

# Analysis on Code-Switching Used in Wechat Circles

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## Abstract

As a kind of communicative tool, Wechat becomes more and more necessary among people. Wechat can be used for communicating, learning and even showing one's personal feelings. In recent years, language used in Wechat attracts more and more linguists' attention. This article will do empirical research on Chinese and English code-switching used in Wechat by 10 English majors based on theories of social linguistics. Based on Poplack's classification of code-switching, Syntactic features and behind motivations of Chinese and English code-switching will be explored as well.

**Keywords:** Wechat circle, Code-switching, Syntactic features, Motivations.

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## 1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Wechat is a kind of social software developed by Tencent. This kind of software can be employed for users to share messages and pictures. They can also read articles, news and share their daily life in Wechat Circle. Wechat has greatly change people's life and shortened personal distance. Therefore, Wechat becomes more and more popular. Recently, with the development of researches on language, more and more researches switch their focuses on language used in Wechat.

Code-switching as a general language phenomenon is a very important topic of socio-linguistics. Code refers to any code system including different languages and language varieties (Sun, 2017). Code-switching refers to the phenomena in which two or more languages or language varieties used in daily communication (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Recently, code-switching becomes a hot topic of Bilingual researches.

## 2. THEORETICAL BASIS

### 2.1 Concept of Code-switching

Code-switching is a neutral term which is different from dialect, pidgin and creole with a lot of emotional colors. Code refers to refers to any language or any language variety (Li, 2009). Different socio-linguists have given different definitions of code-switching from different perspectives. Grosjean regard code-switching as the phenomena that two or more languages are used in a sentence or discourse (Grosjean, 1982). Fanlin refers to the situation that language users use two or more languages or language varieties in a

conversation. Code used in code-switching can be language, dialect and linguistic style. The language varieties or languages used in code-switching can be basic languages or assistant languages (Fan, 1998). Jiang jinyun believes that code-switching refers to the phenomenon in which language users transform one code to another code. Based on these concepts of code-switching, the author regards code-switching as the phenomenon in which language varieties occur in a paragraph and text.

### 2.2 Classifications of Code-switching

Gumperz and Bloom adopt dichotomy to classify code-switching into situational code-switching and metaphorical code switching. Situational code-switching refers to the phenomenon in which language users switch different codes in different situations, which is closely related to situation. On the other hand, metaphorical code-switching refers to the phenomenon in which language users transform codes with the changes of topics. Language users employ metaphorical code-switching for changing tones or the roles in communication so that language users can achieve communicative effects that they want achieve.

Myers-Scotton classifies code-switching into marked code-switching and markedless code-switching. Language users employ marked code-switching, a kind of nonstandard code, for the seek of changing the expectant and current relationship between rights and obligations. Markedless code-switching refers to the phenomenon in which language users employ standard code so that the expectant communicative effects or

current relationship between rights and obligations will be achieved.

Different from Gumperz and Bloom's classification of code-switching, Poplack's code-switching divide code-switching into three categories: intra-lingual code-switching, inter-lingual code-switching and tagged code-switching. Intra-lingual code-switching refers to code-switching occurs different sentences or different clauses. This kind of code-switching conformed to different grammatical rules is always employed in turns of communication by speakers. Inter-lingual code-switching occurs the phenomenon in which different codes are used in a sentence. When inter-lingual code-switching is used, the code as an auxiliary part must conform to the rules of the basic code. Tagged code-switching refers to the fact that a tagged part is inserted into another kind of language.

### 2.3 Adaptation Theory of Code-switching

In 1990s, Verschuere puts forward his idea that basic language is adaptive in his book *Understandings of Pragmatic*. Adaptation refers to the fact that language users choose code by the way of discussing for the seek of achieving the expectative communicative effect. On the influence of Verschuere, Yu Guodong, a linguist at home, puts forward the Adaptation Theory. He believes that language user's uses code-switching is to be close to or achieve their communicative purposes. Language users employ code-switching for the purposes of code-switching. And the adaptation of code-switching includes the adaptation to reality, adaptation to social motivations and the adaptation to Psychological motivations. The first two kinds of adaptation belongs to the active adaptation, while the third can be categorized the passive adaptation.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-switching is an important topic in linguistic research and a hot spot in bilingual studies. In recent years, foreign linguists have focused their researches on code-switching from the following three aspects: (1) developing and improving the original principles and theories; (2) paying more attention to the phenomenon of code-switching that occurs in conversational discourse; (3) microscopic research on code-switching, which is manifested in the study of the phenomenon of code-switching in a certain language domain.

