dialects spoken by the Bidayuh community of 187,576 people in the Bidayuh Belt of Sarawak (Dealwis, 2008). Living in a multi-ethnic environment, Malaysians have been brought to accept diversity as a natural fact of life. Many societies can described as multi-cultural, but Malaysia is one of the few nations in Asia where citizens study, work and play with friends of different ethnicities, religious beliefs and cultural identities daily in peaceful settings (Fong, 2010).

As this paper discusses the choice and use of languages in a movie, some background of the Malaysian film industry is necessary. The Malaysian film industry has yet to reach the success levels of Hollywood, Bollywood and Hong Kong movie industries in Asia. Nevertheless, the legendary late Tan Sri P. Ramlee, the versatile actor and director whose movies portrayed Malaysian lifestyles in 1960s entertains Malaysian audiences even today, and his works are regarded by Malaysian filmmakers as unique. In 1990s and 2000s the success of Yasmin Ahmad videos and films indicated that Malaysian viewers watching Malay movies still enjoy plots depicting multicultural Malaysia. Yasmin Ahmad as an iconic Malaysian filmmaker of the 21st century cleverly exploits plots based on the fusion of Malaysian cultures such as the pride and prejudice of living in mixed neighbourhoods and the challenges arising in inter-racial marriages. In fact, the audiences for such plots are wide and far-reaching compared to the movies produced in 1970s and 1980s.

The mixed linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Malaysia are reflected in movies through the occurrence of code switching. In fact, code switching in Malaysian movies is increasingly popular nowadays, where actors often have English code switches in Malay dialogues to portray educated middle class and wealthy lifestyles. This paper investigates the phenomenon of code switching, another facet of diversity in Malaysian life as portrayed in *Sepet*. Yasmin Ahmad's blockbuster *Sepet* portrays Malaysia as a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation, where code switching is a common phenomenon in daily communication. It is clear that Yasmin saw the need to leverage on Malaysia's diversity to gain a wider Malaysian audience by making use of a mix of a variety of languages in the dialogues.

The goal of this study is to investigate code switching in *Sepet*. The aims of the study can be formulated into the following research questions:
1.   What are the code switching patterns in *Sepet*?
2.   What are the reasons / functions for the code switches?

Literature Review

According to Fasold (1984), language choice involves code shifting, code mixing and choosing variations of the same code. In bi- and multilingual societies the

language choice made by interlocutors during social interaction is a natural phenomenon and occurs because of many reasons. This includes personal needs such as proficiencies and social groups' needs such as identity projection or rejection. He also noted that the physical setting could exercise a powerful influence on language choice.

The analysis of the present study is drawn upon the Matrix Language Frame Model of Myers Scotton (1993). Although Myers-Scotton refers to code switching as a term used to "identify alternations of linguistic varieties within the same conversations" (1993, p. 1), later the term was defined more technically as "the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded language (or languages) in utterances of a matrix language during the same conversation" (1993a, p. 4). This definition is more fully developed in the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) Model where the matrix language (ML) refers to the main language and the embedded language (EL) the secondary or lesser one. Myers-Scotton proposed that within any stretch of intra-sentential code switching, one language can be seen as the main or matrix language into which items from other language varieties are embedded. In a multilingual context, it is therefore possible to have a number of embedded codes interacting and mixing.

The study also uses Gumperz (1982) framework as a point of reference to explain the reasons for code switching. Gumperz (1982) defines code switching as the "juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems." Code switching is the simultaneous use of two languages at the word, phrase, clause or sentence level. The four main reasons why people code switched as cited by Gumperz, J. (1982) are: firstly, due to lack of knowledge of one's language or lack of facility in that language on a particular subject; secondly, code switching is useful in excluding certain persons present from a portion of the conversation if it is known that these persons have no knowledge of the language used for switching; thirdly, code switching is sometimes used as a stylistic device to indicate change in the' tone' of the conversation at a certain point, and lastly, a person code switches in order to impress another person with his ability to speak in many languages or in a language of "prestige." In fact Gumperz (1982) made a list of the functions of codes used during code switching which have social meanings. In everyday conversation we often change our code when speaking to the same person or different persons because shifts have certain functions. The speakers also switch for socially determined reasons. Gumperz (1982, 64) explained that code switching is perhaps most frequently found in the informal speech of those members of cohesive minority groups in modern urbanizing regions who speak the native tongue at home.

