

Code-Mixing in Sabah and Sarawak English Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the phenomenon of code-mixing as observed in a carefully selected corpus of English short stories from Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia. The investigation encompasses an in-depth analysis of the various displays of code-mixing present in these literary works, while also offering insights into the underlying motivations for code-mixing occurrences. A total of 20 short stories were selected from the anthologies "Chronicles of KK" and "Short Stories from Sarawak: Death of a Longhouse & Other Stories." Employing a qualitative research methodology, the study draws upon theoretical frameworks provided by Musyken (2000) and Hoffman (1991) to scrutinize the linguistic data. The research discerns two prominent types of code-mixing, namely insertion and alternation, with insertion emerging as the predominant form, notably incorporating lexical elements from the local and Indigenous languages of Sabah and Sarawak. The findings illuminate that code-mixing is strategically employed in these narratives to address specific thematic content, enhance comprehensibility for the interlocutor, signify group identity, facilitate repetition for clarification, and serve as a means of interjection. This study contributes to a richer understanding of the intricate dynamics of code-mixing in the literary context of these regions.

Keywords: Code-mixing, Sabah, Sarawak, short stories

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INTRODUCTION

Code-mixing is a common occurrence in a multilingual setting. It is defined as the practice of switching from one language to another in the same sentence without affecting the meaning and occurs when words, affixes, phrases, and clauses are used in the same sentence and in more than one language at the same time (Novianti & Said, 2021; Yao, 2011).

Scholars have identified several reasons as to why speakers tend to code mix. Saville-Troike (1986, as cited in Luke, 2015) stated that speakers code mix to strengthen or soften request or command, due to lexical need, or to exclude other people when a comment is intended for only a limited audience. Hoffman (1991), on the hand, stated seven reasons as to why people code mix, including talking about a particular topic, quoting somebody else, being emphatic about something, interjection, repetition used for clarification, intention of clarifying the speech content for interlocutor, and expressing group identity. Code mixing is also often used to overcome communication difficulties such as misunderstanding or misinterpretation (Luke, 2015). In this sense, code-mixing can assist interlocutors who lack vocabulary in both their first and second languages.

Code-mixing is not only limited to verbal everyday spoken communication but may occur in written forms of communication (Yuanita & Sumardi, 2018). Code mixing in written communication, in this case, fictional narratives such as novels, short stories, scripts and even poetry seems to be the norm especially in multilingual communities. Several studies done on fictional narratives such as studies done on novels by Siregar et. al (2018), Hasibuan and Saragih (2019), Meigasuri and Soethama (2020), Vanessa et. al (2021), Larassati and Suyudi (2021) revealed that code mixing is found in these creative works.

The reasons that code mixing is used in these works are not as different as the reasons they are used in verbal communication. These include expression of group identity, talking of a particular topic, intention of clarifying speech content for interlocutor, repetition of clarification, interjection and showing empathy as well as for lexical needs, to soften and strengthen the request or command as well as to expressing intimacy (Hasibuan & Saragih, 2019; Larassati & Suyudi, 2021; Vanessa et. al., 2021)

In Malaysia, most studies on code mixing in creative writings have focused on code mixing between the four main languages – English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. The number of studies on code-mixing in the other languages, especially the Indigenous languages of Sabah and Sarawak is still lacking (Martin, 2005), and these mainly focused on code-mixing in spoken communication (Salleh et al., 2022; Stephen, Osup & Bakar, 2017). Hashim (2007) stated that the use of code-mixing enables the speaker to express his or her cultural identity when writing Malaysian English creative writing. This is because some of the lexical items from local languages describing food, kinship and cultural expressions do not have English equivalents. Therefore, code-alternation and collocation of local words with English words could be found in these creative writings.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to investigate the phenomenon of code-mixing in selected English short stories from Sabah and Sarawak by exploring the types of code-mixing used in these stories and by identifying the reasons for these code-mixing. Creative writings and literary works are a mirror of society (Kuswanto et. al., 2018). They are the author’s response to the social reality encountered (Sangidu, 2005) and symbolises a reality of segments of the people who live between cultures and languages as literary language actualizes bilingual or bicultural societies (Torres, 2007).

