

NOT CARELESS BUT WEAK: LANGUAGE MIXING OF MALAYSIAN CHINESE IN A BUSINESS TRANSACTION

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Abstract: Language is an inevitable tool for business transactions and regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, age and social class, interlocutors depend on it to conduct their daily dealings. In multilingual and multicultural Malaysia, it is not uncommon to hear a business transaction being conducted in various languages depending on who the participants are and what the context involves. This study focussed on the phenomenon of language (code) mixing within a business transaction that involved four Malaysians of Chinese descent. The study aimed to detect at what level language mixing occurred and what their functions would be. Data were video recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Mandarin utterances were documented in Chinese and Han Yu Pin Yin and provided with translations. Utterances containing a mixture of languages were then extracted for analysis. Findings suggest that language mixing occurred at the word, phrase, sentential and tag level. Language mixing was applied as a strategy to sustain the conversation mainly because of the interlocutors' weak proficiency in specific languages. It was also employed for various functions such as for distancing or narrowing the social status, making emphasis and projecting a higher personal identity. A follow up interview is required in order to verify the extent of the participants' low or high proficiency level in the various languages used in this context.

Keywords: *language mixing, Malaysian, business transaction, communication*

INTRODUCTION

Language is inherent in human lives and as a tool of communication, it enables human beings to convey their needs and deliver their messages cogently and coherently, wherever possible. In the Malaysian context, using many languages within an interaction,

hereby also termed as language mixing, is a common phenomenon (see Morais, 1995; Kuang, 1999; David, 2006; David, Kuang, McLellan and Faitmah, 2009; Jariah, 2009; David and Lim, 2009; Powell, 2009; David and Yoong, 2009). Multilingual societies practise this phenomenon more often than

monolingual societies because of the existence of the many languages in their linguistic repertoire (Holmes, 2001). Consequently, language mixing becomes a habitual occurrence for multilingual speakers.

Malaysia comprises many ethnic groups with various cultural practices but the three dominant ethnic groups are the Malays, Chinese and Indians. Each of them has its own respective first language or L1. As a multicultural society, majority of the people in Malaysia are also competent in using several other languages, at various proficiency levels, among themselves. Of the languages most Malaysians have in their linguistic repertoire, Malay serves as the official and national language while English serves as the second most important language. Both languages are taught and learnt at school from the age of seven until secondary school. This phenomenon helps to explain why many Malaysians, particularly the generation between the ages of 20 to 40, are fairly articulate in both languages. Nonetheless, Malaysian speakers have varying degrees of proficiency ranging from very good and grammatical to poor phonological forms and grammatical structures. In oral communications, most Malaysians are not particular about the level of proficiency as long as they can be understood.

According to the current 6th Prime Minister, Malaysia is the only multiracial country in the world which allows respective citizens' vernacular languages like Mandarin and Tamil to be taught and learnt at school. In this country, parents have the option of sending their children to vernacular schools (primary only) so that their children are able to acquire their native language which may or may not be spoken at home. Parents

of other ethnic groups have been known to send their children to Chinese vernacular schools so that their children can acquire Mandarin. In such schools, children also learn Malay and English simultaneously. The vernacular languages of Mandarin and Tamil are not as widely spoken as Malay or English in this country probably because of the ethnic imbalance where there are more Malays and possibly because English is still a language of prestige in this country. In addition to these four languages, of Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil, other varieties of Malay (Kedah, Negeri Sembilan, Perak, Johore, Kelantan and Terengganu) also exist side by side with common Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew, and Hainanese) as well as Hindi, Malayalam, and Arabic. However, these varieties are dependent on topics of discussion, participants involved, context, situation and place. Among the Chinese dialects, Cantonese is more widely used in the middle region of peninsular Malaysia such as Selangor and Negeri Sembilan whereas Penang Hokkien is more widely used in Penang, Kedah and Perlis. Southern Hokkien is more prevalent in the southern towns of Klang and Johore while Hakka, Teochew and Hainanese are dialects of minority Chinese. They can only be heard in specific areas and among certain clans.