Earlier studies have emphasised that code switching occurs only in informal settings but in Malaysia more recent studies show that it appears as communicative strategy even in formal settings while using the majority language when dealing with members of other ethnic groups. In multi-linguistic settings, code switching can act both as an accommodation strategy, especially in encounters with members from different ethnicities, as well as an alienation

strategy that excludes participation in conversations, particularly when one cannot speak the language code selected. Kow (2003) argues that English/Hokkien/Mandarin/Malay code switching among Malaysian children between the ages of four and six is an innovative linguistic strategy by which children consider efficient and effective ways to communicate, especially when compensating for a limited vocabulary. A similar conclusion has been reached by Kuang (2006) who worked with an under-two year old bilingual child who used Mandarin and English to communicate to speakers of different languages. In fact David (2003) maintains that code switching has become an entrenched code in multilingual Malaysia. It is no longer a rare feature but has become a normal feature in many conversations among and between Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic groups in Malaysia. The choice of language use in speech or spoken discourse largely depends on the social context. In multilingual Malaysia, the choice of language and variety are affected by many factors. They depend on the place of communication or social context, who is speaking to who, context/purpose of communication, status and educational background and ethnicity and culture of the interlocutors.

In multi-racial Malaysia, interaction across ethnicities is unavoidable. The language choice between the various ethnicities is influenced by various factors. Code switching and code mixing tend to take place where the speakers switch from their dominant to another code or language for various reasons such as solidarity, distancing, or mitigating face-threatening situations. It is not uncommon for an individual of one ethnic group to be able to speak the heritage language of another ethnic group due to inter-marriages as well as neighbourhood influences and education such as non-Chinese studying in Chinese schools, etc.

It cannot be denied that one major reason for code switching is limited proficiency in a language. In order to communicate such speakers will use communicative strategies. In such circumstances, code switching ensures that the meaning and message of communication is understood well by the receptor.

A number of studies have been conducted in Malaysia on the significance of code switching in daily interactions between the communicators. Some examples of local studies are found in David's (1999) observations on how Malaysians (Indians, Malays and Chinese) interact with one other by shifting from one language to another in service encounters such as fast food restaurants. In other settings such as a government setting, Jariah Mohd Jan (2003) argues that Malay government officials use Malay, the national language as a power tool over non-Malay junior staff to demonstrate status and power.

Chu (2005) studying doctor-patient interactions examines the frequent use of code switching by the doctor and her patients in a clinical setting to accommodate each other's language choices. Her study finds that the majority of the Chinese patients/caretakers code switch. It was found that the reasons for accommodation by the doctor via code switching included: to invite participation, to show politeness, for ease of understanding, as a private language to reduce fear and anxiety as well as to result in closer doctor-patient relationships.

David (2003) uses the courtroom environment to show how a defending lawyer used dominant Bahasa Malaysia to start with and shifts to English to emphasize an important point to the judge that the accused had not committed any crime for 10 years. Her study describes a range of speech acts like reprimands, directives, requests, and warnings that are conveyed by using different intricate strategies to show the semantic significance in certain specific situations. It is not only the lawyer who code switches, but also the judge who presides over the case.

Methodology

The movie *Sepet* is 1 hour 40 minutes but the viewing and reviewing and transcription took 40 hours. The conversations were transcribed manually and the dialogues of the different characters were analysed using Myers Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language Frame Model as a point of reference to determine the matrix and embedded codes used during discourse in various scenes. The Matrix Language (ML) is the language of the majority of the morphemes in the utterances of at least two sentences in length. Myers Scotton (1993) calls the other language apart from the matrix language in the sentence as the Embedded Language Island (ELI).

