Code-switching for power wielding: Inter-gender discourse at the workplace

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Abstract

There is little doubt that bilinguals, by some of their code-switching, do relate to differences in power and status that go beyond the particular communication situation. In face-to-face interaction one can, directly or indirectly, refer to the more or less agreed-upon differences in power and status between two or more languages which are at one’s disposal for a particular context. In this study, I will examine several extracts from talk exchanges amongst working adults during office meetings. Special attention is paid to linguistic power-wielding among male and female participants and to determining how strategies of domination, negotiations of personal rights and obligations and control in their mutual interaction can be understood. This study will also show how the ‘intricate’ interplay of language choices and code-switching of male and female speakers are manipulated in order to give power and turn-taking rights in conversations and to influence events according to the speakers’ aims. This study suggests that participants develop a strategy of code-switching to exert power in a particular context and to negotiate language choice. Here, language choice is a tool for wielding power because it borrows its status from ‘societal inequality’ and it symbolically expresses convergence with and divergence from the other’s code.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an unexpected surge of research interest in the phenomena of bilingual speech, and in particular, code-switching. Code-switching studies often focus on switches that are at play between speakers who have mastered two linguistic systems and who are able to communicate rapidly and effortlessly from one linguistic system to another as circumstances change within an interaction. These speakers exhibit their ability to switch back and forth between the two languages to
the extent that it is not always possible to determine which of them operates as a dominant code and which serves to embed the content.

Communication between Malaysians does not consist of the simple straightforward use of a standard language (Jamaliah Mohd. Ali 1995; Le Vasan 1996; David 1999). Interlingual code-switching has become a feature of spoken communication in Malaysian society (Kuang 2002). Malaysians, in some of their code-switching, do relate to differences in power and status that go beyond the particular communication context (Jariah Mohd. Jan 1999). Code-switching from the relatively ‘powerless’ or less dominant code into the ‘powerful’ or more dominant code may have certain meanings, and switching in the opposite direction may conjure up other meanings which are related to the difference in power and status between the languages or between native speakers of the two languages.

The social environment in Malaysia is a situation where various languages are used in daily communication (Omar 1982). In a recent study, Jacobson (forthcoming) finds that in informal situations, Malaysian bilinguals ‘tend to rely in their conversation with peers and family members on the resources from the languages with which they have grown up’. He states that switching, particularly from Malay to English or, vice-versa, occurs when participants of a similar ethnic background converse informally in an interaction. As such, the question at hand is whether this exists in a formal situation.

The role and status of English and Malay in Malaysian society: Historical overview

Malaysia is a country where linguistic communities live side by side, and for decades it has striven to foster unity through the use of minority and indigenous languages. This presents linguistic, cultural and intellectual enrichment resources for the nation. Bahasa Malaysia (henceforth BM) has been legislated as the national and official language, as the government believes that the key to unity for a polyglot group of people is to establish a language of mutual understanding. Policy planners have integrated an educational infrastructure to ensure that all Malaysians will be able to speak this common tongue and thus become integrated into Malaysian society. Meanwhile, English is the second language for Malaysia. According to Omar (1997: 1), the term ‘second language’ refers to ‘... second in importance in the hierarchy of the Malaysian languages, seen in terms of the official recognition given to the language, its importance as a language of educational instruction, as well as its position as an important language in the professions’.

The status and prestige of the English language was established during the British regime. In fact, English entered Malaysia, then Malaya, with
the British colonial power. It came as the language of the rulers because it was the language used in the colonial administration although only a small fraction of the population was able to comprehend it. The language itself meant power and prestige. In tandem with its image as the language of power, an opportunity to learn the language and to be able to acquire an admission to English schools, i.e. to schools that used English as the medium of instruction and where the teaching was carried out by the British colonial government through their education office, was considered a big social success for Malaysian children and their families.

The rise of nationalism that led to the independence of Malaya in 1957 brought with it the importance of Malay as an element of national identity. Malay was the best choice to fulfil this function because it is an indigenous language, because of its role as a lingua franca, its position as a major language, its possession of high literature, and the fact that it had once been an important language of administration and diplomacy in the Malay archipelago (Omar 1997: 8). On the other hand, English could never be equated with nationalism for it was the language of the colonial power and ‘it was not indigenous to the soil’ (ibid.).

While English is recognised as being important, the government’s stand is not to undermine the role and status of BM as the official and national language. The Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, acknowledged that, although English is an international language, BM has a role to play and the government does not de-emphasise its role (Malaysian Business 1992).