The multilingual environment of Malaysia, as described here, indicates that it is a multilingual society where speakers accommodate the use of many languages at any one time, depending on the participants, context, situation, and topics discussed. Nevertheless, as many sociolinguists have indicated, multilingual speakers, i.e. those with more than two languages in their linguistic repertoire, tend to have one

dominant language thus, one particular language may prevail over the others at any one time during such interactions. Sociolinguists also suggest that when participants use several languages at one time during an oral interaction, it is because they are not proficient in any of these languages well enough to sustain the conversation in just one specific language (Hoffmann, 1991). Others claim that participants with several languages in their linguistic repertoire do so because of certain reasons including the need to convey their message as effectively as possible. Nonetheless, it is also possible that language mixing occurs because participants are careless (Nortier, 2011) that is, unmindful, to the point of polluting their language by mixing it with other languages unwittingly.

METHOD

For the purpose of extracting spoken data, this study uses a video camcorder as well as an audio recorder to record the business transaction which had occurred in a Chinese tea shop in a major shopping mall in Penang city.

Example 1

Turn	Speaker	Content
271	P	里面有 15 包咯 [li mian you shi wu bao lo] ◦ (lit. There are 15 packets lor.)
272	M	15 包 [shi wu bao] ◦ So... 你们 packing 这样是因为 package 吧了 hor? [ni men packing zhe yang shi yin wei package ba le hor]? (lit. 15 packets. So, you pack like this because of this package only hor?.)

In example 1, P had begun the conversation in Mandarin and it was continued in the same language by the subsequent speaker, M. In between her utterance, however, an English adverb 'so' was inserted into M's utterance at 272, after 'shi wu bao'. This was used as a strategy to buy time (note the slight

Participants were told of the purpose of the recording and consent was given verbally. Data were then transcribed verbatim with Chinese and Han Yu Pin Yin. They were then translated into English. Only data which contain mixing of languages are used for analysis. This paper attempts to locate two facets of language use: levels of language mixing and the functions of language mixing.

The participants were three Malaysian Chinese adults between the ages of 25-30. The participants include one female from Kuala Lumpur, a city that uses more Cantonese, one female from Klang, a town which uses more southern Hokkien and a male from Kuala Lumpur. The other participant is P, a male young person from Penang city which uses mainly Penang Hokkien.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data extracted indicate that several levels of language mixing had occurred. These were classified accordingly.

Language mixing at the word level

Word level implies a change of language occurring through a change in the lexical item. Examples are illustrated.

pause) before she asks in Mandarin again 'ni men' (you all) and again, M uses the English word, 'packing' followed by 'package'. M then ended the utterance with a Hokkien tag 'hor'. In this example, 'so' was inserted to buy time whereas 'packing' and 'package' were interjected because of M's low

proficiency in Mandarin. M did not possess the Mandarin equivalent for these two words. Additionally, the Hokkien tag 'hor' was inserted as a question form because of M's habit as a

Hokkien speaker from Klang. This use could depict M's Hokkien identity or it could be used as a means of narrowing the distance between herself and P who is also a Hokkien speaker from Penang.

Example 2

Turn	Speaker	Content
328	P	洗杯 [xi bei] ° (lit. Washing cups.)
329	M	哦 [o] ° ° ° 有什么 reason 的吗 [you shen me reason de ma]? (lit. Oh, any reasons?)

In this example, M asked P, the tea seller, his 'reason' for placing the used tea bags in a cup in 329. This is probably because M did not have the word in Mandarin thereby indicating her weak

proficiency. Clearly, the word 'reason' was inserted so that M can convey her meaning more specifically to P, who is assumed here to be capable of understanding some words of English in this case.

Example 3

Turn	Speaker	Content
305	M	Po An is going to er... give us some sample of the tea where you can try the detoxin flower tea and auto-de... we are going to try the....
306	All	(Interrupted utterances)
307	G	叫他找你的那个做 sample , 然后 [jiao ta zhao ni de na ge zuo sample, ran hou...]. (lit. Ask him to make yours as the sample, and then....)

In example 3, the conversation commenced in English as is shown in 305 but when G responded, she had to use Mandarin first, suggesting that it is her dominant language. However, the English word, 'sample' was introduced midway by G and this is probably because G is weak in Mandarin and does not have the Chinese equivalent '样本' [yang ben]. In line with this, even if G

had used the Mandarin equivalent, she would not be understood by P, the salesperson, for two reasons: one it is not a commonly used term as most people would use 'sample' and two, P's proficiency level in Mandarin may not be adequate enough for him to understand the word. Consequently, 'sample' is easier to use because it is also efficient and convenient.

Example 4

Turn	Speaker	Content
308	P	... 星期日 [xing qi ri] , (tr. Sunday,) Saturday, Sunday lor.
309	M	... Saturday, Sunday la.