Data

Based on an interracial romance, *Sepet*, released in 2004, has received glowing reviews from critics within the film circle, some even calling it as the first truly Malaysian movie to be made. The simple, honest and moving love story uses colloquial Malay, Malaysian English and bits of Chinese in a predominantly Malay movie. The movie touches on sensitive topics like interracial romance and racial discrimination in Malaysia. The screenwriter/director was trying to use *Sepet* to break peoples' assumptions and to harness a synergy of diversity.

The story focuses on love between a Chinese boy and a Malay girl. Teenage love blossoms instantly between a Malay girl (Orked) and a Chinese boy (Jason Ah Loong) who is from an unhappy family and sells pirated videos. Jason's mother is a *nyonya*, (offspring of a Chinese and Malay union and who tend to use what is known as variety of Malay which has a number of Hokkien lexical items) and his father, a Chinese, and therefore we hear the use of non-reciprocal languages in his house. Jason's father normally uses Cantonese, and his mother talks generally in Malay, but sometimes code switches and uses Malay with English, Cantonese and Hokkien. Orked, on the other hand, comes from a happy family. Both her parents are Malay, but the language used in the home domain is Malay/English code switch.

This film is set in Ipoh in the state of Perak where the majority of the people in the city are Chinese. However, not many non-Chinese know Cantonese (which is the main Chinese dialect of not only Ipoh but also Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia) or Mandarin (the official Chinese used in Chinese medium schools and media).

Analysis

Whereas previously code switching was regarded negatively and seen to be triggered by limited language proficiency, the data in this paper, drawn from a range of settings in *Sepet* , show strategic use of the mixed code to achieve specific functional objectives to harness synergy of diversity in a multilingual context.

The transcriptions disclose that code switching occurs in 72.5% of the conversations in *Sepet.* There are 40 scenes altogether, and code switching occurs in 29 scenes. In *Sepet*, the interlocutors shift from code to code depending on whom they are speaking to. For instance, every time Orked speaks to her friend Lin or her parents, she code switches between Malay and English. However, when she speaks to her Chinese boyfriend Jason or Jason's Chinese friends, she uses Malay, English and Cantonese intermittently.

Example 1

Scene 6
Orked (O) and her friend in the market.

Orked: Takeshi **kan, I think dalam banyak banyak aktor kan, dia lah yang paling** handsome. (amongst all the many actors he is the most handsome)
Lin　: *Siapa?* (Who?) Takeshi Kaneshiro?
Orked: Yes.
Lin　: **Tak ada lah,**(Don't have) **I don't think so**.

Scene 20
Jason(J) introduced Orked (O) to his best friend Keong (K) in a coffee shop.

J　:　This is Keong.
O　:　Keong, **wah**, Jason *kong lei m' leng cai, ngo tai lei hou leng cai.* **(**Jason said you are not handsome, I see you are very handsome).

Scene 22
Jason, Orked and Keong having a meal at a stall.

K　:　I'm sure you can speak better than Jason here.
O　:　No, he is very good in many languages. Malay and English.
K　:　You know why? Our friend here, reads and writes poetry but in Mandarin *la (particle)*. Still his poetry are far too romantic for me *la*, when I read it, oh… **geli**.(disgusting)
O　:　Oh, **yang (love)**, I don't know you wrote poetry, may be you can read them to me sometime.

Key: Times New Roman Bold Italics-Malay; Bold-Cantonese

Example 1 shows that Orked's language choice appears to depend on the interlocutor or speech partner. In scene 6, when she speaks to her friend, she only uses Malay code switches with English words e.g. *I think* and *handsome*. In scene 6, the matrix language used by Orked is Malay and English is the embedded language. In contrast in scene 20, Orked uses Cantonese when Jason introduces his friend Keong to her. It is clear here that Orked tries to accommodate Jason's friend

Keong who is a Chinese. Although Orked is not proficient in Cantonese she uses some lexical items in Cantonese when she meets Jason's friend Keong but her dominant language is English (see Example 1).

Certain Malay, English and Chinese words are habitually used as code switches among Malaysians of all races and these are used in the dialogues (see Example 2).