METHOD OF STUDY

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse the data derived from 20 selected English short stories from Sabah and Sarawak. These short stories are taken from two anthologies, “Chronicles of KK” and “Short Stories from Sarawak: Death of a Longhouse & other stories”. “Chronicles of KK” was written by several Sabahan writers as well as authors who are not Sabahan but wrote about Sabah. It contained 20 short stories based on Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and was edited by Ann Lee. “Short Stories from Sarawak: Death of a Longhouse & other stories”, is a compilation of 35 short stories written by Kuching born, Cecilia Ong.

In this study, only ten short stories from each book were selected. The stories chosen for this study were the ones which featured code-mixing languages of Sabah and Sarawak only.

The code-mixing occurrences in the short stories were manually highlighting and then listed. To analyse the data, Musyken’s (2000) types of code-mixing and Hoffman’s (1991) reasons for code-mixing were used in this study. After identifying the words, phrases and sentences which contained code-mixing occurrences, they were then categorised based on Musyken’s (2000) types of code mixing as well as Holmes’ (2008) reasons for code mixing. Holmes’ (2008) reasons for code mixing was then used to identify the reasons for the occurrence of code mixing in the stories after determining the types of code mixing.

Types of code mixing

According to Musyken (2000), there are three types of code-mixing, which are insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalisation.

Insertion is when the lexical item of one language is inserted into the structure of another language. In Figure 1, “a” & “b” are word(s) or constituent of “A” and “B” languages correspondingly. The word (constituent) “b” is inserted into structure of “A” language.

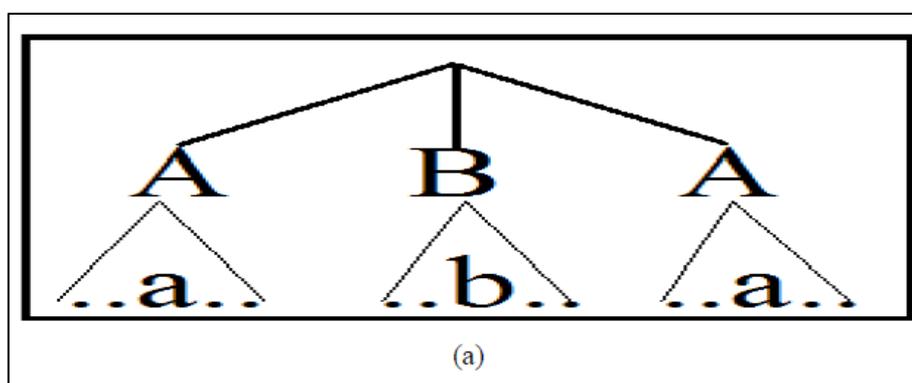


Figure 1. The pattern of insertion code-mixing

Alternation happens when there are two codes which are mixed in one sentence between clause boundaries (Musyken, 2000, as cited in Syafaat & Setiawan, 2018). It describes how both languages occur alternatively, each with their unique structure. In this case, lexical term (word) or phrase of one language is followed by a lexical term (word) or phrase of another language. As shown in Figure 3, “a” word (phrase) or constituent of “A” language is followed by “b” word (phrase) or constituent of “B” language. This is usually in the form of clauses or phrases.

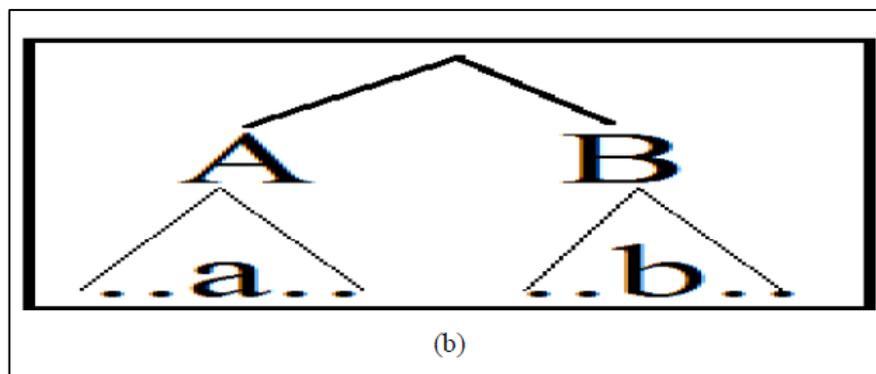


Figure 2. The pattern of alternation code-mixing

Congruent lexicalisation happens when two languages are used together, and both share similar grammatical structures which can be filled by words or phrases from either language. Usually, the meaning of these words or phrases are known by people in its first language (Ikhsani, 2012). In this case, lexical term (phrase) of any language from “A” and “B” can be inserted randomly as shown in Figure 4.