English is also the language of diplomacy among all the members of the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and therefore, by extension, also the language of all the new organs that ASEAN has spawned to involve other Asian Nations. It is, for most countries in Asia, still the most useful language of multinational and intra-regional trade and travel.

As trends are changing in view of the country’s political stability and expanding economic opportunities, the government is expanding the limits for the use of English. For instance, English is used in tertiary education as a medium of instruction for the teaching of science and technology. It is seen as a way of achieving industrialisation and internationalisation.

The Malaysian linguistic scene in the media and social interaction, shows that English is quite widespread as a communication tool. Nik Safiah (1987: 8) states that:

Malay faces stiff competition from English. While the policy is to use the national language in all official instances, in many important domains of language ... English is still the preferred language.
According to Le Vasan (1996: 16), ‘[l]anguage is the main channel for dissemination of information of any kind, and in the international arena, English language reigns supreme. It is the predominant language of trade and commerce and the chosen international language of the countries of the North. Competence in this language then becomes crucial for survival.’ It was the motivation to be ‘higher up on the social ladder’ and also to be successful in the corporate world that led parents to make sacrifices for their children’s education in the English medium. For the mastery of English is not only viewed as a sign of one’s intellectual development but also as a means by which one responds to one’s experiences through improved thinking and communication skills. As such, it has become an important language to be acquired by all Malaysians.

Bilingualism and code-switching in Malaysia

Being bilingual in both BM and English in Malaysia enables me to communicate and interact with a wide range of people and allows me to gain access to knowledge sources, thus bringing social, cognitive and economic advantages. It is therefore essential for a Malaysian to master both BM and English. According to Ain Nadzimah and Rosli Talif (1997), ‘In line with modernisation, international recognition, and desire for progress, the English language seems to be the logical language of choice. This can be regarded as official recognition of BM and English-knowing bilingualism.’ As a result, many families in Malaysia are bilingual in English and one other language.

Code-switching by definition refers to ‘the change from one code to another in the speech of a particular speaker in a particular situation’ (Omar 1993: 110). The reality of choice in a bilingual community, however, is that community members have a third choice, i.e. the use of more than one language in utterances, resulting at times in a mixed language (ibid.: 111). For example, the non-Malays can be said to be able to speak more than three languages, which includes their mother-tongue, Malay and English. On the other hand, a speaker may not always be free to choose to speak the language s/he is most proficient in; rather, the language choice of a speaker may be affected by his/her interlocutor’s linguistic repertoire.

Where the language used cannot serve the speaker’s communicative needs, speakers then often switch languages in attempts to overcome the difficulty. Usually, the limited proficiency of one speaker in the other’s language necessitates the use of code-switching and the reformulation and repetition of utterances (see David 1999 on code-switching in the Malaysian market place and David 2001 on code-switching among the Malaysian Sindhi community). Absence of such use in any verbal in-
interaction may result in non-comprehension, which then leads to the occurrence of communication breakdown.

Jamaliah Mohd. Ali (1995: 94) states that, as English functions alongside the Malay language especially in urban areas, Malaysians sometimes code-switch between three languages, namely English, Malay and the ethnic language. Baljit (1994), in her study on turn-taking, observes that there is a tendency for Malaysians to code-switch when speaking to a person from a different ethnic group. She claims that code-switching in this context is a ‘strategy’ to establish rapport among interactants and that it is also known as ‘code or language choice’, which refers to the use of two languages, i.e. English and Malay, in the same sentence or discourse.

David (2002), in her study on communicative strategies among Malaysian Sindhi families, views code-switching as a communicative strategy in order to compensate for linguistic shortcomings particularly of the younger members of a community in the ethnic language and as a marker of ethnic group membership and identity. It is also viewed as a strategy to ‘camouflage reduced proficiency and may be initiated due to low proficiency or may represent an accommodative stance’ (ibid.: 62). Even within a community, such communicative strategies may have to be used to maintain communication with special participants who have varying language proficiencies.

Azhar and Bahiyah (1994: 133) in their study on code-switching state that ‘code-switching is not only a means of social cohesiveness, but also an effective means of production [as] it allows formal meetings to be conducted quickly’. In their study, they also suggest that a reason for alternating between languages is speed, as a word may become readily available to a speaker sooner in one language than it does in the other.