In Orked's code switching appears to be habitual as shown in Example 2.

Example 2

Scene 2
Orked is praying and her mother (M) asks her to come down and have dinner.

M : Orked, Orked.
O : **Ya, mak**.*(yes, mother)*
M : **Turun, makan**. *(Come down and have dinner*.)
O : Okay, coming.

Scene 25
Jason talks to Orked in front of her house. Orked's mother (M), father (F) and maid (Y) are commenting on him.

M : **Eh, Yam, itu budak Cina** boyfriend **Orked ke**? *(Is that Chinese boy Orked's boyfriend?)*
Y : **Em, nama dia** Jason.*(His name is Jason.)*
M : Handsome **juga eh**, Ah Pa (father) , **jom, tengok**. *(He's handsome. Let's look.)*
F : **Em,** I **dah nampak dah, macam pelakon Jepun yang ada dalam jamban Orked tu.** *(I saw him and he resembles a Japanese actor in Orked's toilet).*

Scene 19
At midnight, Orked answers the phone while her parents are about to go to bed.

F : **Siapa telefon malam-malam ni**?*(Who calls at this time of the night?)*
M : Boyfriend **dia la.***(Her boyfriend.)*
F : **Slamba je lok**.*(You are undisturbed)*
M : **Abih** you panic **nak buat apa**?*(So, you want me to panic , is it?)*

Key: Times New Roman Bold: English code-switches, Times New Roman: Malay

In scene 2, it is clear that Orked code switches unconsciously when her mother asks her to come down for dinner. At the beginning of the conversation, when her mother calls her, she answers in Malay "*ya, mak*" (*yes mother*) and after that code switches to English. In scene 25, the words "boyfriend", "handsome", and "I" are generally found in Malay dominated discourse. Scene 19 again provides evidence that the English word "boyfriend" is commonly used. In scene 25, the matrix language used by Orked's father, mother and Yam is Malay, but there are some English lexical items in their dominant Malay discourse.

Malaysians generally code switch to create closer rapport with the interlocutors but sometimes code switching occurs when someone is angry. For instance, racist remarks in the Malay speaker's language can hurt the Chinese recipient: *mata sepet* (slit eyes) and *char kuey tiao* (Chinese fried noodles) referring to Chinese body odour (see Example 3).

Example 3

Scene 14
Orked (O) goes to school to get her results. Her friend Lin (L) calls her, they chat. Orked and Lin's boyfriend (A) quarrel.

1 O: Oh, Lin please take him away, blocking my air.

2 A: **Bukan** I **yang berbau** *Char Kuey Tiao* . **Dah, Lin, jom lah kita balik lah,** I **dah membeli vcd baru. Kisah mengenai orang yang bermata sepet macam ini.**(It is not I who smell it is **Char Kuey Tiao.** Ok let us return, I have bought a new VCD. The story of someone with slit eyes)

3 O: **ei, kau ni apa hal a? cakap macam orang yang tak berpelajaran langsung. Ah,** one day **kau ni** get into trouble**, baru padan muka kau.**(What has happened to you? You speak like someone who is completely uneducated. …you…then serve you right)

4 A: Me, u mean I **yang** (who) get into trouble?

5 O: Yes, yes.

6 A: You know how I and our friend talking about you and your stupid **mata sepet** (slit-eyed) boyfriend? I'll get into trouble?

7 O: Siapa **boyfriend** aku? (Who is my boyfriend?)

8 A: The **mata sepet lah**. (The slit-eyed)

9 O: **Aku keluar dengan dia sekali je,** so you went all around the school telling about us, what is your problem**?** (I only went out with him once…)

10 Lin: **Dah lah** ok, I already told him don't talk about that**.** (Enough…)

11 A: Hey, you know what's wrong with you a? You are just the only one Malay girl who think you are too good with your race, hanging around **suraulah**, **kuburlah**, **cari Mat Salleh lah, dah pendek tak sedar. (small Muslim place of worship, grave looking for a White man, you are short but not aware)**

