

# Code-Switching in Facebook Chatting Among Maldivian Teenagers

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**Abstract**—This study examines the phenomenon of code switching among teenagers in the Maldives while they carry out conversations through Facebook in the form of “Facebook Chatting”. The current study aims at evaluating the frequency of code-switching and it investigates between what languages code-switching occurs. Besides the study identifies the types of words that are often codeswitched and the triggers for code switching. The methodology used in this study is mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approach. In this regard, the chat log of a group conversation between 10 teenagers was collected and analyzed. A questionnaire was also administered through online to 24 different teenagers from different corners of the Maldives. The age of teenagers ranged between 16 and 19 years. The findings of the current study revealed that while Maldivian teenagers chat in Facebook they very often code switch and these switches are most commonly between Dhivehi and English, but some other languages are also used to some extent. It also identified the different types of words that are being often code switched among the teenagers. Most importantly it explored different reasons behind code switching among the Maldivian teenagers in Facebook chatting.

**Keywords**—Code-switching, Facebook, Facebook chatting Maldivian teenagers.

## I. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

SINCE the world has become a “global world” multilingualism is becoming a social phenomenon in terms of communication. As a result, using and mixing of two or more languages (code switching) as a communicative option in everyday conversations has become a social trend in many of the bilingual or multilingual communities. Code switching is not only being observed in bilingual or multilingual face to face conversations but has also been observed to occur in conversations carried out through internet, such as in internet chat rooms, and in different social networks. In this regard, Facebook is one of the social networks which has been used very widely especially by teenagers in order to communicate among themselves and with other people either through updating status, through commenting on pictures or through chatting in the chat box or Facebook messenger.

As it has been noticed that as many of the teenagers in the Maldives are bilingual, trilingual or multilingual, reasonably often they speak in a mixed language. Most commonly Dhivehi language (mother tongue) and English language are mixed (code switched) in their face to face conversations and also during interacting through internet. Most of them are familiar with the internet, social media and different social

networks, such as Facebook, Viber, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. It has been observed that, for the last few years some concerns have been raised to some extent on the issue of the disappearance of the native language (Dhivehi). It seemed to be believed by some Maldivians that code switching could be one of the factors that might hinder the use of proper mother tongue. Therefore, it is essential to carry out a research on codeswitching to see how it is being practiced in the Maldives. Hence, this study is intended to study the code-switching practice among teenagers in the Maldives while they carry out conversations through Facebook in the form of “Facebook Chatting”. The study evaluated the frequency of code-switching and investigated between what languages code-switching occurs and the types of words (content or function words) they often code switch. Besides the study identified the triggers for their code switching.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Background of Maldives and Maldivian Teenagers

Maldives is an island nation in the Indian Ocean with an approximate population of about 350000. The native language of Maldives is Dhivehi. As similar to other countries due to the impact of globalisation, numerous changes have been seen in the Maldives in the field of technology, education, culture and language.

Education is given a lot of importance in the country. Children start pre-schooling (kindergarten) at the age of two and complete primary schooling (Grades 1 to 7) between the ages of seven to thirteen. Secondary education is divided between grades eight to ten (14 to 16 years) and higher secondary education (Grade 11 to 12) is between the ages of seventeen to eighteen. Most of the primary, secondary and higher secondary schools are public schools; however, there are few private schools, including international schools.

As the students do international examinations (Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), General Certificate of Education (GCE), GCE Advanced Level Examinations of the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) or the London Examinations, Edexcel International) after the completion of secondary and higher secondary education, the curricula and syllabi followed in the secondary and higher secondary schooling are international.