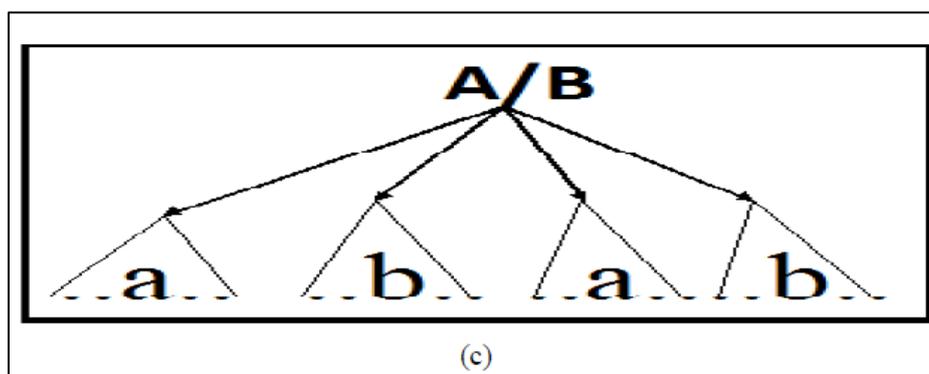


Figure 3. The pattern of congruent lexicalization code-mixing

Hoffman’s (1991) reasons for code mixing

According to Hoffman (1991), as cited in Luke (2015), there are seven reasons why bilinguals or multilinguals mix their codes while interacting.

- (1) *Talking about a particular topic* – the preference of talking about a chosen or particular topic in one language. Usually done because it is easier to express thoughts and emotions using the chosen language.
- (2) *Quoting somebody else* – happens when the interlocutor cites well-known expressions or verses from notable or well-known people.
- (3) *Being Emphatic About Something (Express Solidarity)* – when someone wishes to emphasise something purposefully or may accidentally switch to another language; feels more convenient to be emphatic in the chosen language.
- (4) *Interjection* – words or expressions to express strong emotions or gain attention.
- (5) *Repetition Used for Clarification* – to clarify a point for better understanding, usually of the same message (literally). May also be used to accentuate or highlight a point.

- (6) *Intentions of clarifying the speech content for interlocutor* – repetitions of a message with the purpose of making the speech run smoothly or clarifying the ideas, so it can be understood by other interlocutors.
- (7) *Expressing group identity* – different group communities may communicate differently, indirectly expressing which group they belong to.

RESULTS

The result of the analysis of the two compilations are reported and where needed, excerpts from the books are included to further clarify the result. There are a total of 104 data, 67 data from “Chronicles of KK” and 37 data from “Short Stories from Sarawak: Death of a Longhouse & Other Stories”.

Type of code-mixing

The analysis of the 104 data revealed the two types of code-mixing, which are insertion and alternation. The following table summarizes the total number of occurrences for each type of code mixing found in both short stories.

Table 1. Occurrences of code mixing in the indigenous languages found in the short stories.

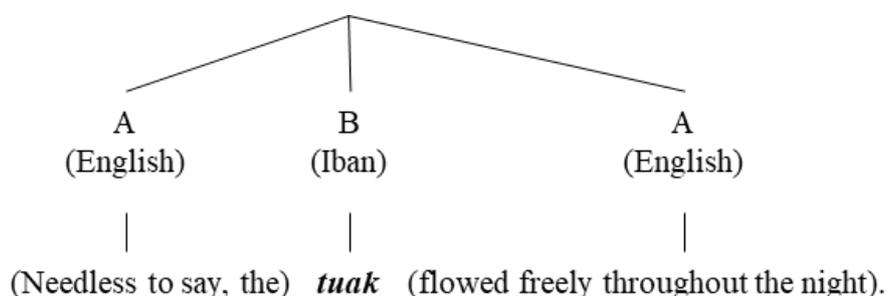
Types of code mixing	<i>Chronicles of KK</i>	<i>Short Stories from Sarawak: Death of a Longhouse & other stories</i>	Total
Insertion	47	31	78
Alternation	3	3	6