12 O: Hello, one, **aku tak pernah pergi** club, two, **aku tak cari Mak Salleh, aku tak suka Mat Salleh, awek kau yang suka Mat Salleh. Kau sedar … kau tu Mak Salleh celup, muka macam Mat Salleh, tapi English tak pass. Sedih, sedar sikit, ah, ok. (I have never been to the club… I have not looked for a White Man, your girlfriend like to look for White man. Are you aware.. you are not a real white person, your face is like that of a white person but your English is not good. Sad, realize this a bit…)**

13 A: **Apa benda yang dia merepek ini?** (looking at Lin).(What is she blabbing about?)

14 O: **Ei, kau tau tak**, our generation a, Malay man have been marrying outside their race, **kau faham tak**? Do you understand ah? Ok, never mind, tak ada hal, alright **je, sekarang aku nak buat, semua bising, apa hal?** (Do you know…do you understand?... never mind, now I want to do, all of you make noise, what is the problem?)

Key: Times New Roman Bold: Malay and English code-switches; Italics Times New Roman- Chinese code-switches

In *Sepet*, we note that when Orked talks to her friends, she uses English and Malay intermittently although Malay is her mother tongue. In Scene 14, it is clear that when Orked is angry, the dominant language she uses is Malay and English becomes the embedded language. The Malay pronouns "*kau*" in line no.3 and "*aku*" in line no. 9 are deemed less polite by native speakers of Malay. In scene 14, Orked is angry, and uses the "*aku*" and "*kau*" pronouns to express her anger. Similarly, Jason expresses his anger in a Chinese dialect (see Example 4).

Example 4

Scene 26
Keong (K) is injured, Jason (J) visits him.
K: Just shut up ok, <u>tiam che ei sai bo</u> (shut up can a?) <u>lu kua ei tio gua bo, wa m cai ya comi ni ani gong ei</u> (can you see me? I don't know why you are so stupid). <u>Comi lu boi understand honour among friends leh a</u>**?** (why don't you understand honour among friends?). <u>lu cabo pengiu</u> (your girlfriend) Orked pun understand a. <u>si lu bo, si lu ka yilang kong bo, kong wa na tolo bo</u> (you right? Are you right? You told them where I am-right?). <u>Bo yiong la lu, huanna pun eihiao, lu boihiao</u> (useless la, Malay also know, you don't know) …
J: … don't worry la, I think he won't touch your family la.

Key: Underlined-Chinese

In scene 26, we note that Keong starts the conversation in English, then immediately code switches to Hokkien when he scolds Jason. Keong, who is Hokkien, normally speaks Cantonese with Jason. Keong is not fluent in Cantonese and Jason is not fluent in Hokkien. It is clear that when Keong wants to express his anger, he immediately code switches to his mother tongue – Hokkien. Hokkien became the matrix language in this conversation and English the embedded language.

One of the functions of code switching is to create rapport with the recipient. In *Sepet*, Orked sometimes tries to accommodate Jason who is Chinese by speaking Cantonese (see Example 5).

Example 5

Scene 6
  Jason (J) passes the VCD to Orked(O).

O: How much?
J: Five.
O: Thank you. *M'm koi (Thank you).*
J: *M'sai (you are welcome).*

Key: Times New Roman Italics: Cantonese

In Scene 6 Orked and her friend Lin go to the market to buy VCDs and this is the first time she sees Jason, who is selling the VCDs. Example 5 shows that Orked tries to accommodate Jason by code switching from English to Cantonese to start a friendship at their first meeting.

Example 6

Scene 15
Jason suddenly comes to see Orked and he looks tired.

O: … what's wrong with you? You looks tired, *mo fan kau a lei* (didn't sleep did you?)
J: Have some new DVD come, I have to go and check them.
O: Its ok, you go on first, we go out another time ok.

Key: Italics: Chinese

Example 6 shows that Orked starts the conversation with Jason in English, and shortly after code switches to Cantonese to express concern.