In example 4, the salesperson, P, spoke in Mandarin possibly because it is his dominant language and possibly because he is not as confident in speaking English. However, in wanting to make an emphasis for his customers

whom he knew were from Kuala Lumpur, P, somehow inserts two English words, 'Saturday' and 'Sunday' at the end of his utterance. It implies that as a weekend terminology, it is commonly understood. In this context, P appears to

be emphatic in his meaning. It is also possible that P was trying to raise his own social status among his customers

who were from the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, thus more revered in status by those living in smaller cities like Penang.

Example 5

Turn	Speaker	Content
360	G	不要买一个这样的杯 [bu yao mai yi ge zhe yang de bei] ? (lit. Don't want to buy this type of cup?)
361	P	Ah... 你冲那杯 [ni zhong na bei] 。 。 。 家里的 cup 也可以啊 [jia li de cup ye ke yi a] 。 。 。 不要破裂出来吧了 [bu yao po lie chu lai ba liao] 。 (lit. Ah, you make, cup at home also can ah. Just don't want a broken one only.)

Likewise in example 5, the conversation was conducted in Mandarin as G uses Mandarin in 360. Speaker P then introduced a common Chinese tag of 'ah' as an opening before he proceeded to using Mandarin in 361. In this context, 'ah' is a common time staller used by speakers and within the same utterance, P also inadvertently used the English word, 'cup'. As has been mentioned in the previous example, it is possible that P was aiming for

solidarity so as to close this business transaction thus, he accommodated to the language dominance of his customers (M and G) by using some words of English. It is also possible that 'cup' was a much easier reference than a Mandarin equivalent although this could not be ascertained without an interview. Nonetheless, it is very likely that by using some English words, P had commanded the attention of his customers from Kuala Lumpur.

Example 6

Turn	Speaker	Content
370	G	这个杯比较 [zhe ge bei bi jiao] elegant 。 (lit. This cup is more elegant.)
371	M	这里有 [zhe li you] crack 。 (lit. Here has a crack.)

In example 6, speaker G employed the same strategy as P did in example 5. G inserted the English word 'elegant' to describe the cup. Her intention was clear, she did not have the proficiency level in Mandarin thus, she relied on her dominant language, English. It is obvious that Mandarin was used to some extent because G had some competence and this was more or less to ease the business transaction since it is very likely that P did not speak good English. While Mandarin enabled G to engage P and to get closer and establish goodwill and support with P, the English insertion allowed her to convey her meaning more clearly. Thus, the

word 'elegant' was used as a reference to describe the package instead of the Chinese equivalent "高贵" [gao gui]. Similarly, M, who appeared to be less proficient in Mandarin also posed some simple utterance in Mandarin in 371 but due to her inadequate Mandarin, M had to rely on an English word, 'crack' to convey what she meant exactly.

Language mixing at the phrase level

Where a speaker inserts an expression or anything that is more than two words, it is classified as a phrase. This may occur within an utterance or at another turn. A number of instances were detected.

Example 7

Turn	Speaker	Content
413	M	The smell... bau meh? Tak bau? (lit. The smell, got smell? No smell?)
414	G	有 [you] meh? Tak bau. (lit. Got meh? No smell.)
415	M	我 [wo] scared 倒掉 [dao diao] ° (lit. I'm scare it'll spill.)

In example 7, there were instances of language mixing appearing at word, phrase and tag level. However, in the context of this analysis, only mixing of two words or more were extracted for analysis. Clearly, the conversation had begun at 413 in English by M who seemed more proficient in English than in Mandarin as the earlier analysis suggests. However, midway in her utterance, she inserted a Malay word 'bau' which she appeared to be asking as a question through 'meh'. As if talking to herself, M then asked in Malay, the national language, 'tak bau' which

means 'didn't smell?' In this instance of language mixing, it appeared that M was trying to distance herself and her friend, G, from the salesperson P, who was in the vicinity of the business transaction. This was done by referring to a third language, Malay. It is as if M was asking her friend, G in secrecy through Malay, 'tak bau' in relation to the aroma/smell of the tea. When G heard this, she responded first in her dominant language, Mandarin, 'you meh' before she replied 'tak bau', accommodating to M. This strategy suggests that G was accommodating M as well as distancing P.