As a result, since from the primary education, the medium of instruction is English Language and all the subjects are being taught in English Language, except the subjects; Dhivehi Language (native language) and Islamic Studies. As a consequence of this English Language is used as a second

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language and most of the Maldivian students are bilingual. They speak the native language (Dhivehi Language) and English Language. However, there are some very few schools where Arabic Language is used as the medium of instruction. Thus students from these schools are sometimes trilingual. They speak English, Arabic and Dhivehi. Besides it has been noticed that some of the students are quite fluent in Hindi (an Indian Language) as Maldivians watch a lot of Hindi movies, songs, drama series and different TV programs from Indian channels. Another reason could be the frequent travelling of Maldivians to India and Indians to Maldives.

### B. Code Switching

Due to the wide spreading of bilingualism and multilingualism a lot of changes have been brought to the way we communicate each other. One of them is mixing of more than one language in daily conversational utterances. In linguistic term it is commonly called code switching. However, it has been observed that different terms are being used such as, code mixing or sometimes code changing. It has been seen that these terms are being used interchangeably for this type of occurrences of mixing of two or more languages in speech.

According to Clyne, code switching, and code mixing are referred to the same phenomena in which the language A and B are used mixed together by the speaker in different parts of his speech [1]. Myusken defines code switching as use of more than one language by two people engaged in a speech act [2]. Many scholars believe that code switching is common in bilingual or multilingual societies [3], [10].

It has been observed that code switching is quite frequent among teenagers. A study done on SMS Code-switching among Teenagers in Jordan showed that code switching is quite common among the teenagers when they use SMSes as a mode of communication [4]. Similarly, a research carried out in Brunei shows that mixing between the two languages among Bruneians is extremely common as well [5]. It seems that the situation is relatively similar in the Maldives too.

Research shows that in many countries, people tend to switch code between their mother tongue and English Language especially when communicating through internet or in social networks like Facebook. A research carried out on Young Bilinguals' Language Behaviour in Social Networking Sites: The Use of Welsh on Facebook" shows that English and the mother tongue are the most commonly used languages in order to communicate through face book [6].

It has been observed that many people switch codes between content morphemes and system morphemes. Myers Scotton [7] distinguishes between system morphemes and content morphemes. System morphemes are grammatical morphemes which includes functional elements or function words such as, *conjunctions, discourse particles, determiners*. These morphemes do not receive or assign thematic roles. In contrast content morphemes are content words that assign thematic roles, such as, *nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs* [7]. Research shows that function words are the most likely components to get mixed up where as content words seem to

be the types that are frequently mixed [8].

It is quite obvious that content morphemes are more frequently switched between the two languages rather than system morphemes. According to Kecskes [9], a statistical evidence of a study carried out to explain code switching produced by Spanish- English bilingual speakers from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective showed that the total of switched content items is more than system or function words. It is further mentioned that switches are not only made up of single words, but of larger linguistic units, such as phrases, clauses and sentences.

There might have been a number of reasons for code switching especially among the teenagers. The findings of the study [4] shows that teenagers prefer to code switch, especially switching to English from the mother tongue, for numerous reasons, such as for pride, to get higher socio-economic class, for maintaining the language competency, and for the language simplicity.

### III. METHODOLOGY

As this research is about investigating and exploring about some of the code-switching practices of Maldivian teenagers in Facebook chatting, the research is conducted using a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approach. In this regard the data (the Facebook chat log, 800 utterances of a group conversation by 10 teenagers) was collected through online. These 10 teenagers are from a High School in the Maldives. Once the chat logs are collected from the participants, they are coded and analysed for description and drawing themes. Therefore, one of the designs used in this study is descriptive and analytic.