**Linguistic power and code-switching**

Power is an interactional skill and process that participants have to contest roles and disputes, and to disagree on the interpretation of events. In face-to-face communication, participants who may be in a position of overriding power compared to the other participants because of their expert knowledge, their status in the society, or an upper sense of authority over other members have the tendency to be dominant (Jarirah Mohd. Jan 1999: 52–53).

Essentially, language is powerless on its own and the participants have the power to use language in various forms and contexts. Fairclough (1989: 46) states that power in communication has to do with powerful participants ‘controlling and constraining the contributors of non-powerful participants’. A powerful participant in an interaction who
attempts to exercise power needs to be ratified and accepted by the other interactants. Linguistic differences may be said to reflect and reinforce the difference in power. This is consistent with the work done by Owsley and Scotton (1984: 103):

power language … the aggregate of linguistic features negotiating the position of ‘taking charge’ in a talk exchange … Such language attempts to control the overall exchange, including the addressee’s conversational contribution, in three main ways: it directs the amount and content of what gets said, it evaluates such talk by passing judgments or providing interpretations and it organises the exchange. Obvious examples of powerful linguistic features are interruptions, leading questions and challenges …

Brown and Gilman (1960: 255) are explicit in their assumption that power is associated with asymmetrical relationships in which the power is held in the one-to-one interaction especially by those in the one-up position. As such, one person may be said to have power over another to the degree that he is able to control the behaviour of the other. Therefore, power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is non-reciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behaviour. Following Brown and Gilman, other theorists and researchers (Fairclough 1989, 1992; Thomas 1984, 1985, 1995; Holmes 1992; Jariah Mohd. Jan 1999) in sociolinguistics and specifically pragmatics have referred to the concept of power either as power or authority of one speaker over another in an interaction or as an unequal encounter.

The linguistic signalling of power and solidarity can be seen as a way in which a participant locates himself in his social world when he speaks. As such, one’s access to and participation in the power forums of society is dependent on knowing the linguistic signals and language used in a social context; and how using that language power enables personal and social goals to be achieved.

In a multi-cultural society like Malaysia, effective communication means the ability to correctly perceive the cultural nuances accompanying verbal and non-verbal language. Effective communication can only take place when inter-ethnic, socio-cultural as well as linguistic differences can be bridged in a language mutually comprehensible to the participants. In any conversation, one has to accommodate to others and so the language selected for discourse or communication is linked with the speaker’s need to earn the approval of the listener. In order to create rapport with the listener, it is best to converge to the speech style s/he uses. The code or language selected will therefore be the language or dialect or style of the listener. Speech accommodation, apart from being
a device used by a speaker to win respect and approval, is also a device used by a speaker to make himself/herself better understood (David 1992b).

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to examine several extracts of formal talk exchange where instances of code-switching occur between working adults. The analyses of talk include examining the existence of linguistic power-wielding among male and female participants and how strategies of domination, negotiations of personal rights and obligations and control in their mutual interaction can be understood.

This is a micro-ethnographic study of ‘power’ in order to analyse how Malaysian working adults use code-switching to wield power over others.

**Methodology**

The formal situations in this study refer to meetings of high-level officials in the management unit of a government sector where issues and policies are discussed. The data collected for this study is made up of two departmental meetings. The meetings were audio-recorded unobtrusively in order to depict a natural flow of discourse and to allow the most natural behaviour of the participants in the discussions. Each meeting lasted for 63 and 68 minutes respectively and the recordings are transcribed to render a total of 240 utterances, with some consisting of more than one sentence in a turn. A typical utterance would consist on average of 50–60 words. In total, there were 8,900 words in the transcription.

This study involves 24 government officers, 11 males (8 Malays, 2 Chinese and 1 Indian) and 13 females (11 Malays, 1 Chinese and 1 Indian). The profile of the participants and the duration of each meeting is indicated in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Meetings</th>
<th>Duration of Meetings</th>
<th>Department Head</th>
<th>Subordinates</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male (M)</td>
<td>Female (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>63 minutes</td>
<td>Male (HM)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>68 minutes</td>
<td>Female (HF)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*M = Malay, C = Chinese, I = Indian
The language practices of the participants in the departmental meetings are noted by listening to the discussions while they are in progress. Permission to record official meetings is often difficult to obtain because of their confidentiality and especially when outsiders are involved in the research process. Nevertheless, the writer was fortunate to identify an officer who would allow an upcoming departmental meeting to be recorded and later transcribed.