Example 8

Turn	Speaker	Content
312	P	如果有 public holiday 的话，有 public holiday 的价格咯 [ru guo you public holiday de hua, you public holiday de jian lo] ° (lit. If there is public holiday, then use public holiday rate lo.)
313	G	一百吗 [yi bai ma] ? (lit. One hundred?)

In this example, speaker P introduced the English phrase 'public holiday' within an utterance that had begun in Mandarin. The same phrase was repeated. This occurrence signified that 'public holiday' was a catch phrase

that anybody would know and understand. Thus, the language switch may have been an unconscious effort developed by P. In this context, it had probably occurred as a result of habitual use.

Example 9

Turn	Speaker	Content
371	M	这里有 [zhe li you] crack ° (lit. Here has a crack.)
372	G	是 [shi] meh?... 不是 crack 来的是吗 [bu shi crack lai de shi ma] ° (lit. Ya meh? Not crack, isn't it?)
373	M	这个比较 [zhe ge bi jiao] low quality ° (lit. This is a little low quality) (Looking at the camera person) <i>We're still waiting.</i>

In this example, speaker M began the utterance in Mandarin then inserted an English word, 'crack'. The conversation was picked up by G who

asked for the assurance of the 'crack' in 372 and by the next turn (373), M intercepted the conversation by adding that the cups in discussion were of 'low

quality' in comparison to others. This insertion was clearly an indication of M's weak proficiency in Mandarin because she did not know the Mandarin equivalent for the phrase 'low quality'. It is possible that M was trying to assert

her higher status as a buyer of the tea as well as her regional origin, Kuala Lumpur. It may also be possible that it was a ploy to carry on a 'secretive dialogue' with G. This needs to be verified further through an interview.

Example 10

Turn	Speaker	Content
377	G	Wait huh...
378	H	我们做 kei le fei 是不是要给钱 [wo men zuo kei le fei shi bu shi yao gei qian] ? (lit. We should be paid for being screen actresses right?)
379	G	是咯 [shi lo] ° ° ° (lit. Ya lor.)

Malaysian speakers of Chinese descent seem to be linguistically diverse. In this example, speaker G used English as a simple caution to request M to wait and M inserted an entire phrase from Cantonese, 'kei le fei' which means small supporting actors in Cantonese, to indulge in being 'sarcastic'. In this regard, H initiated a new topic of discussion in 378 by using Cantonese which was also a common dialect most Chinese people from Kuala Lumpur

would use. It is possible that since the interlocutors M, G and H were from Kuala Lumpur, they were simply making efforts to feel at home by using Cantonese. In other words, speaker H may have used it because there was no equivalent word for 'kei le fei' in Mandarin or even English. The term 'kei le fei' was borrowed from Hong Kong dramas and movies. It is a commonly used term to refer to small and unimportant people.

Example 11

Turn	Speaker	Content
427	M	Slimming tea... 瘦身茶 [shou shen cha] ° (tr. Slimming tea.)
428	H	你还不够瘦啊 [ni hai bu gou shou a] ? Nak kurus lagi? (lit. You're not slim enough ah? Want to slim more?)

In this example, it is noted that three languages were used simultaneously by the two speakers, M and H. Speaker M started the conversation in English, her dominant language and she repeated the term in Mandarin which was then picked up by H who asked M in Mandarin 'ni hai bu gou shou a?' For some reason, H asked M in Malay the same question, 'Nak kurus lagi?' which means "you want to be slimmer?" The turn where H shifted to Malay was

considered a communicative strategy that was deployed as humour. Clearly, M also understood the Malay reference and so when H was aiming to exclude P, the salesperson, H teased M in Malay to make fun of her and to attract her attention and reaction. While this was going on, it is probable that P, the salesperson was in the dark. This indicates that a change in the language was to distance the salesperson, P.

Example 12

Turn	Speaker	Content
492	H	Smell?
493	M	Yeah, 对 [dui], the aroma 香味比较香 [xiang wei bi jiao xiang] ° 那个就 [na ge jiu] ° (lit. Yeah, right.)

In example 12, speaker M was connecting the English phrase, “the aroma” to the previous speaker’s language choice of “smell” possibly, to convey a more exact meaning. M

repeated the same phrase in English and later in Mandarin as a way to reiterate her point. Her intention was to correct H’s language choice but she wanted to do it without imposing too much offence.

