

## Functions of Code Switching in Youth WhatsApp Chats

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### Abstract

This paper examines the functions of code-switching occurrences between a group of multi-ethnic youths in Malaysia. Since the population of Malaysia is ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous, code switching is a common phenomenon among these youths which has spread into the online mode of communication. WhatsApp chats from a total of 24 respondents was collected from participants of various background, mainly Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups. A qualitative methodology was employed wherein an online interview was conducted to analyse their motives underlying the code-switching phenomenon. The functions of code-switching were further analysed using a conceptual framework developed by the researcher that was adapted from Appel and Muysken (2005) and Hoffman's (1991) functional model of code-switching. The yielded findings postulate that the participants in this study code-switched in the WhatsApp Messenger mostly for emphatic function and interjections. However, the paper propose that habitual code switching might encourage the code-switching phenomenon, since both English and Bahasa Malaysia play a huge role in their daily communication. Code switching behaviour also indicates their bi-multilingual identity as Malaysians.

**Keywords:** *Code switching, WhatsApp messenger, Malaysian, online communication*

## 1. Introduction

Code-switching refers to the dynamic conversational phenome in interactions, that is an alternation of codes in a single conversational occurrence, dialects, or registers (Hamzeh & Jianbo, 2019). It is considered as an important phenomenon and common norm among bilinguals or multilingual community (Koban, 2013) especially when two or more languages are in contact. Traditionally, code-switching has been classified as a random occurrence (Poplack, 1980), a sign of incompetency in either both languages (Coulmas, 2005) or due to language barrier with the interlocutors (Hughes et al., 2006). Some recent studies on code-switching suggest that the phenomenon is a form of communication "strategies" to achieve specific functions (see for instance Alhourani, 2018; Khoumssi, 2020; Rusli et al., 2018).

Code switching is prevalent throughout multilingual countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, and others, portraying the differences between ethnicity, cultures, and generations. In the Malaysian context, code-switching is when English and Malay as well as other ethnic languages are combined in one or more sentences. It is natural for Malaysians to code-switch in daily conversations since they are at least bilingual speakers. This range of linguistic phenomena then form a code that contextualize meaning and represent a broad range of functions. Code switching can occur in various context ranging from face-to-face interaction in daily conversation to online medium.

Malaysia is a multicultural and multiracial country of about 32.73 million population with more than 100 languages and dialects (Departments of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). According to the statistics, Malaysians are made up of Bumiputera (69.3%), Chinese (22.8%), Indians (6.9%) and other minorities ethnic groups (1.0%). It is suggested that Malaysians are at least bilinguals where they can access two or more languages and thus, provide space for them to practice different choices in using the languages for different

purposes in diverse circumstances (Chan & Abdullah, 2007). Therefore, the language condition in Malaysia is extremely complex as there is not only the occurrence of the national language which is Bahasa Malaysia or English in communication, but also code alternations between Malay and English, any of the Chinese vernaculars and English, an Indian vernacular, usually Tamil and English as well as myriad of other code-switching varieties. As a result, the daily communication of this multi-ethnic society comprises of different combination of language codes or known as 'Bahasa Rojak' (Shafie & Nayan, 2013, pp. 188). 'Bahasa Rojak' refers to the combination of two or more languages in which one language acts as a base language (pp. 188).

However, the focus of this study is mainly on code-switching behaviour using Bahasa Malaysia and the English language rather than focusing on the code-switching patterns within a particular language's dialect. Despite this, the data of this study will encounter such occurrences of Malaysian English as it arises to be the lingua-franca (used in an informal setting) for this multiracial society. This is because Malaysian English functions on a wider range of interlocutors, namely the Malays, Chinese and Indian. With these dominant influences, these language varieties have consequently developed communication features such as '*lah*,' '*kan*,' direct translations of English to Bahasa Malaysia, and nativized intonation, speech rhythm and pronunciation. These features might as well be found in WhatsApp conversations as these students communicate in the course of spoken-like conversation.