Code-switching categories	Intra-lingual code-switching				Inter-lingual code-switching	Tagged code-switching	Total
	Letter combinations	Words	Alphabetic words	Phrases			
Frequency	28	35	1	16	29	0	120
	91						
Frequency	75.8%				24.2%	0	100%

According to the data in the table, intra-lingual code-switching occurs most frequently and accounts for

Domestic researches on code-switching can be summarized into the following categories: (1) reviews of research on code-switching, such as He Li's *A Review of the Research on Code-switching in the Past Thirty Years*, Li Shaohong's *An Overview of Code-switching*. He Ziran's *A Review of Research on Code-switching*, etc. (2) Studies on the patterns of code-switching, e.g. Yu Guodong's *A Pragmatics Study of Code-switching*, Du Hui's *Code-switching and Social Rules*, etc. (3) Empirical studies of code-switching, e.g. Wu Ge's *The application of Code-switching in English Vocabulary Teaching* and Wang Jin's *The Function of Code-switching and its Mode of Embodiment - a Functional Analysis of English Code-switching in Chinese Newspapers*, etc. Combining the researches of domestic and abroad studies, it can be seen that there are only a few studies on the phenomenon of code-switching used online or in social software. Ding Xiaofang (2014) explores the rationality and constraints of code-switching in WeChat in his article "*The Phenomenon of Code-switching in WeChat*". Sun Hongyang (2017) explored the reasons for the using of code-switching in news headlines in WeChat in his article "*An Analysis of the Code-switching Phenomenon in WeChat Version of News Headlines*". On the basis of previous studies, this paper collects 120 pieces of Wechat circles published by 10 English teachers and students to study the code-switching phenomenon. The external structural features of code-switching in WeChat circles and the motivations behind code-switching are explored.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This empirical research is conducted on the basis of Poplack's three classifications of code-switching and Yu's Adaptation Theory of code-switching. 120 pieces of WeChat circles published by 10 English teachers and students in 2017 are selected as the corpus. And the statistical results are presented in the form of a table. These corpus and statistical results are used as the basis to explore the external structural features and motives of code-switching.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 External Structural Features of Code-switching in WeChat Circles

Taking Poplack's three classifications of code-switching as the theoretical basis, this paper makes the following classifications and statistics on the phenomenon of code-switching in the WeChat circles.

the largest percentage of the collected corpus, about 75.8% of the total. Inter-lingual code-switching was

second only to intra-lingual code-switching, accounting for about 24.2% of the total number. No tagged code-switching occurs in the collected corpus. The most frequent occurrence of intra-lingual code-switching was words, followed by letter combinations, with little difference in the frequency of alphabetic words and phrases.

For example: (1)

- a. 关于 POCIB 比赛, 收获满满!
- b. 服务区 high 一波!
- c. 小姐姐们的 NCEPU style。
- d. 京东 Lady Run

(2) 2018, new beginnings. 2018——新起点。

The four sentences in the first example correspond to the four types of intra-sentential code-switching. The main part of the sentence is in Chinese, and the inserted English component acts as an auxiliary, which conforms to the grammatical rules of Chinese. Sometimes the grammatical rules of the inserted English part are ignored, which doesn't affect the achievement of the expectative communication goals. This point is quite different from inter-lingual code-switching. The second example is an example of inter-lingual code-switching which refers to the fact that the language user employs different codes in different clauses. In this example, both codes, English and Chinese, in different clauses should conform to their own grammatical rules.

## 5.2 Motivations behind of the Use of Code-switching in the WeChat Circles

### 5.2.1 Adaptation to Language Reality

If a concept or idea exists only in one code and does not find a corresponding form in the other language, then when these two codes come into contact, the phenomenon of code-switching or code-borrowing occurs. In this case, one of the codes fills a gap in the other. This is an important reason for the emergence of code-switching. When a linguistic gap arises between different languages, the speaker is forced to adopt another language to fill the gap in order to communicate accurately and achieve the desired communicative purposes, which belongs to the adaptation to language reality. The occurrence of this kind of code-switching is entirely for the internal linguistic reasons.

Chinese and English exist in different cultures and some words from one culture are difficult to find an exact equivalent in the other language. This can lead to lexical gaps. Therefore, code-switching occurs when there is a lexical gap between two codes. Such code-switching in WeChat occurs in the case of proper nouns, such as names of people, places and institutions.

- (1) 杨振宁和 Hawking, 你站谁?
- (2) Mymo 带大家一起学习。
- (3) KET 考试终于结束了。
- (4) 京东 Lady Run.
- (5) POCIB 来啦!

In the above examples, Hawking is the name of a famous physicist. Mymo is the name of an early education centre. KET refers to the Cambridge English Test for Beginners, a proficiency test for listening, speaking, reading and writing. And Lady Run is a running event organised by Jingdong. POCIB is a practical training test for skills in the foreign trade industry. There is no exact translation equivalent to these words in Chinese. Language users opt for code-switching in order to be faithful to the source language, which non-only adapt to the language reality but also avoids the confusion of a Chinese translation.