Example 13

Turn	Speaker	Content
548	P	这种比较好咯。。。因为 Teh Boh, 它是有 caffeine 的 [zhe zhong bi jiao hao lo... yin wei Teh Boh, ta shi you caffeine de] ° (lit. This type is better lor, because Boh The, it has caffeine.)
549	M	那边卖 tea, 那边也是 natural tea 嘛 [na bian mai tea, na bian ye shi natural tea ma] ° (lit. There sells tea also natural tea mah.)

In this example, speaker M used the English word, “tea” and “natural tea” due to habit. She inserted the word or the phrase that had been predominantly used in her family at home (she admits to this in a casual talk). M claimed that she had not been aware of the mixing of languages. Nevertheless, in this example, it is possible that the

Mandarin equivalent for ‘tea’ may be varied as it is more natural to say “tea leaves” 茶叶 [cha ye] or “natural tea leaves” 天然茶叶 [tian ran cha ye] unlike in Malaysia, where people tend to just say “tea” or “natural tea”. From this example, it is deduced that M used the English phrases for her own convenience.

Example 14

Turn	Speaker	Content
628	M	Second choice 呢 [ne] ? (lit. How about second choice?)
629	P	Second choice, 如果没有钱就换了 [ru guo mei wei qian jiu huan liao] ° (lit. Second choice, if no money will change.)

In example 14, speaker P was converging to the language choice of speaker M who had begun the utterance in English. This was possibly done to accommodate to his customer, as a means of establishing goodwill and support, knowing that the customer would be more inclined towards using

English, as they were from Kuala Lumpur. The switch thus developed by P contained a mixture of Mandarin and English. This is done probably because Mandarin was P’s dominant language. This occurrence suggests that language mixing took place to help sustain P’s low proficiency in English.

Example 15

Turn	Speaker	Content
635	P	除非我成绩很好 [chu fei wo cheng ji hen hao] ° ° ° (lit. Unless my result is very good.)
636	M	SPM result 拿多少 [na duo shao] ? (lit. How was the SPM result?)

In example 15, P was referring to his academic results 'SPM' (a major secondary examination in Malaysia) in 635 where he said that his result was not up to expectations, i.e. not good. In her desire to know more, M then asked P in English, 'SPM result' 'na duo shao' which means how well did you do in your SPM. This shift from English to Mandarin was to accommodate P's language choice. However, in using the English phrase of 'SPM result', it appears that M had used it as an inevitable choice as there was no other way of saying it as Malaysians know what 'SPM result' refers to. In this

case, SPM refers to a particular examination which all Malaysians high schoolers need to take before they proceed to pre-university level.

Language mixing at the sentential level

In a conversation including a business transaction where speakers take turns to talk, language mixing may also occur at the sentential level where a speaker changes from speaking language A to using language B with another speaker. This may also occur when a speaker uses language A but his/her interlocutor responds in language B.

Example 16

Turn	Speaker	Content
290	G	是要买一个 20 套的哦 [shi yao mai yi ge 20 set [sets] de o] ° (lit. Need to buy 1 whole 20 sets oh.)
291	M	够了啦。这个啦 [gou liao la. Zhe ge la] ° (lit. Enough lar. This one lar.)
292	H	Are you sure want to buy ah?
293	M	Yes. This is for slimming actually, and according to the shopkeeper, not only...

In this example, speaker G and M were discussing in Mandarin when H interjected by switching to English. It was a way to distance the salesperson, P,

from understanding their conversation. Speaker M used English because H was using English, so speech convergence is happening here.

Example 17

Turn	Speaker	Content
298	P	这个排毒的茶 [zhe ge pai du de cha] ° (lit. This is a detoxifying tea.)
299	M	这个花茶 [zhe ge hua cha] ° ° (lit. This is a flower tea.) (Negotiating with the salesperson) We are now trying to er... what is your name ah? 姓什么啊 [xing shen me a]? (lit. Surname ah?)

In this example, speaker M was probably trying to garner support from her friends as well as to obtain more information. M was possibly also trying

to assert her authority as someone who is older than P by using English and here, she used the pronoun, 'we' to display her desire.

Example 18

Turn	Speaker	Content
349	P	100 磅大概。两个月啦 [yi bai bang da gai... liang ge yue la] ° (lit. 100 pound about... 2 months time lar.)
350	M	Smell like chrysanthemum... smell like chrysanthemum...
351	G	会很难讲的 [hui hen nan jiang de] ° (lit. Will be very hard to say.)
352	P	会难讲 [hui nan jiang]... 那个是 [na ge shi] uh... (lit. Hard to say that...)