During the last two decades, a considerable body of literature on code-switching has emerged revealing its functions and patterns in computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC). Several studies have looked into the code-switching phenomenon in emails (see for instance Jayathilake, 2021; Negrón Goldberg, 2009). Other studies have focused on the code-switching behaviour in forums (among others Androutsopoulos, 2004; Hinrichs, 2006; Leppanen, 2007). Fewer studies have explored the code-switching occurrences in blogs and SMS (see for instance Cathomas et al., 2015; Morel et al., 2012). In Malaysia, the phenomenon of code-switching is considered common among Malaysian second-language speakers (Ariffin, K., & Rafik-Galea, 2009; David, 2003; Ismail & Mahmud, 2021). Such behaviours were studied among others, Malaysian lawyers, judges, and witnesses in the courtroom setting (David, 2003). Her study revealed that the respondents switched from Malay into English and vice versa at some points in the conversations depending on the situational context, not necessarily triggered by different levels of English proficiency. As for Stapa and Khan's (2016) study that sought to identify the codeswitching phenomenon in an interracial marriage, it was perceived that the respondents were likely to switch expectedly and unexpectedly to perform different functions such as for the purpose of expressing emotions, providing further elaboration, clarification, and emphasis. Perceptions on code-switching behaviour were also discussed in different settings such as schools, universities, and business deals (see for instance Mohammadi, Seraj, Ibrahim & Abdul Hadi, 2019; Roslan, Mahmud & Ismail, 2021; Lau & Ting, 2013 respectively). Most recent studies on code-switching have shifted from offline to online modes such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter and others (see for instance Izazi & Tengku Sepora, 2020; Shafie & Nayan, 2013).

From these reviews, it is observed that there is an extensive amount of research on code-switching in various contexts and a group of speakers. However, these studies tend to focus on code-switching behaviour on public social media as well as the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon by employing a survey for data collection. On the contrary, the present study looks at the occurrence of Manglish in a private setting. This privacy initiates transparency in expressing feelings and personal sharing (Pearce, Thøgersen-Ntoumani, & Duda, 2014), thus offering rich personal information with the usage of Manglish. To this end, this paper focuses on the functions of code-switching in the speech of young Malaysians in WhatsApp Messenger. The purpose of this study is to examine the code-switching behaviour that occurred in the conversa-

tions. The functions of code-switching are further explained by Appel and Muysken (1987, 2005) using the functional specialization model.

### 1.1 Functions of code-switching

An extensive study on motivations, functions and motives of code-switching has been conducted by several linguists and researchers from different aspects of linguistic (Eldin, 2014; Stapa & Khan, 2016). However, Auer (1988) argues that code-switching is used in a creative way and its functions should be boundless without a pre-established set of functional categories. In line with the claim, the present study combines Hoffman (1991) and Appel and Muysken (2005) frameworks on code-switching functions to identify various plausible reasons the youths may code-switch in their conversations. Similarly, Ahmed Abousoud (2019) in her study on code-switching among Facebook users, adopted Hoffman’s (1991) framework due to the detailed categorization of code-switching and code-mixing types within any discourse. Figure 1 illustrates the models employed in analysing the WhatsApp interaction data.

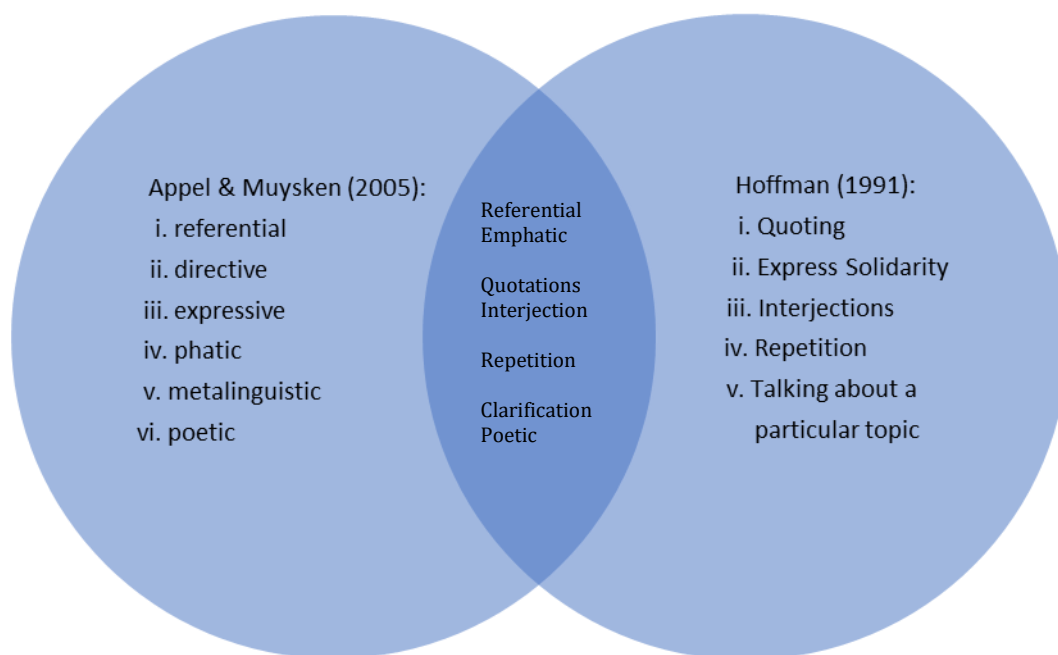


Figure 1

Appel and Muysken (2005) have revised the six main functions of code-switching while Hoffman (1991) identifies five functions of code-switching. Table 1 summarises each function according to the respective framework.

