

FUNCTIONS OF CODE-SWITCHING IN VIETNAMESE TV MUSIC CONTESTS BY JUDGES

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ABSTRACT

Code-switching, a common language phenomenon in bilingualism or multilingualism, is identified when a speaker starts uttering in one language and then switches to another language in the same conversation. This paper reports the employment of judges' code-switching between Vietnamese (L1) and English (L2) in their interactions with each other and candidates in music contests on Vietnamese TV shows, focusing on the functions of the speakers' switches. Qualitative approach was applied for the research design and analysis of data collected (30 episodes of three seasonal contests) shows that the judges' switches serve certain functions related to discourse and social functions which are in line with those found in previous studies of the same language practice in educational settings. Due to what has been found, with a critical view, the author poses a question concerning the reasons why there has been a tendency of speakers on TV shows to switch back and forth. It is hoped this opens further studies of the topic to the author as well as researchers of interest.

Từ khóa: *code-switching, functions, judges, Vietnamese TV music contests.*

CHỨC NĂNG CHUYỂN MÃ NGÔN NGỮ CỦA GIÁM KHẢO TRONG CÁC CUỘC THI ÂM NHẠC TRÊN TRUYỀN HÌNH VIỆT NAM

ABSTRACT

Chuyển mã ngôn ngữ là một hiện tượng ngôn ngữ phổ biến trong song ngữ hoặc đa ngữ, được xác định khi người nói bắt đầu bằng một ngôn ngữ rồi chuyển sang một ngôn ngữ khác trong cùng một cuộc đàm thoại. Trong bài viết này, tác giả trình bày các chức năng của chuyển mã giữa tiếng Việt – ngôn ngữ 1 (L1) và tiếng Anh – ngôn ngữ 2 (L2) của giám khảo trong các cuộc thi âm nhạc trên truyền hình ở Việt Nam. Phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính được áp dụng và kết quả phân tích từ nguồn dữ liệu đã thu thập được (gồm 30 tập của ba chương trình các mùa thi khác nhau) cho thấy chuyển mã ngôn ngữ của giám khảo trong các chương trình này giữ chức năng về mặt diễn ngôn và chức năng xã hội. Các chức năng này đã được chỉ ra trong hầu hết các nghiên cứu trước đây về hiện tượng chuyển mã ngôn ngữ trong các môi trường giao tiếp khác nhau. Tuy nhiên, hầu như chưa có nghiên cứu nào được thực hiện với các chương trình trên truyền hình. Từ góc nhìn phản biện, tác giả đặt ra câu hỏi vì sao có xu hướng này của người nói trên truyền hình. Hi vọng kết quả của nghiên cứu này gợi mở hướng nghiên cứu cho chính bản thân tác giả và các tác giả khác trong tương lai về hiện tượng ngôn ngữ phổ biến này trong lĩnh vực giải trí trên truyền hình.

Keywords: *chuyển mã ngôn ngữ, chức năng, giám khảo, thi âm nhạc trên truyền hình Việt Nam.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the decades, English has become the dominant foreign language in countries around the world, and Vietnam is no exception. In this environment where different languages such as Vietnamese and English are used, speakers tend to alternately utter both languages within and between their conversations (Nguyen Thi Hang, 2014; 2021; Lynn & Hang, 2017). As a common feature of bilingualism, this practice has been termed as ‘code-switching’ or code-mixing’ (Haugen, 1953; Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Myers-Scotton 2006).

Vietnamese TV shows have mushroomed over the past 5 years, with about over one hundred TV shows are on yearly. According to an estimate by the Vietnamese Audience Association, 140 TV shows were on in 2017 (Vietnam-TMA). These most known shows are Vietnamese RAP (or RAP Viet), the Heroes, and King of RAP, with the biggest number of followers and viewers. In my observations, the alternate use of both Vietnamese and English appears to occur frequently in such TV shows, particularly when judges directly comment on contestants’ performances and in their interactions with each other. Below is an example extracted from an episode of the selected TV shows:

Example 1:

Em sử dụng *fast flow* rất là tốt.

(You use fast flow very well)

(Vietnamese RAP, 2020, Episode 1,
1:23:10)

Judge R. started his comment on a contestant in Vietnamese “Em sử dụng”, and then inserted an English phrase “fast flow” in his utterance before he got back to his feedback in Vietnamese.