Example 20

Turn	Speaker	Content
367	P	等到有味道出来 [deng dao wei dao chu lai] ° ° ° (lit. Wait until the smell comes out.)
368	M	Oh... for the smell to come out.

Example 21

Turn	Speaker	Content
386	G	应该跟她讲钱 huh [ying gai geng ta jiang qian]... (lit. Should ask her for money.)
387	M	Ya la!
388	M	Charge, charge! Extra charge!

In examples 18, 20 and 21, language mixing was apparent as the switch was made very clearly by the subsequent speaker in the conversation. In example 18 for example, when speaker M spoke in an English utterance in 350, she was doing it to project her own identity since she was from Kuala Lumpur. The same strategy occurred in example 20 when M again used an English utterance to elevate her personal status in P's eyes. However, in example 21, when G asked in Mandarin whether she should ask for money, M reiterated the stand by validating with 'Ya la' which was neither English nor Malay because the 'ya' could

mean English for yes or it could be a Malay 'ya' which means yes while 'la' is just a particle Malaysians use to assert a meaning. It also seems that a switch from Mandarin to English allowed the speakers to express their attitude about a sensitive matter such as money, thereby making the issue less sensitive. From the previous analysis shown above, it had been revealed that speaker M seemed to have English and southern Hokkien as her dominant languages thus, in her moment of appreciating the tea, she had just broken into English to convey her meaning as is shown in 368, 387 and 388.

Example 19

Turn	Speaker	Content
363	P	Ah... 大概 3 分钟、4 分钟这样 [da gai 3 fen zhong, 4 feng zhong zhe yang] ° (lit. Ah, about 3 minutes, 4 minutes this way.)
364	M	We have to wait for 3 to 4 minute...

Likewise in example 19, speaker M spoke in English after a Mandarin utterance was initiated by P. This occurrence seems to suggest that M was trying to ease the communication by talking to herself in English in 364.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of data suggests that language mixing constantly occurs within utterances made by Malaysian participants of Chinese descent,

particularly those from Kuala Lumpur. Data illustrate that the participants used more Chinese which encompass Mandarin, Hokkien and Cantonese in their conversations. However, despite that, they were generally weak or have low proficiency in their Chinese, hence, they were prone to mixing their conversations which had started in Mandarin with other languages like English and Malay. This was accomplished either by inserting single

lexical items which may appear at the beginning, middle or end of the utterances or by inserting phrases or complete sentences within the conversation. Generally, tags taken from Cantonese or Hokkien served as a language mixing feature too but usually at the end of the utterance. Where necessary and when incapacitated by a lack of their own proficiency in Mandarin or due to habitual usage, these participants may also insert phrases within a predominantly Mandarin utterance. Nonetheless, where sentential mixing occurs, it appears that the participants were clearly switching languages such as by using Mandarin then mixing it with a complete utterance in English or Malay and vice versa. While some instances were meant to project an individual's personal status other instances seemed like a think-aloud strategy.

As a final analysis, the functions executed by the language mixing instances suggest a number of things. First and foremost language mixing is a common phenomenon in Malaysian interactions as seen in a business transaction involving Malaysian speakers of Chinese descent. In fact, among Chinese speakers, Malay could serve as a common language of use too.

The other functions of language mixing seem to indicate that speakers mix their languages not because they were careless or unaware of their mixing. In fact, Malaysian speakers of Chinese descent mix their languages for the following reasons: 1) when they were less competent in one language; 2) when they want to convey their message more clearly and more significantly; 3) when they want to exclude or include solidarity; 4) when they want to make an emphasis, 5) when they want to display

their social status as higher, 6) when they want to create a certain communicative effect and 7) when it suits their convenience such as thinking-aloud. .

This paper has presented the findings of one episode of a business transaction talk where four speakers of Chinese descent were involved. The analysis indicates that language mixing occurs frequently and often involves three to four levels encompassing the word, phrase, sentential and tag level. This paper has also highlighted that Malaysians of Chinese descent mix languages involving Mandarin, English, Cantonese, Hokkien and Malay. It is possible that Malay, as a language learnt at school, was more accessible but Tamil was clearly, a language that was not in their repertoire. Nonetheless, this study is restricted to only four speakers and one business transaction. This gap can be widened in future studies in order to be able to make generalisations. Moreover, to validate the analysis, that the speakers were weak in their respective languages, an interview should be conducted.

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