**Table 1 Summaries of Code-Switching Functions (Adopted from Rusli et al. (2018))**

<b>Appel &amp; Muysken (2005)</b>	<b>Hoffman (1991)</b>	<b>Functions adopted by present Study</b>
Referential  This function is used when there is a lack of knowledge of the language. A language is	Quoting  Participants use CS or CM to quote a famous expression, proverb, or famous saying of	1. Referential 2. Emphatic 3. Quotations, 4. Interjection,

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chosen based on its appropriateness, to be used for a particular topic, usually when a certain concept is not accessible in the user's mother tongue.	prominent figures.	5. Repetition 6. Clarification 7. Poetic
Directive  This function is used to include or exclude a person from a conversation. Sean de Goede (2015) mentioned that the directive function helps listeners to become more engaged and attached to the	Express Solidarity  A person who uses a language that is not his original one has a desire to be more serious or solid towards something. Thus, he/she voluntarily or involuntarily prefers to switch from the second language to the mother tongue or he/she can switch from the mother tongue to the second language.	
Expressive  For this function, speakers use more than one language to empower their identity or express feelings towards others. By using a foreign language, any possible taboo terms in the native language can also be avoided.	Interjections  An interjection is words or expressions added to express surprise or strong emotions or to attract attention. It can be found in the shape of a short exclamation like hey! Well! Look...etc. They are more utilized in speaking than in writing.	
Phatic  This function is used to indicate a change in tone and highlight the significant parts of a conversation.	Repetition  If the bilingual person wants to add more clarification and certainty to the speech, he/she switches between codes and varieties	
Metalinguistic  Metalinguistic function includes quotations, phrases and metaphors.	Talking about a particular topic  Participants in certain situations choose to utilize different codes rather than their original ones. These codes are kept to express certain topics such as emotions, feelings, insults...etc	
Poetic		

Poetic function occurs when words, funny phrases or jokes are used in various languages for the purpose of entertainment. Chan (2009) suggested that code switching acts as a poetic device when words in various languages rhyme with each other and create a harmony sound.		
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Based on the framework formed, there are seven functions of code-switching behavior; *referential, emphatic, quotations, interjection, repetition, clarification and poetic*. The referential and expressive function in Appel & Muysken (2005) functional model is similar to Hoffman's (1991) model where the respective functions serve for the purpose of talking about a particular topic and expressing emotions. However, there are other functions from each model which is considered inappropriate to analyze the data in this study such as the directive function by Appel & Muysken (2005) and expression of group identity by Hoffman (1991) as these functions apt the face-to-face interaction. On the other hand, phatic function serves to emphasize the importance of a subject matter which is indicated through the change in tone of the conversation. This function is similar to Gumperz's (1982) function of repetition in code-switching. It is usually detected through a verbal conversation. Another important function selected for the analysis process is poetic function which refers to jokes and puns. In the present study's context, jokes can further be clarified through the use of WhatsApp emoticons.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach for it involved "research procedures for describing, analysing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group's shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs and language that develop over time" (Creswell, 2012, pp. 462). In this study, the communication strategies of the participants who belong to the same English background courses were studied through a mobile application device to understand the central phenomenon of bilingual speech, in this case, the code-switching behaviour. Since many studies have been carried out in other CMC medium, it is significant to explore the code-switching patterns via the least-explored medium such as the mobile-instant messaging which is WhatsApp messenger. As this is a document analysis, the data is in the form of online written texts which was collected through the WhatsApp conversations. Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study as a group of individual and site was intentionally selected to learn and understand the phenomenon of speech behaviour. This corresponds with Patton's claims (1990, pp. 169) on the important factor in choosing participants and sites is "information rich." The data collection developed was snowball sampling as the participants recommended other individuals to be sampled. The potential conversations that contained code-switching behaviour were selected from the WhatsApp Messenger of 12 participants with at least 2 000 words each. The selected participants aged between 18 to 24 years old as various studies have suggested that more than 80% of the social media users are mainly youths (Abraham and Fanny, 2019). They are of different ethnicity since Malaysia is a multicultural country comprising of the Malay, Chinese, Indian and other minorities ethnic groups. Moreover, these participants have at least, some degree of proficiency in both Bahasa Malaysia and the English

language since code switching “requires speakers to have knowledge in at least two languages” (Ling et al., 2014, pp. 227). Another instrument employed in this study was the interview questions which have been formulated based on the functions and the conversations itself. The interview aims to triangulate the WhatsApp findings.