Insertion

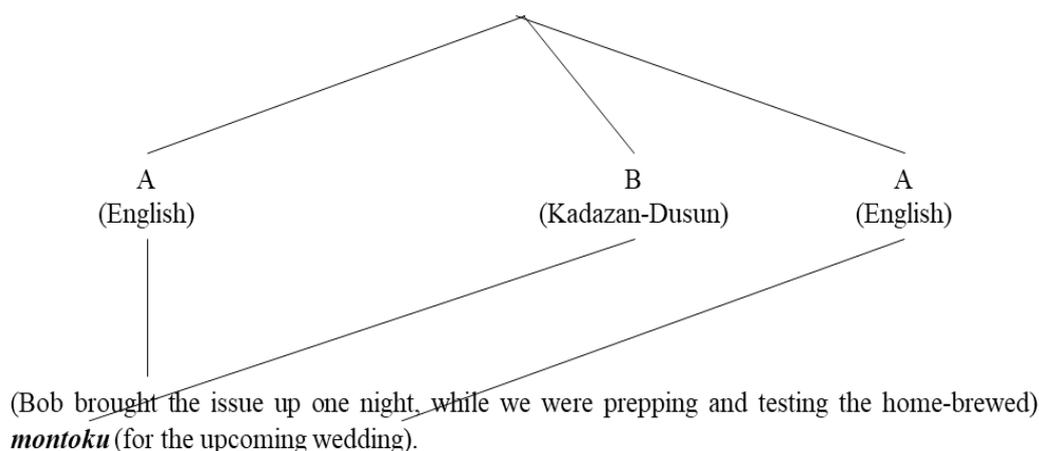
Insertion is the most used code-mixing type in the two books. The total number of insertion type code mixing from the data are 78 occurrences, 47 from *Chronicles of KK* and 31 from *Short Stories from Sarawak: Death of a Longhouse & other stories*. In the stories analysed, most of the sentences, which are in English, are inserted with either Standard Malay, or Sabah and Sarawak indigenous lexical items.

The inserted Sabah and Sarawak indigenous words are usually in the forms of nouns which are related to the people’s culture and cultural materials or elements such as traditional clothes, food, beverages, and house sections mainly the longhouses or traditional village houses.

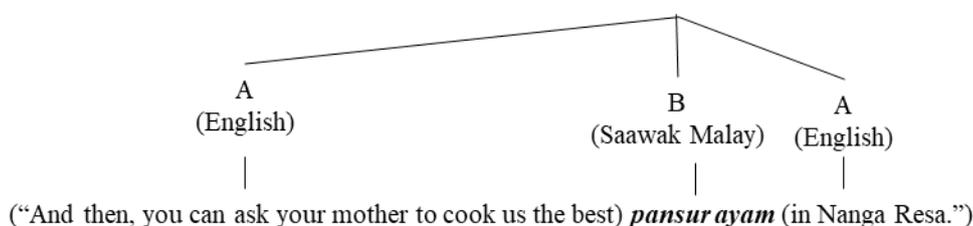
- (1). Needless to say, the *tuak* flowed freely throughout the night.



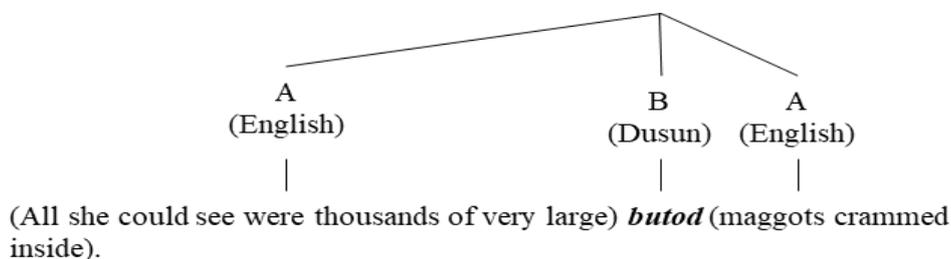
(2). Bob brought the issue up one night, while we were prepping and testing the home-brewed *montoku* for the upcoming wedding.