Data analysis and findings of Malay—English code-switching in formal discussions

The discussion of code-switching interaction in formal meetings does not necessarily suggest that all formal meetings reflect this particular language routine. They need not involve only the use of the two languages Malay and English. In general, meetings of a more general nature are likely to be conducted entirely in Malay. However, many meetings will reflect the reverse situation where Malay is used ‘as the matrix language containing English embedded islands of varying complexities. In addition, there may be instances of the presence of Malay and English in a balanced situation where each language holds its own and neither dominates the other’ (Jacobson i.p.).

The data illustrate a range of code-switching episodes moving from a single unit of one other language, i.e English in a monolingual discourse or Malay/English (ME) as depicted in (1), to that of a completely balanced performance in the two languages, i.e English—Malay (EM) as illustrated in (2).

(1) *Masih juga ada lagi up and down, eh? / kita kena hantar complain kepada pihak berkenaan supaya dia semak*  
(‘There’s still ups and downs, eh? / we need to send complains to the appropriate authorities so that they check’)

(2) *I think you follow up by phonelah / kita pun nak tau kan?*  
(‘I think you follow up by phone we need to know as well?’)

Extract 1:

1. HM: *Azman / apa aja yang tak ada / so gantikan baliklah / yang / yang menggantikan Azman yang ambil tempatnya / siapa nama? /*  
(‘Azman / what ever is missing / so needs to be replaced / the one taking over Azman’s place / what’s the name?’)

2. F(C): *kita tak tau / must be new staff / kita tak tahu boss siapa –*  
(‘we don’t know / must be new staff / we don’t know who’s our boss –’)
3. HM:  – sebab kita tak mesyuarat lagi /
(‘– because we have not had our meeting yet /’)

4. F(C): memolah to say / siapa / mana tempat sebab sometimes they go off / kita tak tau siapa ganti –
(‘send out memo to say / who / venue because sometimes they go off / we don’t know who will be replaced –’)

5. HM:  – hmm / bolehlah / itu kita edarkan / itu bawah cadangan baru-lah / terus terang / saya sendiri pun tak <kenal> /
(‘– hmm / will do / we will distribute / it will be in the new suggestion / frankly speaking / I, myself, do not recognise /’)
@ <laughter>

In Extract 1, the chairperson (HM) uses Malay as the matrix language in conducting the meeting since it is the official language. Malay is used for the ‘public’ content such as the formal query regarding certain issues listed on the agenda of the meeting.

In turn 2, kita tak tau / must be new staff / kita tak tahu boss siapa –, the Malay matrix consists of an embedded English phrase that is considered the most common type of code-switching. F(C) seems to mix the two languages (ME) even in a formal setting, i.e. when she is conversing with her superior, who is also a colleague of similar linguistic competence.

This natural process of switching is usually interpreted as a sign of intra-ethnic identification, and it is more likely for non-Malay speakers to code-switch since it is seen as a demonstration of shared biculturality. Furthermore, the Chinese female participant, F(C), is more familiar with the terms in English and saying them in Malay would have been quite cumbersome. HM, in this instance, allows such a demonstration of ME even though he himself mostly uses the Malay matrix (see turns 1, 3 and 5). HM firmly believes in the sole appropriateness of Malay for administrative matters, but a certain leeway is awarded to the non-Malay subordinate, i.e F(C), who alternately uses English in her utterances (see turns 2 and 4).

In Extract 1, no hesitation is detectable as the participants move from one language to the other. However, there are massive stretches of English and this shows dominance. Power differences documented here are institutional in the sense that the use of code-switching is found between the head and his subordinate. The head, who has more power, maintains the Malay matrix while the non-Malay female subordinate switches into English in order to show her assertiveness and dominance in her domain. The participants use code-switches in a variety of ways, many of which have pragmatic functions, such as wielding power.
In Extract 2, the code-switches used by F(M) and HM mark crucial points in the conversation. It appears that the Malay female participant F(M) does not code-switch according to topics or theme but uses it in order to indicate the plan of action that has or has not already been taken, as in turn 2 ‘dah inform’ (‘has informed’) and turn 4 ‘dah take action or not’ (‘has taken any action or not’). In other words, she uses the English matrix in order to stress or emphasise pertinent points in the discussion.