The interviews were conducted through the WhatsApp Messenger in order to clarify the functions of code-switching phenomenon that occur in the conversations between the participants and their friends. The interview took place after the conversations were selected and each of the participants was asked to answer the interview questions based on their previous conversations. After the data was collected, it was then analysed using Appel and Muysken (2005) and Hoffman’s (1991) functional categories were used to answer the second research question.

## **2.1 Data collection**

The data was collected through the conversations that occurred in the WhatsApp Messenger. Before the data was collected, the selected participants were informed and briefed about the context of this study where their personal conversations with their friends were required. However, this was done without revealing the objectives or research questions to avoid cases such as self-initiated code-switching in their WhatsApp conversations. The participants have also agreed to contribute data for this study and allowed to forward their WhatsApp conversations to the researcher because they have signed the letter of consent which was distributed before the data collection process began. Since they have given their consent to the research, 24 WhatsApp conversations were collected with two conversational episodes from each participant. The topics of conversations in the WhatsApp Messenger were not restricted. Conversations which occurred only in Bahasa Malaysia or fully in English were excluded.

The messages and identities of the respondents have been kept confidential. Therefore, the total of conversations collected were 24 with the occurrences of code-switching phenomenon. The conversations were also transferred into word document which was sent through emails. The collected data was referred to in the interview process which was also conducted via the WhatsApp Messenger. The occurrences of code-switching activities in the sentences were highlighted to ease the interview process where quotations might be needed in conducting the interviews. Some of the code-switched words were identified and the purposes of the phrases or clauses that have been switched were clarified during the interviews. The interview questions asked were constructed based on the seven functions of code-switching.

## **2.2 Data analysis**

The collected data was then prepared for the analysis process. The WhatsApp conversations were analysed to identify the functions of code-switching. For each WhatsApp conversation, their code-switched words or phrases were highlighted in every sentence which were then categorized into their functions which were adapted and adopted from Hoffman (1991) and Appel & Muyskens’ (2000) functional categories of code-switching. The final process involved analysis of the interview questions which were used to clarify whether the participants’ real motives for code-switching complement the functions identified earlier. The results obtained were discussed and compared with results on studies done using CMC as a means of communication.

### 3. Findings

This section identifies the functions of code-switching. The functions are analysed based on the conceptual framework adopted and adapted from Appel & Muysken (2005) and Hoffman (1991) which are: referential, poetic, emphatic, quotations, interjection, repetition, and clarification. The themes relate to the issues discussed throughout their conversation. A number of functions identified for each type are discussed and illustrated, with examples from the data. The functions and examples of code-switching in WhatsApp conversations can be seen in the following.

Based on the analysis of the WhatsApp conversations, it was found that the conversational topics discussed in the conversations can be a factor that contributed to the reason for code-switching. In this study the participants code-switched when they were discussing health conditions, apologising, and swearing. However, Bahasa Malaysia was used when quoting a person. Further explanation on the code-switching phenomenon can be seen below.

#### Referential Function

According to Appel & Muysken (2005), this type of code-switching often involves a lack of knowledge in that particular language or a lack of facility in that language on a certain subject. In addition, a specific word from one of the languages involved may be semantically more appropriate for a given concept. Based on the analysis of WhatsApp conversations, only one example of topic-related switching was found in this study. However, the switching occurred unconsciously, not because the participant lacked knowledge of one language as claimed by Chen (2007). Chen mentioned that some topics may be more proper to be discussed in one language than in another language. This implies that it is not easy to gauge the suitability of one language against another to discuss certain topics. Therefore, code-switching might occur intentionally depending on certain situational factors.

The example can be seen in Shalbanah's conversation, where she is conversing with her friend, Varan who just had an accident earlier. In the conversation, Shalbanah seems worried and inquires him about his car and health condition. The conversation is illustrated in example 1 below where the correct translation for each sentence is in italic.