Classic and world-well-known instances of code-switching research in societies include Poplack (1980), Myers-Scotton (1988; 1993), Auer (1995) and Brice (2000). This topic has attracted the interest of

Vietnamese researchers over the decades, but mainly in educational settings (Le Van Canh, 2014; Nguyen Thi Hang, 2014; Lynn & Hang, 2017). However, little has been known regarding code-switching used by speakers in other settings, for example, television or movies, rather than language teaching and learning context. It is observed that both judges and contestants on TV shows code-switched frequently between their mother tongue or L1 (Vietnamese) and foreign language (English) during their interactions in every live TV show involved. Thus, this study aims to explore this uncovered language phenomenon practised by judges in such TV music contests and seeks answers for the research question formulated, as follows:

What functions do judges’ code-switching serve in their interactions in Vietnamese TV music contests?

One of the focuses is places on the question of What functions the judges’ switches take, and thus, this paper presents solely the results of the functions of their switches via analysis of 30 videos/clips recorded from Vietnamese RAP 2020, The Heroes 2021 and King of RAP 2020.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section briefly reviews related points to the study: the concept of code-switching in bilingualism and the functions of code-switching, as the theoretical background basis of knowledge of the topic explored.

2.1. Concepts of code-switching

Code-switching is one of the three phenomena (the two others are borrowings and interference) in bilingualism in which speakers use at least two languages. As a common feature of any bilinguals, code-switching occurs spontaneously when they utter in conversations (Baetens, 1982; Edwards, 2004; Grosjean, 1982; Haugen, 1953; Mackey, 1975; Mackey 2000; Mackey, 2005; Romaine, 1995).

Numerous ways to identifications of this language phenomenon from the perspectives

of scholars in terms of the conceptualisation of code-switching. The most general definition of code-switching is “the alternate use of two languages or linguistic varieties within the same utterance or during the same conversation” (Hoffmann, 1991, p.110). Sociolinguistically, each dialect can be seen as a language code. In this perspective, code-switching is identified by Gardner-Chloros (2009) as “the use of several language dialects in the same conversation or sentence by bilingual people” (p.4). Similarly, code-switching is used to refer to the phenomenon in which “speakers switch backwards and forwards between distinct codes in their repertoire” (Bell, 2014, p.111). By means of juxtaposition, i.e., elements of different languages put next to each other, Gumperz (1982) defines conversational code-switching as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different systems or subsystems” (p.59). Meanwhile, Poplack (1980) views alternation as the switching of codes between turns or utterances.

In general, from a broad viewpoint, code-switching can be regarded more widely as the alternation of two languages in the same discourse. More narrowly, it can be seen as alternation within a sentence or across sentences, or sometimes neutrally by considering code-switching between these two viewpoints.

In the context of TV shows, I define code-switching as the speakers’ alternate use of Vietnamese and English in their interactions with each other and with contestants. As mentioned above, this paper focuses on the judges’ utterances for an analysis of the functions of code-switching to address the research question.

2.2. Functions of code-switching

Different functions of code-switching have been identified by researchers, and these categories of functions include linguistic functions, social functions and discourse functions.

Linguistically, according to Baker (2006), Chung (2006), Hamers and Blanc (2000) and Skiba (1997), code-switching is a valuable linguistic tool that can allow the switchers to compensate for their linguistic deficiency in using the base language, e.g. in a shortage of the words or of expressions, or overcoming the gap in linguistic competence between the two languages. In her research involving Puerto Rican residents in a bilingual community, Poplack (1980) found that switches occurred among both fluent and non-fluent bilinguals. Though their switches were of different types, she concluded that code-switching is a linguistic norm in the New York Puerto Rican community, and is used as an indicator of bilingual competence.

From a social perspective, Blom and Gumperz (1972; 2000), and Gumperz (1982) classify code-switching into situational and conversational code-switching. Situational code-switching is motivated by changes in factors external to the participants’ motivations, and conversational code-switching is understood as a shift in topic and in other extralinguistic context markers that characterise the situation Myers-Scotton (1993). Examples of extra-linguistic factors which affect speakers’ choice of language in conversation are referred to by Wei (1998) as the topic, the setting, or the relationships between participants.

The social functions of code-switching are marked as the signals of topic shift and as a form of expressing attitudes, intimacy or building relationships among the speakers (Auer, 1998; Baker, 2006; Hoffmann, 1991). Example 2 below from the Vietnamese English teaching and learning context attempt to illustrate one of the functions belonging to this category of social functions.