Extract 2:

1. HM: *satu lagi / perhentian bus tu* /
   (‘one more thing / the bus station’)  
2. F(M): *kita dah inform juga kepada apa? =*
   (‘we have also informed to whom? =’)  
3. HM: = putrajaya –
   (‘= putrajaya –’)  
4. F(M): − *samada dia dah take action or not kita tak tau /
   (‘− whether he has taken any action or not we don’t know /’)  
5. HM: *bila dah ada tu baru kita tahu dia dah <take action>*
   (‘when it is present then only we would know that he has taken some action’)
   @ <laughter> @
   eh / why not this one *ni / you semak dengan agency lain di sini / minta dia*
   (‘eh / why not this one here / you check with the other agency here / ask him’)
   / *mereka tulis surat sama / jadi nampak ramai / you kata on behalf of /
   (‘/ they write also / so it may seem to be many more / you said on behalf of /) sikit suaranya /
   (‘less say in it’)

HM, on the other hand, code-switches in turn 5 ‘why not this one … you *semak dengan agency lain*’ (‘why not this one … you check with the other agency here’) in order to immediately assign tasks for F(M) to undertake. In the same utterance, HM also instructs F(M) to ask the officer in charge to write the letter, and he switches to EL, i.e. ‘on behalf of’, to express the intention that needs to be related. In this instance, HM controls the issues at hand and assigns appropriate actions to be taken. His use of code-switching is seen as wielding power, i.e. controlling the direction of discourse and suggesting the plan of action to be taken by his subordinates.
It is clear that while the subordinate switches to emphasise and highlight pertinent matters, the superior switches to give directives and assign actions to be taken. In both cases, the power interplay is at work at two different levels.

In Extract 3, HM switches to EL in turn 2, i.e. ‘− not muchlah / compared to −’, when he interrupts and highlights the difference between the many security staff that the ministry has compared to the other departments and other government sectors. In defence, F(C) also interrupts and switches to EL in turn 3, ‘but still’, maintaining her stand that it is not the ministry’s concern if the other departments have more security staff. HM further explains his point in turn 4 using the Malay matrix affirming the lack and waste of money in the hiring of the few security staff that they presently have in their employment. In this exchange, it appears that HM uses the Malay matrix to emphasise his official position to counter the interruption by F(C):

Extract 3:
1. F(C): yalah / yang ours are very small −
   (‘yes / ours are very small −’)
2. HM: − not muchlah / compared to −
   (‘− not much / compared to −’)
3. F(C): − but still dia punya apa −
   (‘− but still it is his −’)
4. HM: − tapi itu pun tak cukup / kalau dia jaga di bawah sekali pun / dia pergi
   (‘− but that is not enough / if he guards the lower area still / he goes’) round / tak cukup juga kerja dia / buang duit aja /
   (‘round / his work is still not enough / it is only a waste of money /’)
5. F(M): so / terpulang kepada kementerianlah / samada nak beri atau tidak /
   (‘so / it is up to the ministry / whether to give or not /’)
6. F(C): biar dia round di bawah / at the end of the day / count the number of
   (‘let him make his round at the lower area / at the end of the day / count) parking /
   (the number of parking /’)
7. HM: itulah I takut hilang aja / satu lagi dia ni bertukar ganti / orang yang
   (‘that’s it I’m afraid it will be lost / another thing is he is constantly being replaced / with someone’)
   berlainan setiap hari / so itu masalah kalau kita nak beri jaga pass tu /
As for F(C), she may have shifted to EL with the intention of signifying status and power in terms of her knowledge of the situation at hand or because, despite her ethnicity, she uses EL in her daily interaction and appears to be comfortable with it. Using EL also helps clearly to convey her ideas that she hopes will persuade her superior and colleagues to accept her views.

In the second recording of a similar formal government meeting, where the chairperson is a female officer with an honorific title, i.e. Dato, a different pattern is observed. The female officer (HF) is seen to maintain the English matrix in her interaction with a few instances of embedded words and phrases in Malay as highlighted in Extract 4.
Extract 4:

1. M(M):  
   *ya –*  
   (*yes –*)

2. HF:  
   *– at the ministry? / how many times? /

3. M(M):  
   *ya / kementerian / Dato pengerusi / kita telah pun mengadakan tiga kali*  
   (*yes / ministry / Dato chairman / we have already had three times /*)  
   *dan sekali lagi kita akan mengadakan dalam bulan disember nanti /*  
   (*and once again we will have in the month of December /*)