#### Example 1

Shalbanah	<i>kete u?</i> <i>Your car?</i>
	<i>Baru kan kete tu..kat mne skang?</i> <i>It's a new car right...where is it now?</i>
Varan	ya, its new but its okay lah <i>Ya, it is new but it's okay</i>
<u>Shalbanah</u>	I think u shud rest je Dun think too much I'm glad ur fine
<u>Varan</u>	<u>Me too</u>
<u>Shalbanah</u>	now u listen to me, <i>xpyh pk kete ke ape</i> <i>Now you listen to me, no need to think about the car or anything else</i>

U take ur medicine n go to bed k <emoti-  
con>

*Take your medicine and go to bed okay*

---

In the extract, we can see that Shalbanah code-switched to Bahasa Malaysia when asking about her friend's car. Shalbanah was more comfortable asking about the car's location and seeking for clarification in Bahasa Malaysia, instead of using English. From the interview, Shalbanah mentioned that she was unaware of the situation where she code-switched into Bahasa Malaysia when asking about the car. Instead, she was just curious about the car's condition since it was bought by her friend for less than 6 months. This phenomenon is clearly seen in the following sentence since Shalbanah only code-switched into Bahasa Malaysia when talking about the car but switched back into English when giving advice. This finding indicates that although Shalbanah is an Indian, she is more comfortable in using Bahasa Malaysia to clarify important matters. This might be affected by her social group of friends and years of living and growing amongst the Malaysian where the dominant ethnic comprises of the Malay society.

### **Emphatic Function**

Mahootian (2006) stated that the emphatic function of code-switching is associated with meta-level act of communication where the form itself, meaning mixed speech discourse, is about the speaker rather than the speech. In other word, emphatic function serves to express one's emotions and feelings. According to Hoffman (1991), a person tends to switch from his second language to his first language, either intentionally or unintentionally, when he suddenly wants to be emphatic about something. On the other hand, he switches from his second language to his first language because he feels more convenient to be emphatic in his second language rather than in his first language.

From the data, several emphatic functions of code-switching were found throughout the conversations. From the data, Natasha, Zuliza and Haliza switched to the word "sorry" in English instead of expressing it in Bahasa Malaysia, or their mother tongue. Based on the interviews, saying sorry in English made the participants feel less guilty, and connote the meanings without blaming themselves directly. For example, the extract below illustrates a conversation between two friends, Natasha and Ash. It is regarding Ash's romantic relationship since Natasha noticed that he looks happier. In the middle of the conversation however, Natasha fell asleep and woke up after some time. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

### **Example 2:**

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**Natasha**

**tertido pulak..sorry2**

***Sorry...I fell asleep***

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Sangatlah pretty

*She is so pretty*

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In the longer extract, we can see that Natasha woke up and realized that Ash is still waiting for her response. In fact, Ash already sends the photo of his new girlfriend. She immediately responds to him by explaining the delay in her response and expresses an apologetic feeling to Ash by switching to English to alleviate the sense of guilt and strengthen intimacy. The situation is further mitigated by her following response, that his girlfriend is beautiful. In the interview, Natasha mentioned that it is normal for her to apolo-



gize using the English language and in this case, she emphasizes it by using the number “2” to indicate her sincerity.

Other than symbols, the exaggerated use of spelling and punctuation, and the use of capitals, spacing and special symbols or marks for emphasis applied in written electronic texts, can indicate strong feelings (Chen, 2007). From the data, the use of exaggeration such as repeated letters and punctuation marks was found in the WhatsApp conversations between Arvina and her friend, Maria. In the conversation, Maria is seeking Arvina’s advice on pursuing her master’s studies. After a while, Arvina then advised her to sleep as Maria needs to work tomorrow. However, Arvina found out that Maria took a two-day medical leave due to her health condition. Feeling worried, Arvina started to ask Maria about her condition. The conversation extract can be seen in the following example:

**Example 3:**

<b>Arvina</b>	<b>how would I know pakcik</b> <b><i>how would I know uncle?</i></b>
	Whats wrong with <i>u????</i> <b>demam ke?</b> <i>What is wrong with you? Do you have fever?</i>

In the conversation, Arvina asks Maria the reason for taking a medical leave. Maria then emphasizes that it is due to her sickness, eliminating the assumption that she is not taking the leave unreasonably. Arvina then responded that she is unaware of Maria’s reason and continue to ask whether she is sick or having a fever. In the line, the emphatic function is illustrated through the use of repeated question marks to express her heightened emotional involvement or concerns regarding Maria’s health. This is supported by the interview when Arvina mentioned that she was surprised when her friend took medical leave for a few days. She code-switched into Bahasa Malaysia and asked whether Maria had a fever to show her concern on this matter because Maria is known as someone who is committed in her work.