Example 7

Scene 20

> *Orked come in to the shop, she sees the boss slicing pork.*

O: Ho yo, *hou hou mei* (very tasty) a. hai, sayang. (Hello love)
J: This is Keong.
O: Keong, wah, Jason *kong lei m' leng cai, ngo tai lei hou leng cai*. **(Jason said you are not handsome, I see you are very handsome).**

Key: Bold-Chinese

Example 7 shows that Orked tries to accommodate to the situation by saying in Cantonese "*hou hou mei*" (very tasty) when she steps into a Chinese coffee shop and looks at pork being sliced up. Actually, pigs are Quranically described as filthy beasts and so Muslims stay away from them, and anything that comes from them, so it is strange for Orked as a Muslim to have said this. She soon switches back to Malay when she greets Jason with "*hai, sayang*" *(hello, love)*. Also, when Jason introduces Keong to her, she switches to Cantonese when talking to Keong. This is the first meeting with Jason's friend Keong, so she speaks Cantonese to create rapport.

There is another example where Orked tries getting information from Meng, a friend of Jason, about the whereabouts of Jason. In doing so, she accommodates to Meng by using Cantonese (see Example 8).

Example 8

Scene 29
Orked in the car with her father and is looking for Jason
O: Ya, kawan dia (yes, his friends). Stop, stop <u>ah pa</u> (father) ei, Meng a, Jason *hai pindou***?** *(where is Jason)?*
Meng: Jason a?
O: Where is he?
Meng: *m' ci o (don't know o).*
O: Where he go?
Meng: **Tak tau la** *(don't know la).*

Key: Bold-Chinese

Example 8 shows that Orked uses Cantonese in her opening with "*Jason hai pindou?*" (where is Jason?). Jason's friends are all Chinese and she knows they only speak Cantonese, so she shifts to Cantonese so that they can understand what she is saying. She then echoes the question, this time in English albeit a pidgin version to accommodate their variety of the language and says, "where he go?"

Apart from using code switching as a strategy to create rapport the characters in *Sepet* code switch when they try to exclude someone from a conversation (see Example 9).

Example 9

Scene 6

Lin and Orked go to the VCD stall

1 Jason: Mau beli video?*(Want to buy video?)*
2 Lin: No, actually I **nak beli kasut lah. Saya size enam, dia size lima . Ada jual kasut tak?**(*No…I want to buy shoes. I 'm size six, she's size five. Do you sell shoes?)*
3 O: You **jangan jangan dengar cakap ini perempuan, dia** *chee-sin* **(crazy)***. (Don't listen to this woman, she's crazy).*
4 Lin: **Apa dia** *chee-sin* **(crazy)**?*(What is …?)*
5 O: **Tak ada, aku kata kau orang baik hati, suka campur dengan orang bangsa lain**. *(Nothing, I said you a good person who likes to mix with other races.)*
6 O: en… Boss, you got VCD with Takeshi Kaneshiro or not?

Jason takes a VCD and run to them

7 J: Miss, you take this, you watch it first, if you don't like it, you can return it, no need to pay one.
8 O: Are you sure?
9 J: **Ya.**
10 O: *Zankei* (really)?
11 J: *Zankei* (really).
12 O: OK, thank you.
13 J: Miss, Miss, *lei kiu mei meng***?** (What is your name)?
14 Lin: **Apa yang dia cakap?** (What did he say?)

Key: Bold Malay, Chinese

Example 9 shows that when Orked describes her friend Lin to Jason she code switches to Chinese with "*chee-sin*" (crazy) in line 3. It is clear she does not want Lin to understand what she is saying to Jason because she informs Lin that "*chee-sin*" has a different meaning –that of someone who has a good heart and likes to mix with people of different races. Another such example of a switch with a similar function occurs when Jason in line 13 asks Orked her name. He code switches to Cantonese because he knows Lin does not understand Cantonese.

Sometime, code switching is used for emphasis. For example, the word *sepet* appears many times to refer to Jason who has slit-eyes. *Sepet* – slit-eyes is a common insult when referring to the narrow eyes of the Chinese which infer inscrutability and even heartlessness (see Example 10).