4. HF:  
   *so / yang lain ni / apa masalah tidak dapat mengadakan tiga kali? / up*  
   (*so / the rest / what are the problems that can not have it for three times? / up*)

   *till now you should have three times already / kuantan / apa masalah*  
   (*‘till now you should have three times already / kuantan / what problems’ / tidak dapat diadakan? /‘cannot have it? /’*)

5. M(M):  
   *dan kita perlu kemukakan laporan / mesyuarat kita ini kepada JPA –*  
   (*‘and we need to submit report / our meeting to JPA –’*)

6. HF:  
   *– yes –*  
   (*‘yes –’*)

In Extract 4, HF switches back and forth between the languages, i.e. EL and ML (where EL is her dominant matrix), rather smoothly and effortlessly so that she appears to be considered as quite an advanced code-switcher. HF uses code-switching in turn 4 regardless of direction as a means of wielding power. But code-switching in itself, in one direction or the other, is also used as a way of ‘countering claims of the opposite part of a discussion’ (Jorgensen 1998: 254). In this instance, HF uses code-switching as a strategy in order to turn the direction of the conversation, and she marks the specific points in the conversation as crucial as indicated in turn 4 ‘… up till now … already’.

In turn 7, Extract 5, the Malay male participant, M(M), uses the Malay matrix throughout his interaction with HF even though the responses he obtains from HF are completely in English. He appears to be comfortable with the language. Furthermore, the Malay matrix gives him confidence and in turn enables him to make his claims stronger, i.e. the fact that he had conducted the meeting three times and that he intends to have another meeting once again in December.
HF seems to be in complete control of the conversation especially with M(M), a monolingual who addresses HF directly in Malay in most of his contributions. HF in turn 8 responds to M(M) in EL with embedded Malay and accepts his choice of language. She addresses M(M) in EL instead of the ML to explain her point ‘you see …’ and to stress the fact that top management should consider giving suggestions, bearing in mind issues brought forward by the workers and by the administrators as well. Since HF responded in EL, F(M) then interjected using EL as well, reminding HF that there have been many sessions where opportunities were given for workers to discuss policies and other pressing issues.
F(M) maintains the English matrix in turn 9 except for a short phrase of Malay embedded in her utterance where she particularly refers to a specific meeting held every month. The use of the English matrix by F(M) in turn 9 illustrates her ability in handling the situation, i.e. in reporting to the chairperson and other participants what has been occurring in her department. In this light, she is seen as one who maintains and projects power in her capacity as senior staff in the management team.

Furthermore, in turn 9, English is maintained when F(M) interrupts HF in order to stress her claims and make them stronger and to underline her point of view. English appears to have greater linguistic power than Malay; it therefore it becomes a tool to exercise power. As such, English and its status as the language of power is made use of throughout the verbal interaction between HF and F(M).

HF, in Extract 5, is able to conduct the discussion in either language as it suits her needs best. This illustrates that to really understand how bilingual adults develop their linguistic power-wielding skills, one must understand the larger framework of power distribution in a broader societal context. One must also understand the ways in which a person uses one or the other language to convey pertinent viewpoints in his or her verbal discourse with other bilingual participants.

Extract 5 illustrates a case of strong dominance between HF and F(M). They are both bilinguals. HF controls the other participants by giving directions in English. In turn 10, for instance, HF completely switches to English in order to reciprocate F(M)'s choice of language. As such, her language choices are addressee-related, but they are also determined by her communicative intent, i.e. to control the situation and exert power.

HF may not have used the Malay matrix since, being fluent in English, she uses more English than Malay in more than one context of language use. Her elite switching to EL may be perceived as a strategy that denotes power since EL in Malaysia signifies high status. Furthermore, it appears that the more powerful participants use code-switching more often and in more advanced ways than the less powerful participants.

**Conclusion**

The recordings of the meetings reveal the fact that some participants exhibit the ability to move back and forth between their two codes depending on the suitability of their needs.

This study shows that powerful participants code-switch to strengthen a command. It also indicates to the speech partner that one belongs to a particular social class, i.e. to use it as a marker of high social status and membership of an educated elite.
Summing up, it is evident that adults develop an understanding of language use that gives power and casts rights in conversations. They also develop code-switching skills in manipulating issues at hand, to influence events and discourse according to their own desires. This they do in a complicated interplay of power-wielding, and code-switching serves as a power instrument in a verbal discourse of top management staff in a formal context.

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