**Quotations**

According to Gumperz, (1982), speakers will often switch into that person’s language, when quoting or reporting someone else’s discourse. In many instances, the speaker code switched to quote themselves and others directly or indirectly, or simply to state a slogan. This occurs when the speakers aim to convince the addressees. Seemingly, a quotation served as a proof that what they were saying were facts and that the addressees had to believe them.

From the data, there are several instances of code-switching found especially when the participants were in the mode of storytelling. This is frequently seen in Shalbanah’s conversation with her friend, Varan. In the conversation, both of them are admiring some students who can afford to use expensive cars in college. This conversation then leading Shalbanah to talk about her cousin’s girlfriend who just received a new car from her father. The conversation can be seen in the following excerpt:

**Example 4:**

Shalbanah	hahaha
	I tink so too

when I saw the cousin, I was like *wth?*  
*Ayah dia beli? i mau jugak*  
when I saw my cousin, I was like *wth?*her  
father bought her? I want it too

---

In the chats, Varan teases Shalbanah that her cousin just hit a jackpot since he is in a relationship with a girl from a wealthy family. As seen in the extract, Shalbanah laughs at varan's statement and agreed with him. We can also see that Shalbanah refers to a particular moment when she switched from English to Malay while talking with Varan, and she reports her own responses. Here, direct speech is associated with the role of author and animator (Holt & Clift, 2007). This is indicated using quotative 'like'. Magliacane and Howard (2019), in their studies on the use of 'like' in L2 English reported similar findings as their participants demonstrate consistency in the use of 'like' as a way to introduce a quotation or inner thought. In other words, Shalbanah's transition from one role as the author, to the other role as an animator can be seen when the code switch represents how she sounded during the actual conversation. This is supported by her interview response as Shalbanah claims that she quoted her original response to share her feelings when she found out about the car. However, her following reaction to wanting the car is fully a joke.

### Interjection

Thompson (2019, pp. 100048) describes an interjection as a lexical item or phrase which are "used to express, but not to describe, a speaker's emotions or mental state, attitude, action, or reaction to a situation." In other words, interjections lead to triggering certain feelings at that particular moment and has no grammatical structure or even word class. Examples of interjections are *wow, yuk, aha, ouch, oops, ah, oh, er, huh, eh, tut-tut (tsk-tsk), brrr, shh, ahem, psst, bother, damn, (bloody) hell, shit, goodbye, yes, no, thanks, and well* (Wharton, 2000). This can be ascribed to the fact that interjections express strong feelings and emotions.

Several examples of interjection can be found in the WhatsApp data. An example of interjection can be seen in Nizam's conversation with her coursemates, Efa. In the chats, they are discussing their assignment's due dates. The excerpt is presented in the following example.

### Example 5:

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Nizam	Havent ask them yet
	Bcause yg ad els juz me and ely
	<i>Because it was only me and ely who took the course</i>
	<b>Oouchh</b> lupe...sara and shal pon amik els
	gk
	<i>Oouchh forgot...sara and shal also took els</i>

---

In the chats, Efa suggested Nizam to confirm the assignment's deadlines with his other friends who are taking a similar course. Nizam admits that he has not asked the other friends since there were only two of them in a similar course. After a moment, Nizam corrected his statement after he realized that there were actually four of them taking the course. In the excerpt, we can see that Nizam speaks mostly in the Bahasa

Malaysia and suddenly switched to the English interjection *oouchh* after realizing his mistakes; he has forgotten to mention other friends' names from the course. Wierzbicka's (1992) claims that interjection is language-specific and possesses social meaning. In this case, *oouchh* is spontaneously uttered by Nizam although his base language in the sentence is Malay. This proves that from the interview, Nizam claims that the interjection that he used in the sentence is purely accidental, and unintentional.

Ameka (1992) explains further on the secondary interjections as independent words which can express a mental attitude or state. The following sample shows the usage of secondary interjections such as "damn it," "alamak," (translated as "oh my gosh") and "gosh." Based on the interview, Amira used the interjection "damn it" to express her frustration since she has the desire to watch a movie and also go to the book fair, but she can only choose one of them. Moreover, Amira mentioned that she also used interjections such as "alamak" and "Gosh" to express her frustration and disappointment. Examples of the conversations are illustrated in the following excerpts:

**Example 6:**

Amira	Hobbit sounds like a plan but nak pegi big bad wolf gak <i>Hobbit sounds like a plan but I want to go to big bad wolf too</i>
	sumer tempat nak g <b>damn it</b> laaa <i>damn it I feel like going everywhere</i>
	Hahaha

Goffman (1981) refers primarily to expressions such as *ouch*, *oops*, *yuk*, *wow*, *eh*, *ah*, *aha*, *oh*, as non-words which are not productive in the linguistic sense. Wierzbicka (1992) proposed that "ow" is the interjection used to replace "pain" or "I'm in pain." However, the use of 'damn it' in this sentence acts as emotive function and implies that she is more comfortable expressing her frustration in English rather than in Bahasa Malaysia.