Example 2 (In a staff room):

Speaker A: Manchester *hôm qua lại thắng*.

<Manchester won again yesterday>

Speaker B (is reading the news on his cell phone): *Lại có storm ở Hà Tĩnh.*

<*There's storm in Ha Tinh again*>

Speaker A: Really?

Two Vietnamese speakers are talking to each other in their break time. Here speaker A starts in Vietnamese about the football match he watched on TV the previous night. Speaker B suddenly changes the topic as he saw the news (published by a Vietnamese internet newspaper in English) on his cell phone about a storm occurring in Ha Tinh (a province in central Vietnam where there are frequent storms during summer). About a week before another storm also happened in this place. Speaker B switches to English to quote “storm” in his utterance in Vietnamese. Speaker A switches to English to show his surprise at the news that B has just given. A switches to English because the topic of the conversation between him and his colleague has changed.

Gumperz (1982) categorises discourse functions as “quotations”, “addressee specification”, “reiteration”, and “message qualification” (pp.75-79).

Firstly, according to this scholar, speakers do not always deliver a message in the language they normally use (L1). Instead, they tend to quote in another language (L2).

Example 3:

Speaker F: *Hoặc cho nó nghe bài Goodbye* [laugh]

(Or let her listen to the song Goodbye)

(Recording of F8.2)

The speaker above switched from Vietnamese to English to quote the name of the song “Goodbye”. His switch serves as the quotation. Note that, this example is an extract from a class recording when this male teacher was in class with an upcoming event of international Woman's Day. He was previously speaking in English to the male students about the day, suggesting presents that male students should give their

girlfriends, then he switched to Vietnamese “*Hoặc cho nó nghe bài...*” to make the joke (students laughed), meaning instead of giving presents to girls on that day, just let them listen to a Goodbye song. His switch also serves as a social function, being intimate with students and establishing rapport with students.

Secondly, addressee specification is used to identify directly or indirectly the person the speaker is speaking to. One example of this from a bilingual speaker living in an Australian village is:

Example 4:

Where ‘nother knife? *walima* pocket-knife *karrwa-rnana*?

(Where’s the other knife? *Does anyone have a pocket knife?*)

(McConvell, 1988, p.135)

In the example above, the speaker switches from Kriol (an English-based Creole spoken by Aborigines) to Gurindji (spoken in the Wave Hill area as 2nd or often 3rd or 4th language by Whites and Aborigines). His/her switch “*walima*” “*karrwa-rnana*” (Does anyone have a) implies the group of butchers who are indirectly spoken to (McConvell, 1988).

Thirdly, code-switching is used to reiterate what has been said. That is, the repetition may serve to clarify or emphasise a message. In her study of teachers’ code-switching in a Vietnamese university, Nguyen Thi Hang (2014; 2017) found that teachers’ switches mainly serve as reiteration.

Example 5:

Teacher: You keep the same word? *Em vẫn giữ cái từ đấy à?*

(You keep the same word? *You keep the same word?*)

(Recording teacher 5.3)

Finally, code-switching is also used to qualify a message. That is, a message (or a

subject) is introduced in one language and qualified or expressed in another way in another language. The example below is a sentence in English and Spanish, where the speaker starts the subject/topic in English and switches to Spanish, using a relative clause, to qualify the subject as “the oldest one”.

Example 6:

The oldest one, *la grande la de once años*.

(The oldest one, *the big one who is eleven years old*)

(Gumperz, 1982, p.79)

In sum, three main categories of functions of code-switching by bilinguals have been found in the context outside the classroom in the literature: linguistic functions, social functions, and functions related to discourse, as reviewed above. Among these functional categorisations, social functions and discourse functions seem to be more prevalent than linguistic functions.

3. METHODS

Qualitative approach was applied for this study design, seeking for interpretations of the information obtained. Data collected were recordings of live music contests on Vietnamese TV in the form of videos (vids) or clips of three music contests/programs of seasons of 2020 and 2021. All these videos or clips were downloaded freely from two channels Youtube and VieOn. Table 1 summarises the information collected for analysis.