(3). “And then, you can ask your mother to cook us the best *pansur ayam* in Nanga Resa.”



(4). All she could see were thousands of very large *butod* maggots crammed inside.



As shown in the excerpts above, the noun *tuak* and *montoku* are both traditional fermented alcoholic drinks for Sarawak and Sabah, respectively, while *Pansur ayam* is a type of traditional dish in Sarawak where the chicken, along with spices, rice or vegetables are put together into the bamboo stem, then directly placed over an open fire to be cooked. Lastly, *butod*, is a Dusun word which refers to the larvae of Sago Palm Weevil, a kind of snout beetle that consumes sago palm throughout its infancy. These words are written in original Sabah or Sarawak words to keep the meaning of the content, or it is untranslatability to English language. Local words which are related to the traditional rituals are also used and inserted into the English sentences. For instance, terms related to traditional costumes and their accessories such as *tinumbuku*, *gonob*, *kakamot*, *sinsin*, *sinogoloi*, *kokogis*, and *sanggul* are purposely written in the ethnic terms followed with their translation in the books.

(5). “Oh, and we will have a *Momisok* ceremony after the burial.”

(6). I found her sitting on the verandah, trying to fix her *tinumbuku*.

(7). She fixed her *gonob* and left me alone with my confusion.

(8). “Tell us about your costume and its *kakamot* in detail.”

(9). “*Sinsin* is a ring-shaped copper belt...*Sinogoloi*, on the other hand, is a belt of tubular copper pipes... These strands of white beads are called *kokogis*.”

(10). She had herself well made-up, her hair was piled high on top of her head in a neat *sanggul* and dangling from her exposed ears was the pair of earrings meant for Endu!

The data also revealed that the local language insertion is used to refer to certain human private body parts. The words *yoyong*, *tantalau*, and *pantat*, are nouns in Sabah that refer to the private body parts.

(11). “and they come out looking like your *yoyong*.”

(12). The faithless fiancé had woken up the next day with his *tantalau* sticking out of his forehead; his pride, now his shame, for all the world to see.

(13). “Yeah, right. If Pharrell Williams got burnt to charcoal! *Pantatlah* Pharrell—”

Besides that, nouns that refer to places in a house such as the word *kakanan* which means a dining place in Rungus language in Sabah, and the words *ruai* and *sadau* which means “balcony” and “upper floor” in the longhouse in Sarawak, respectively as shown in the following excerpts:

(14). On the seventh day of harvest, a beautiful young woman miraculously stood up out of *kakanan*.

(15). By the time the roosters crowed, everybody was flat on the *ruai*, like vanquished warriors after a great battle.

(16). Dave was in his own small room up in the *sadau* (the upper floor in a longhouse), trying to concentrate on his history revision.

Nouns related kinship are also found included in the insertion code-mixing in the stories. For example, the words *Baki* in Sabah and *Aki* in Sarawak means “grandfather” in English.

(17). “Only boys could climb the tree, your *Baki* would remind us. Girls weren’t allowed.”

(18). “You know, when my dear old *Aki* showed me this little secret, I didn’t believe him so I pushed him in.”

Besides insertion of single words, insertions of noun phrase are also found in the stories. For instance, as shown in excerpt (19), the phrase *Tuai Rumah* which means “head of the longhouse/village” and *Pasar minggu* in excerpt (20) which means “weekend market”:

(19). *Tuai Rumah* Umpau or TR Umpau would always be the first to meet him as he stepped off the longboat.

(20). Every Sunday the couple would go to the *pasar minggu*, making a beeline for the pet’s corner.

Lastly, insertion also included the insertion of verbs. However, there is only one data which have verbs as insertion code-mixing.