A questionnaire was designed as one of the instruments and administered online by using "Through Google Docs Forms". Close ended and open-ended questions are included in the questionnaire and as a result of this the responses from the questionnaires are analysed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The responses or the close ended questions are analysed quantitatively by using the automatic analysis of Google Docs Spread Sheet. However, to interpret the broader meaning from what the participants have said regarding the open-ended questions, responses are analyzed qualitatively by coding and developing themes. To ensure safety of the samples, the identity of the participants is kept confidential and for ethical reasons consent form was given in advance to the participants as well as to any concerning bodies.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through this study, answers for five main questions regarding the phenomenon of code switching in Facebook chatting among the Maldivian teenagers are found. In order to find the frequency of code switching the question proposed was:

**Q1-**How often do you code switch when you communicate through face book chatting?

The answer for this question is found by using a structured question in the questionnaire. An attitude scale was provided

(very often, often, rarely, never). The result shows that 59% of the teenagers often code switch while 32% does very often while they chat in Facebook. Only 9 % says that they rarely code switch and there is nobody who said that he or she never code switches. Therefore, this shows that code switching is very common among teenagers and it is quite frequent. This is also very clearly observable from the collected chat logs.

In order to identify the different languages, they use in code switching, the below motioned question was proposed and the Tables II and III show their responses.

TABLE I  
FREQUENCY OF CODESWITCHING

Very Often	32%
Often	59%
Rarely	9%
Never	0%

**Q2-Between which languages you code switch in Facebook chatting?**

TABLE II  
DIFFERENT LANGUAGES USED IN CODE SWITCHING

Languages	Responses in percentage
Dhivehi , English	71
Dhivehi, English, Hindi	17
Dhivehi, English, Spanish	8
Dhivehi, English, Italian	4

According to the responses the majority of the teenager's, (71%) code - switches between English and Dhivehi (mother tongue). 17% of them say that along with Dhivehi and English, Hindi is also used in code switching. Besides Spanish and Italian are also used sometimes but very rarely, in mixing with Dhivehi and English. This could be a very rare occurrence as Spanish and Italian are not commonly heard as well as spoken in the Maldivian community. However, these languages might be used in the tourism sector.

This conversation took place during Ramadan (month of fasting in Muslim culture). In the conversation the 10 teenagers talk about going to a restaurant for breaking the fast at the sunset. They discuss on which restaurant to go, which food to choose (menu) and the prices. The next question proposed in this study aims to find out the different types of words that are most often being code switched. The question is given below.

**Q3- Which types of words are most often being code switched by the Maldivian teenagers in face book chatting?**

From the data it is evident that the switches are happened within words, clauses, and sentence level. They switch between different morpheme boundaries such as between system morphemes as well as content morphemes. Most of the words which are often being code switched by these teenagers are content words rather than function words. Out of 26 words 19 words are content words and 8 are system words. Table III shows the different types of words which are being code switched in the conversation.

It is evident that most of the content morphemes which are switched are of nouns and verbs and most of the system

morphemes are of discourse markers, such as *so, ok, alright*, etc. Table IV shows the different categories of content morphemes which are code switched by the teenagers in the conversation.

TABLE II  
TYPES OF MORPHEMES THAT ARE BEING CODE SWITCHED

Content Morphemes	System Morphemes
1- per person	
2- confirm (4)	1- so (3 times)
3- me	2- ok
4- my name	
5- rough	
6- estimate	3- reserve <u>kuran</u> ( <u>to</u> reserve)
7- reserve (2)	
8- maybe	4- yes
9- roadha veellun (breakfast)	
10- TOUGH	
11- DHAANAMO (will go)	5- ALRIGHT
12- who?	
13- KOBA (where)	6- fine (2 times, as the meaning of OK)
14- kurunbaa fani (coconut juice)	
15- cashew nut rice	
16- menu	7- and
17- maadhamaay (tomorrow)	
18- per head	8- bayyeh (damn)

TABLE IV  
TYPES OF WORDS THAT ARE BEING CODE SWITCHED

	person, head, name , roadha veellun (breakfast), kurunbaa fani (coconut juice), cashew nut rice, menu
Nouns	
Verbs	confirm, estimate, reserve, will go,
Adjectives	rough, tough
Adverbs	may be, where
preposition	per
Pronoun	me, my, who

The last question proposed in this study is the reasons for code switching. In order to find the answer for this question, an open-ended question was asked in the questionnaire and a number of reasons are given by the participants. Below are the responses received from the participants, regarding the reasons for code switching in Facebook chatting.