Example 10

Scene 7

O and Lin talking about the story book.
Lin: I think **kan** , may be the writer over simplify the **penjajah** (colonial master) and **dijajah teori**… (colonise theory)
O: **Ya**, that might be truth, but something … **sampai sekarang pun**,(until now) the British **dah lama** <u>cau</u> (long time ago have gone), but we still believe all the things they changed is

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good. I think you saw it **kan (right) bila anak** Mrs Tan **beranak**,(when Mrs Tan's child gave birth) all the relative gather around and said a "Wah so fair a, some more the nose and so sharp, but sorry to say a, the eyes is a bit **sepet (slit-eyed)**.

Lin: **Alah** you **ni, selalu nak ejek** I **(You always tease me)**.

Scene 14
Orked (O) and Lin's boyfriend (A) quarrel.

A: You know how I and our friend talking about you and your stupid **mata sepet (slit-eyed)** boyfriend? I'll get into trouble?

O: **Siapa** boyfriend **aku**? (who is my boyfriend?)

A: The **mata sepet lah**. (the one with slit eyes)

O: **Aku keluar dengan dia sekali je**, so you went all around the school telling about us, what is your problem? *(I went out with him once …)*

Key: Bold –Malay code-switches in dominant English; Italics- English code-switches n dominant Malay

Example 10 shows that sepet is a negative word. In scene 7, Orked imitates how people describe a baby, the words "but sorry to say a, the eyes is a bit *sepet*", the word sorry implies that people use the word *sepet* negatively, to suggest ugly. Scene 14 also shows that A purposely code switches *mata sepet* when he refers to Jason. He not only uses "you and your stupid boyfriend," but inserts the words *mata sepet* to emphasis his dislike. Example 11 also shows how people code switch for emphasis.

Example 11

Scene 18

Jason and Orked sitting in the MD

O: So, what is the Malay girl in your school?

J: I don't know, I was too young and too shy to ask.

O: So I'm just a substitute lah macam ni? (like this)

J: No, this call *yuanfen* **(destiny)**.

O: em?

J: Is a Mandarin word for destiny.

Scene 20

Jason wanted to introduce Orked to his best friend Keong, Keong tries to advise him.

K: Hey, I don't you should go out with her, Chinese boy shouldn't go out with Malay girl. Sure trouble later. You'll going to break your parent heart la, you have to change your name, then changed your religion, very <u>mafan</u> (trouble) one you know? Some more you cannot eat *chasiu* (pork) anymore you know or not? Cannot eat pork.

J: **Ya hor. (true)**

In scene 18, Jason said the meeting between him and Orked is destined. When he talks about this he purposely code switches and uses a Mandarin word "*yuanfen*" (destiny). He wants to emphasise to Orked that she is not a substitute but their relationship is fated. Jason code switches to Mandarin because he wants to explain the significance of the word "*yuanfen*" (destiny) to Orked.

In scene 20, it is clear that the matrix language in this situation is English, but suddenly Keong code switches to Hokkien using the word "*mafan*" to warn

Jason that having a Malay girlfriend can be troublesome. This is to emphasise how troublesome such a relationship will be.

Example 12

Scene 7
Lin is reading a book in Orked room.

Lin: Orked, Orked
O: **ya, saya** (yes)
Lin: (shows the book)
O: **Buku itu, buku itu susah sikit nak** explain **lah**. (it is a little difficult to explain the book) Basically it is about … the psychological effect… the **penjajah (colonial master)** has **…**
Sin: So what kind of effect?
O: **Mana** (where) hairbrush **ku**(my)? Aiya, I think **dat kat** Yam.
Lin: Hello, miss…

Lin asks about the book, and Orked tries to explain it.

O: …last last the native did believe that the will … so **orang hitam gian nak kahwin dengan orang chocolak, orang chocolak gian nak kahwin dengan orang putih. Kira nak naikkan darjat like that lah.(black people are eager to marry brown people and brown people are eager to marry white people. Consider it to raise the status…)**
Lin: Ya kah? (Is that so?)