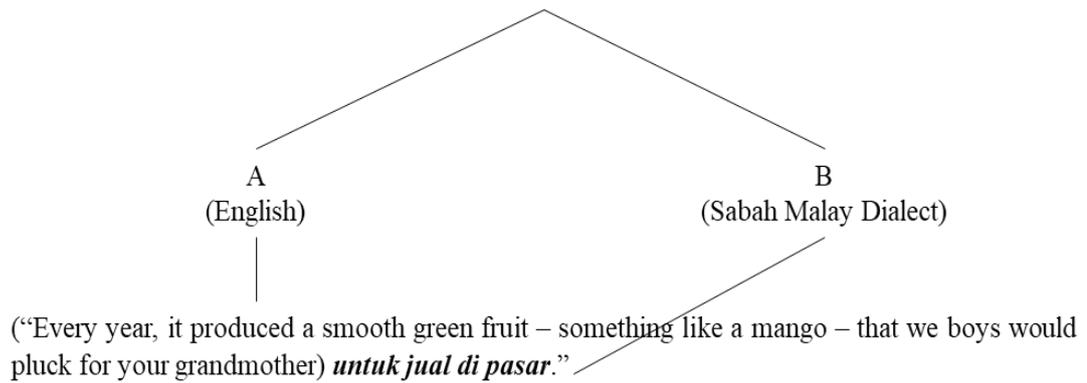
(21). “If fishing takes too long, I’ll go *merambat* with you!”

The word *merambat* in Sabah means an action of catching fish using a net. In the context of the story, the character was referring to the act of, “to find other girl”.

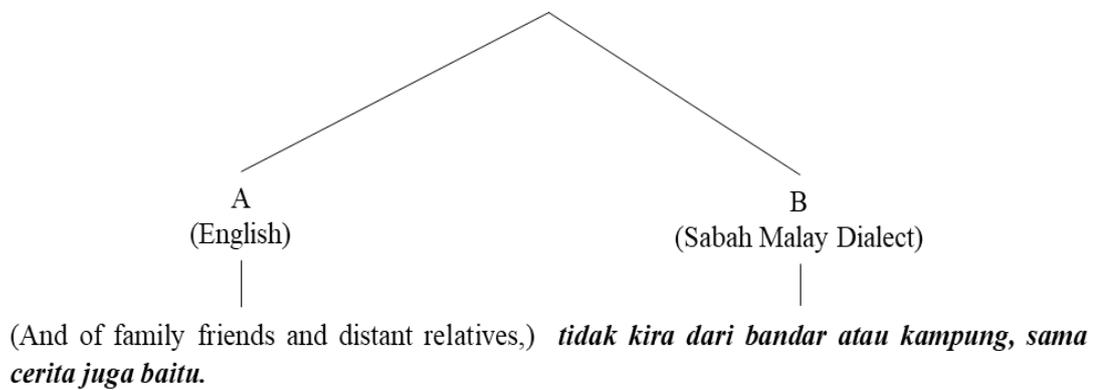
Alternation

In this study, the stories mixed Standard Malay clauses into English sentences. From the analysis, it is found that alternation code-mixing data can only be found in the book “Chronicles of KK” and there are six occurrences in the short stories.

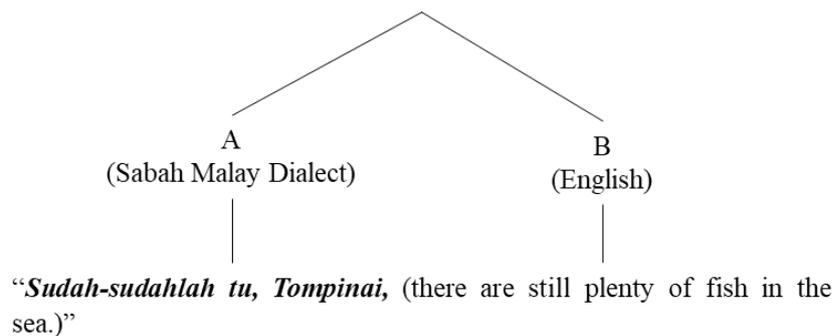
(22). “Every year, it produced a smooth green fruit – something like a mango – that we boys would pluck for your grandmother *untuk jual di pasar.*”



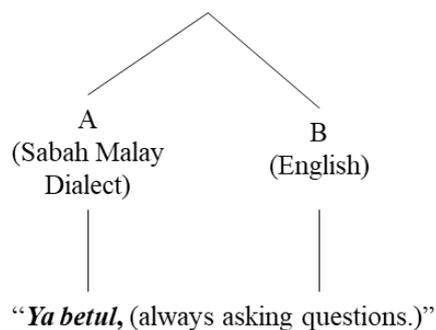
(23). And of family friends and distant relatives, *tidak kira dari bandar atau kampung, sama cerita juga baitu.*



(24). “*Sudah-sudahlah tu, Tompinai,* there are still plenty of fish in the sea.”