**Clarification**

Hoffman (1991) mentioned that there will be lots of occurrences of code-switching and code-mixing when a bilingual or multilingual person talks to another bilingual/ multilingual. This phenomenon, however, is required to assist the delivery of the speech content for it to flow smoothly and can be understood by the listener. A message in one code is repeated in the other code in a somewhat modified form.

Based on the analysis, it was found that Natasha code-switched from Bahasa Malaysia to the English language when asking for clarification from his friend on whether he has chosen the university to pursue his bachelor's degree. In the interview, Natasha mentioned that she was being very serious regarding this matter since her friend has been keeping the intention of pursuing his degree since he has started working.

**Example 7:**

Natasha	Really? Then just enjoy your cuti.. <i>Really? Then just enjoy your break..</i> <b><i>Hey, dah tngok uni ke? For your degree?</i></b>
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*Hey, have you surveyed the university? For your degree?*

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The next example shows how Thanusha was asking for clarification about the type of food that is served at the restaurant. From the interview, Thanusha code-switched into Bahasa Malaysia in order to ask for clarification since she was eager to know more about the restaurant because it seems interesting to her.

**Example 8:**

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Thanusha	what type of food? <b>Smue ade ke?</b> What type of food? Is there all type?
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Example 9 on the other hand, illustrates the clarification made by Shalbanah and Arvina who code-switched from the English language to Bahasa Malaysia to get further explanation and details of their friends' health state. This corresponds with their interviews since both participants mentioned that they were worried about their friends' health. Examples of clarification found in WhatsApp Messenger can be seen in the following:

**Example 9:**

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Arvina	what? Then r u ok? <b>Teruk ke?</b> <i>Is it bad?</i>
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**Poetic Function**

Appel & Muysken (1987) mentioned that bilingual speakers tend to switch to another language to make puns and jokes for the purpose of amusement or entertainment. From the analysis, it was found that there is an element of puns in the example when Laily was asking his friend whether she already had her dinner or if she fasting that night. The statement is clearly a pun that Laily purposely posted to his friend since it is not a fasting month and there are no such beliefs as fasting at night. This is supported by the conducted interview since Laily mentioned that she was only teasing his friend by asking whether she is fasting.

**Example 10:**

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Laily	Xjd sgt coz ujan lebat <i>I didn't make it cause it was raining</i>
	N uitm banjir arini...huhu <i>And Uitm was flooding...huhu</i>
	So basically..all of us are not productive today...
	Juz sleeping n watching some movies...
	Have u taken ur dinner??
	<b><i>Ke puasa mlm2 ni?</i></b>

---

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*Or are you fasting tonight?*

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The example below shows another poetic function in the conversation since Laily code-switched from Bahasa Malaysia to the English language when she was making a joke about replacing the diamond ring with the super ring, which is a donut-shaped snack. Laily also mentioned in the interview that, she code-switched to English unconsciously since she only thinks of teasing her friend at that moment who really loves diamond.

**Example 11:**

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Laily	Ye la...shopping kan hobi korang
	<i>Klau mintak diamond ring ngan ak...</i>
	<i>If you asked for a diamond ring</i>
	<b><i>I will replace it wit super ring</i></b>

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In the following sample, Shalbanah code-switched from English to Bahasa Malaysia when she told her friend about the condition of her old scooter, which lost one of its handles. In the interview, Shalbanah mentioned that she preferred to use Bahasa Malaysia since she was trying to bring back funny memories to her friend. She added that it was more to a mischievous tone since it was her friend that pulled the handle. Then, she switched back to English and mentioned how funny that situation was.