Code switching is an innovative strategy. It is an effective and efficient way to communicate, especially when compensating for limited vocabulary. Example 12 shows Orked trying to explain a story to Lin, but Orked finds it hard to explain and code switches when attempting to explain. Her proficiency in English is not sufficient so she code switches to Malay when she is unable to explain in English.

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Discussion

Sepet is a romantic film and the theme of the story is Malay-Chinese racial relations and the issue of nationhood. *Sepet* won the Best Asian Film Award at the 18th Tokyo International Film Festival in October 2005. It had previously won other best film awards at the 27th Creteil International Women Directors Festival in France and the Global Chinese Golden Arts Awards.

There are many code switches in *Sepet* and a number of reasons for such occurrences have been discussed. The movie shows code switching happening between characters of different races. It proves to show that in Malaysia code switching among the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic and linguistic groups has become the norm (David, 2003). The integration and increased use of both Bahasa Malaysia and English in the educational system since 1970s and 1990s respectively have encouraged many younger Malaysians to use Bahasa Malaysia and English intermittently in their conversations. Ah Loong and Orked are products of such a system of education. The different code switching scenes in *Sepet* give evidence that code switching is not only so entrenched in Malaysia's diverse population, but also appears to become a code in its own right. It is only logical that such a common form of real-time code switches discourse would be

fully utilised by Yasmin Ahmad in *Sepet*, using the common languages in urban areas.

The language use in *Sepet* is unconventional to Malaysian cinema and the story is also unconventional in how it approaches Malaysian plural society. *Sepet* has also been successful in capturing how *Bahasa rojak* (mixed language) is spoken in Malaysia. As shown in the examples given, the code switches as used in *Sepet* are used to influence interactions. Most of the time they indicate to the addressee that the speaker is accommodating to the speech situation. In short, code switches are used to influence interpersonal relations (Myers-Scotton, 1988, p. 218). The interlocutors are motivated by the identity and relationship of the participants that often "express a move along the solidarity or social distance dimension" (Holmes, 2001, p. 36).

Sepet shows that code switching has become a norm in discourse in both in-group and out-group encounters. The family is an important domain in which practices of code switching are found to occur. Orked speaks English and Malay intermittently with her Malay parents. Hafriza Burhanudeen (2006) in discussing language choice of urban bilingual Malays in Kuala Lumpur, states that English is often mixed with Malay when speaking to educated parents and siblings.

In the Malaysian context, it is sometimes easier to display one's annoyance by switching from one language to another. The examples in scenes 14 and 26 given in this paper demonstrate this strategy which allows the person who is annoyed, some leeway to express their emotions without appearing too harsh or injuring the relationship beyond reconciliation.

The characters in *Sepet* code switch to facilitate the conversation, to exclude someone, to emphasis something, to show intimacy, to reduce distancing, to accommodate and to express emotion. In many situations people use non-reciprocal language. For example, Jason, his father, his brother and his sister-in-law always speak Cantonese with his mother who is *nyonya*, but his mother always speaks Malay to them. Sometimes, Orked speaks English with her friend Lin, but Lin speaks Malay to her. In the hospital, most of the time Keong speaks Hokkien, but Jason speaks English. Non-reciprocal language can happen among the interlocutors when they know the language background of each other. In *Sepet*, although many non-reciprocal language situations appear, these do not adversely affect the flow of communication between the characters. This is because Malaysians are generally multilingual.

Conclusion

Sepet by Yasmin Ahmad (2004) depicts Malaysia as a multi-ethnic country. The people socialise freely and there are many languages and dialects used for different purposes or reasons. Although, the matrix language used in this Malay movie is Malay, other embedded codes such as English and Chinese (Cantonese and Hokkien) are used. This movie through the use of code switching shows the reality of choice in a bilingual or multi-lingual urban society like Malaysia. It indicates that community members also have a third choice that is, the use of more than one

language in utterances, resulting at times in a code mixed discourse often referred to as *Bahasa Rojak*. A speaker may not always be free to choose to speak the language he or she is most proficient in. Instead, the choice of code made by the speaker is influenced by a range of factors including the speech partner's linguistic proficiency, and the need to create closer rapport and solidarity.

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