(25). “*Ya betul,* always asking questions.”



In excerpts (22) and (23), the sentences begin with an English clause and end with a Sabah clause whereas in excerpts (24) and (25), both begin with a Sabah clause and is followed with an English clause. All four excerpts showed that the code-mixing may come in both independent and dependent clauses, regardless of whether it is English or Sabah Malay.

Reasons for code-mixing

In this section, the reasons for code-mixing are identified based on Hoffman's (1991) theory. Out of the seven reasons, only five are identified in the short stories, which are (1) talking about a particular topic, (2) intentions of clarifying the speech content for interlocutor, (3) interjection, (4) the use of repetition for clarification and (5) expressing group identity.

Talking about a particular topic

According to Hoffman (1991), there are instances whereby a speaker may opt to use their first language when talking about a particular topic because they are more comfortable expressing their emotional opinions in their own language. This is especially true when they talk about matters that relate to their culture and beliefs, for instance in the excerpts below:

(26). "Tell us about your costume and its *kakamot* in detail...*Sinsin* is a ring-shaped copper belt. *Sinogoloi*, on the other hand, is a belt of tubular copper pipes...These strands of white beads are called *kokogis*... A complete set of *kakamot* consists of three *botungkat*, a *pinadang*, three *sinsin*, two *sinogoloi* and a *kokogis*...The *botungkat* is a belt made out of silver coins; *pinadang* is a belt with black, red and white beads in a triangle pattern."

(27). "The decorative rings on my upper arms and ankles are called *simpai* and *lungkaki*, respectively.

(28). "Some people know this *sunduk* as *sinurondo* and it acts as a head cover to protect your head on a sunny day at the *ranahon*."

(29). "This is *lapoi*, *gonob* and *tabot*," she said pointing at her sleeveless *garung* that covered her upper body, knee-length skirt and tube clothes worn underneath the *lapoi*.

(30). The young maidens were especially busy as they readied their *kain*, *marik*, *empang*, *selampai* and head dress, all the silver trinkets, each of them wanting to be at their best for the *Kumang Gawai* contest that night.

The italicised words in excerpts (27) – (31) refer to the different types of traditional accessories used by the women of Sabah and Sarawak. In this sense, it is easier to use these lexical terms to talk about matters related to the culture and also because it may be difficult to find the exact equivalent translation to these terms.

Intentions of clarifying the speech content for interlocutor

When a bilingual person speaks to another bilingual, there will tend to be a lot of code-mixing to ensure a smooth flow of conversation and would be easily understood by both speaker and listener. This is a common occurrence in the short stories analysed, since the authors wanted the readers to understand the context of the usage of the different Sabah and Sarawak indigenous languages.

(31). "The decorative rings on my upper arms and ankles are called *simpai* and *lungkaki*, respectively."

(32). In those days, what the water village houses had for a toilet was a hole in the floor, with hungry little fish that the locals call *Lai Mang*, crudely known as Shit Fish.

(33). The ride upriver had been quite uneventful even though it was the *landas*, the rainy season, and the river was rather high.

(34). Dave was in his own small room up in the *sadau* (the upper floor in a longhouse), trying to concentrate on his history revision.

Often times, the authors, provide some form of explanation or translation of the items which are code-mixed for instance. The words italicised are those from the local languages while those which are underlined are the explanation.

Interjection

Interjections are phrases or statements that are placed into a sentence to convey strong emotions or to draw attention to themselves (Hoffman, 1991). Often time, interjections are short and are brief exclamation with no grammatical implication. Interjections in the short stories analysed are used in the front of sentences:

- (35). “*Oh*, you won the *ratu cantik* competition, is it?”
- (36). “*Oh*, I’m Umang, daughter of Buma, the Tuai Rumah of the longhouse near the foot of the hills.”
- (37). “*Ya betul*, always asking questions.”
- (38). “*Ngam* lah, you cantik mah.”