**Q4-Why do you think teenagers codeswitch while they chat in Facebook?**

The results above show that 31% of the teenagers say that they code switch because they find it easier to express what they want to express by switching the code.14% of them say that they do it for fun, while 12% of them say that they code switch because it is a trend among the teenagers. 11% of them say that code switching is something they do in everyday face to face conversations; therefore, they tend to do the same in Facebook chatting too. 8% of them believe that most teenagers code switch because of the lack of language proficiency and because of bilingualism. 6% of them say that the reason why teenagers code switch is because code switching makes it easier to comprehend. Some (5%) believe that they code switch as a pride while others (3%) say that they code switch because they cannot find the exact term in that particular language. Besides, some of them (1%) believe that teenagers code switch in Facebook chatting just to attract the opposite sex which is indeed an interesting finding.

The findings of this study show that code switching is very

common and quite often among Maldivian teenagers while they communicate through Facebook chatting. This is rather similar to the case of Code-switching among Teenagers in Jordan [4] and also to what has been found about the code-switching practices in Brunei [5], which are previously motioned in the literature review.

The responses from the questionnaire show that Maldivian teenagers do code switch between a number of languages, such as Dhivehi, English, Hindi, Spanish and Italian to some extent but very infrequently. It is evident from the responses provided for the questionnaire as well as from the analysis of the chat log that Dhivehi and English are the most commonly used languages in code switching. As similar to the research carried out by Cunliffe, Morris and Prys [6] on language behaviour in social networking sites among young Bilinguals' of Welsh, the findings of this study also show that English and the mother tongue are the most commonly used languages in order to communicate through face book.

TABLE V  
REASONS FOR CODESWITCHING

Reasons	Percentage
1- Easy to express	31%
2- For fun	14%
3- As a trend	12%
4- Everyday practice	11%
5- Lack of language proficiency	8%
6- Being bilingual	8%
7- For better comprehension	6%
8- For pride	5%
9- Lack of exact terms	3%
10- To attract opposite sex	2%

The study shows that these teenagers code switch between system morphemes and content morphemes and most of the words which are often being code switched are content words rather than function words. This finding is parallel to the earlier mentioned study which was carried out by Kecskes [9], in order to explain code switching produced by Spanish-English bilingual speakers which also showed that the total of switched content items is more than system or function words.

A number of reasons for code switching among the teenagers are also found through this study. The findings show 10 different reasons why they code switch. According to the responses, they code switch in Facebook chatting because they find it easier to express, for fun, as a trend, as they are used to it since they do it every day in face to face conversations, because of the lack of language proficiency, because of bilingualism, as it easier to comprehend, as a pride, because they cannot find the exact term in that particular language and most interestingly to attract the opposite sex. Some of these reasons are similar to what Musthafa [4] has found, such as code switching for pride and language simplicity.

## V. CONCLUSION

The current study is set out to seek answers for four main questions related to the phenomenon of code switching in Facebook chatting among Maldivian teenagers. The study indicates that code switching is very common and occurs very often among them. From this study, it is found that Dhivehi

and English are the most commonly switched languages. However, Hindi, Spanish and Italian are also used to some extent. The findings also demonstrate that switching occurs mostly between content and system morphemes and when compared to system morphemes, the switching of content morphemes is more.

It has been identified that there are several reasons for code switching such as for ease of expression, as a trend, as a pride, for fun, as they are used to it, due to the lack of language proficiency, because of bilingualism, for easier comprehension, due to lack of exact lexical terms and also to attract the opposite sex.

Since code switching is very common among Maldivian teenagers, and is no sufficient research done on this subject it would be highly valuable to conduct more research on different aspects of code switching such as grammatical aspects of code switching, attitude towards code switching and the impact of code switching on native language, since there are some concerns regarding the disappearance of native language and the lack of love from teenagers on the native language.

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