**Example 12:**

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<b>Laily</b>	<b>hahaha</b>
	Even I only hav scooter
	U remember my scooter or not
	<b><i>Sebelah xde handle? So funny</i></b>
	<i>One of the handles was lost? So funny</i>

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#### **4. Discussion**

The paper has highlighted the functions of code-switching, which occurred among multiracial Malaysian youths. It was found that code-switching occurs for several reasons either consciously or unconsciously. Seven functions of code-switching were adapted from Appel and Musyken (2005) and Hoffman (1991). Based on the data analysed, a few examples of referential function that was found in the conversations. For instance, the participant tends to code-switch to Bahasa Malaysia when talking about a particular topic, in this case, about a friend's car. Moreover, the participant also code-switched into another code due to the lack of readily available words in the language such as abbreviations and acronyms. For example, acronym 'BBW' which stands for "Big Bad Wolf" and 'btw' which stands for "by the way." The use of referential function in this study corresponds with the reason for code-switching in Facebook as reported by Hidayat (2010) who found that the participants also code-switched for lexical need and when talking about a particular topic.

However, the participants in the present study code-switched in the WhatsApp Messenger mostly for emphatic function and interjections. This finding contrasts with the functions of code-switching found in Facebook since Choy (2011) claimed that the Facebook users in her study code-switched mostly for referential function and lack of facility in another language. Moving further, the participants of this study tend to code-switch unconsciously when they were quoting someone, expressing feelings, or even repeating their sentence. In agreement with Mabule (2015) and Martínez (2018), this study found that code-switching is a phenomenon that can occur spontaneously, not only seen as a sign of linguistic deficient or inadequacy. The unconscious use of code switching is also demonstrated in Narayan's (2019) study where he found that Fijian ESL teachers code-switched unintentionally in the classroom.

The data showed that although some of the participants are Malays, their base and dominant language is not necessarily Bahasa Malaysia. Bahasa Malaysia served as the matrix language in 13 samples out of 24 collected samples of the WhatsApp conversations. On the other hand, English served as the matrix language in 9 samples of the collected conversations. Therefore, it can be deduced that Bahasa Malaysia is the main and common language used in WhatsApp conversations of the participants in this study compared to English. However, this phenomenon is affected by the participants' personal background such as their ethnic group. The findings are similar with the study conducted by Shafie and Nayah (2013) where they found that Bahasa Malaysia is the most popular language used in Facebook wall posts and comments. However, there is also widespread use of English in the WhatsApp Messenger among the participants in this study. In contrast, Choy's (2011) study on code-switching patterns in Facebook revealed that the matrix language of most of his participants were English. This shows that although the participants in Choy's study are Chinese bilinguals, their matrix language is not necessarily Mandarin.

In addition, the findings also show that although most of the participants are Malay students, their main language is not necessarily Bahasa Malaysia since they are more comfortable expressing feelings in English. Another factor that might affect this situation is their exposure to the English language since they are enrolled in English program. A similar case appeared in the study conducted by Hui et al. (2022) on Cantonese-English bilingual youths. Although their participants were Hong Kong speakers, they preferred to use English and Cantonese when speaking. Further, Hui et al. (2022) suggest that such a phenomenon is caused by habitual switching in the community.

This explains the difficulty in identifying Amira's matrix language from the data, as Bahasa Malaysia and English hold an equal role in both of the samples. Similar to the Hong Kong speakers, Amira, is considered as a balanced bilingual (Stocker & Bethete, 2020) which means that one is having more or less equivalent proficiency of two languages, and therefore, purposely code-switched in the conversations. Since code-switching occurred tremendously in her conversations, it is assumed that it is a deliberate action driven by the speaker's preference or language competences (Gardner-Chloros, 2010).

## **5. Conclusion**

This study set out to address the functions of code-switching practices by a group of Malaysian young speakers. Since other studies have focused on code-switching in public social media, this study reveals how some functions operated in the private conversational setting. For instance, the present study demonstrates that switches from English to Bahasa Malaysia carry social and interactional functions. In specific, the use of language alternation challenge and re-appropriate ethnic stereotypes as the Indian participants in this study tend to code switch to Bahasa Malaysia especially when expressing concerns to their friends. The findings also demonstrate the conscious and unconscious use of code switching between Bahasa Malaysia

and English by the participants. The participants of this study tend to code-switch unconsciously when they were talking about a particular topic, quoting someone, expressing feelings, or even repeating their sentence. In agreement with previous studies, code-switching phenomenon observed from this study's data can occur spontaneously, not only seen as a sign of linguistic deficient or inadequacy. The participants' manipulation of both English and Bahasa Malaysia serve them well to achieve both their communicative objectives. It can therefore, be deemed as a habitual manner which reflects the bilingual identity and background as Malaysians.

It is anticipated that the medium investigated here when studying code-switching will offer a new perspective. The analysis shown in the present study placed importance on the relationship between speakers and addressees. That is, the relationship between speakers, might affect their reasons for code-switching. This is another variable that could be considered in future research.

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