Repetition used for clarification

Repetition, especially in code mixing when more than one language is used, is to help clarify the messages and help the listeners to understand the context (Hoffman, 1991). Not only does repetition helps clarify the message it also emphasises it, for instance:

- (39). *Cantiknya*, how beautiful.

In excerpt (40) above, the word *cantiknya* which means ‘so/how beautiful’ is used in both Malay and English to not only clarify the message but also to emphasise on the beauty of the character.

Expressing group identity

Another reason why code-mixing is used is due to the absence of appropriate equivalent of the words in English. This can also be associated indirectly to Hoffman’s (1991) expressing group identity reason. A lot of the words used, especially in the insertion types of code-mixing contain the indigenous words related to the Sabah and Sarawak ethnic groups and their cultures, including the traditional costumes, foods, beverages, house areas, kinship terms, and rituals.

- (40). The forgotten part of the *Momisok* ritual is that if the dead body has been cried on by one of the offspring of the deceased, then the spirit will come back and somebody else needs to be sacrificed.
- (41). Sigat was among the competitors in the young men’s section, vying for the *Keling* title.
- (42). The gongs vibrated on and on throughout the night as they danced the *ngajat* and sang to the music.

In excerpt (41), *Momisok* refers to a ritual or belief of the Kadazan community to allow the dead to visit their family for the last time before passing on. *Keling* in excerpt (42) is a legendary warrior of Dayak’s community regarded as a God and in excerpt (43), the word *ngajat* refers to a traditional dance of Dayak’s community.

CONCLUSION

Code mixing is often regarded as a feature of spoken communication. Most studies done on code mixing revealed that code mixing is a natural occurrence when it comes to spoken texts (Fitria & Syariff, 2020; Ramzan, Aziz & Ghaffar, 2021). Recent studies on written texts also revealed that code mixing exists in internet chat room conversations, e-mail letters texts messages or SMS and advertisements (Duah & Marjie, 2019) and in many other languages such as English-Bengali and English-Hindi (Das & Gamback, 2013).

Even though most studies on code mixing have mainly focused on spoken texts, there are some studies which looked at the phenomenon of code mixing in written texts, particularly in literature orworks of fictions. Such as the work of Bennett-Kastor (2008) on Irish Literary Texts and Rebekawati & Gintings (2013) in an Indonesian novel, Ibhawaegbele & Edokpayi (2014) on Nigerian Novels, and Ayoub et al. (2016) on Pakistani English Postcolonial Novels.

In Malaysia, most studies on code mixing in creative writings have focused on code mixing between the four main languages – English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. The number of studies on code-mixing in the other languages, especially the Indigenous languages of Sabah and Sarawak is still lacking (Martin, 2005), and these mainly focused on code-mixing in spoken communication (Salleh et al., 2022; Stephen, Osup, & Bakar, 2017).

This paper explored the different types of code-mixing and the reasons for code-mixing in two short stories compilation from Sabah and Sarawak written in English. Based on the analysis, there are two types of code-mixing used in the short stories which are insertion and alternation. The most used type of code-mixing is insertion with 78 occurrences, and only six occurrences of alternation. These code-mixing included nouns, noun phrases, and verbs.

Written language is often planned and the use of code mixing in these works are mostly deliberate, and with intentions. It is a choice made by the author for many purposes and reasons. For instance, the present study identified five reasons for code mixing in the short stories and they are (1) to talk about a particular topic, in this case matters related to culture (2) to clarify the speech content for the interlocutor (3) repetition used for clarification (4) interjection and last but not least, (5) to express group identity.

This study revealed that code mixing also exist in the Indigenous Literature and they are a choice which the authors made to express their ideas, message, themes, and context better. This is because most local items such as food and cultural elements and expressions, do not have English equivalents and their translation into English might not express them clearly. As shown in this study, the use of code mixing enables the author to express not only their ideas and context better but also as a form of cultural identity especially in Malaysian English creative writing.

This study focuses on short stories written in English, future researchers may want to expand or focus on code-mixing used in novels from Sabah and Sarawak or those written in Malay language.

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