### 5.2.2 Adaptation to Social Conventions

Adaptation to Social Conventions refers mainly to conformity to social culture such as customs and ways of behaviour (Yu, 2000). Language cannot be separated from socio-cultural constraints. People's use of language is inseparable from the constraints and restrictions imposed by social norms. In different social contexts, language use is restricted and constrained by different social norms. On this backdrop, different codes are chosen. This belongs to the passive adaptation to social norms. With the use of code-switching, communicators can avoid social embarrassment and conform their words and actions to social norms (Yu, 2000).

- (6) 虽然你们的节目被 pass 掉了, 但你们依然是最棒的。
- (7) Love you every day. 节日快乐!

In the two examples above, intra-lingual code-switching and inter-lingual code-switching occur respectively. Both types of code-switching occur as an adaptation to social conventions.

In the sixth sentence, pass means "to withdraw, to kill, to brush off". Here language user uses the word "pass" instead of saying "your show was brushed off". Speaker uses a piece of code-switching to save the performer's face and avoiding embarrassment, while also conveying the exact meaning of what he or she wants to say. The code-switching here is belongs to the passive adaptation to social conventions.

The seventh sentence is a friend's message posted on Valentine's Day. Chinese people are more subtle. And their expressions of love are not as straightforward and explicit as those of foreigners. This circle is published publicly and will be seen by many people. Therefore the language user uses code-switching to avoid embarrassment and uses English to express his love for his other half in a subtle and euphemistic way.

### 5.2.3 Adaptation to Psychological Motivation

Yu argues that adaptation to psychological motivation belongs to active adaptation (Yu, 2000). This type of code-switching is a communicative tool that language users actively adopt this kind of code-

switching in order to achieve the desired communicative effects. As the WeChat circle is also a way of communication, code-switching in the WeChat circle also reflects the active adaptation to psychological motivations. The speaker's active adaptation to psychological motivation includes the following aspects.

First, reflecting professionalism

(8) 希望能和大家度过一段愉快的 KET 时光之旅！

(9) 希望明天考 TEM4 的同学们都有一个好成绩！

These are both examples of intra-lingual code-switching, both of which are designed to show the professionalism of the language. And KET is one of the examinations administered by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Board. And the TEM4 stands for the National Tertiary English Language Examination Level 4. Both of these are English language exams aimed at learners of English, so speakers use code-switching to show professionalism.

Secondly, reflecting fashionability

(10) 为大家打 call!

(11) 服务区 high 一波!

(12) 听了小哥哥的演唱会, 满足 ing!

As internet becomes more and more popular, more and more internet buzzwords are appearing in our lives. The above examples include call, which means to support someone And the word "high" in example 11 means to be excited. And "ing" in example 12 means somebody is doing something. All of these three examples are popular internet phrases that speakers use to reflect their own personality and fashion.

Thirdly, to indicate focus

(13) 我第一个抱着大家的 CERTIFICATE

(14) 快抑制不住自己了, It's a torture.

In real life, people tend to emphasize and draw attention to themselves by changing their voice, tone or repetition. In the virtual space of WeChat, the speaker can take the form of code-switching to emphasize the important points of their words.

Both of these examples achieve the speaker's intention of emphasis. The thirteenth example is a Wechat circle sent by an English major who has just received his class certificates for the fourth year of his studies. Here the speaker uses an intra-lingual code-switching to highlight his joy while receiving the certificate, which also draws the attention of the other students and makes them look forward to it. The fourteenth example takes the form of an inter-lingual code-switching, which highlights the speaker's inner dullness and unbearable emotions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

With the development of international exchange, our language business is growing and developing. Language contact is happening all the time. The phenomenon of code-switching has also become a relatively common phenomenon in social life. This article uses a combination of theory and data to explore the external structural features of code-switching in WeChat circle and the motivations behind of the use of code-switching. It is found that intra-lingual code-switching occurs most frequently in WeChat circles, followed by inter-lingual code-switching. The motivation behind code-switching used in WeChat circle is found to be adaptation to language reality, social conventions and psychological motivations. This article not only applies the Adaptation Theory model to analyze the phenomenon of code-switching used in online language, but also has implications for the analysis of code-switching in other online social networking platforms. The author argues that the analysis of the external structural features and motivations of code-switching in WeChat circle can provide some insights into the choice of appropriate code-switching in different situations. However, there are some shortcomings of this study. For example, this study does not involve code-switching in other languages, but only Chinese-English code-switching.

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