Table 1. Summary of data collected

Name of contests	Season	No. of Episodes	Length of time
Vietnamese RAP	2020	10	780
The Heroes	2021	10	610
King of RAP	2020	10	900
Total		30	2290

30 episodes were downloaded from the two channels mentioned above, saved in

folders and named them. Listening and watching these videos took plenty of time as I had to repeat each episode at least three times. For poorer sound quality ones, I even did repeat much more than that because these are all live recordings. It took nearly a month for the author to accomplish listening to the 30 vids. The longest episode was 75 minutes. Sound errors occur in some episodes and some vids, and the voice of judges are difficult to listen to. Sometimes, their pronunciation of switches in English is evident in my confusion due to their pronunciation errors. This challenged me to a great extent and required my patience. Moreover, judges come from different parts of the country. As a result, their accent varies, especially when switching to English. However, that repetition of listening and watching the same episodes ensured my notes and logs of all instances of their switches.

In this study, I only focus on judges' utterances to identify their use of language. Their interactions were with candidates with other judges or even with their own. Thematic analysis was used in this study because this analysis seeks similar and different aspects of the information gathered (Boyatzis, 1998; Gibson & Brown, 2009). While listening and watching vids, I picked all situations in which judges used Vietnamese and English, and placed them on a table with columns of names. Next, I marked all the switches in each situation and compared the similarities and differences between them. After that, I categorised and classified the switches, named them and compared all categories with those that the previous researcher had found (Gumperz, 1982; Nguyen Thi Hang, 2014; Poplack, 1980).

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Instances in which judges inserted English into their utterances adapting to Vietnamese pronunciation are excluded from this study as this belongs to another language phenomenon in bilingualism named interference rather than code-switching.

Table 2. Judges' instances of code-switches occurred in the data collected

Name of contests	No. of Episodes	Length of time per episode	Total time (minute)	No. instances
Vietnamese RAP	10	78	780	130
The Heroes	10	60	610	52
King of RAP	10	90	900	210
Total			2290	392

Although this study does not aim to seek the frequency of judges' code-switching, during analysis, the author listed the number of instances of judges' code-switching and this frequency is summarized in Table 2.

392 instances of judges' switches were found in 30 episodes of the three selected TV shows which last 2290 minutes. As appeared, the levels of switching frequency among judges vary. More instances were evident in the longer episodes. That is, the more time the judges uttered, the more opportunities for them to switch. The switches of judges are mainly certain words. For example, in the program "King of RAP", the word "RAP" was counted in 42 times, "flow" 68 times, "lyrics" 37 times and "melody" 33 times. The switch in English "like" was repeated in almost all episodes of these three shows/contests. In "The Heroes" three switches in English were most uttered: concept, mashup, and producer.

In their research, Myers-Scotton (1993; 2006) included that code-switching occurs when at least one of the interactors shifts a topic. In my study, code-switching occurs when judges instructed or explained to their contestants. The atmosphere of the contest or show settings seem to become a small society where both judges and candidates were willing to build good rapport to create a more friendly environment. This is clearly shown via the way judges communicated with each other and their contestants.

The functions of judges' code-switching in the present study were classified and categorised into two main aspects: discourse

functions (quotation and message qualification) and social functions (showing attitudes and feelings).

4.1. Discourse functions

My analysis shows that all judges code-switched from Vietnamese to English and their switches in English are related to music or music terms. These terms include lyrics, flow, fast flow, flow triplet, voice, RAP, melody, hit, vocal, tone, Oldschool, Hillschool, House, and Bumbap. R and B (R&B), beat, dancer, producer, hook, mashup, and versa. These English switches serve as discourse functions to the extent that they contribute to coherence and as a connection between two languages spoken by judges.

Example 7:

Judge K: Bạn sử dụng nhạc *Oldschool*, nhịp *Bumbap*, một cái nhạc tinh túy và là cội nguồn của *Hiphop*. (You use *Oldschool* music genre, *Bumbap* rhythm, an essence music series and it is the original of *Hiphop*.)

(Vietnamese RAP, Episode 5, 77:30)

Judges' English switches of such terms serve as quotations. They quoted the exact words or phrases in English (with appropriate English pronunciation) and inserted them into their Vietnamese feedback on candidates' performance. Example 7 above was one of the many similar comments of judges from my data. Reasons for employing such switching or mixing could be because some English phrases are hard to translate into Vietnamese for judges; these phrases sound odd or even unclear to both judges,

contestants and the audience if they are in Vietnamese. Judges, therefore, feel more convenient to use English rather than translate such phrases into Vietnamese. Many music terms are proper names of music genres. As a result, both contestants and the audience feel easier to understand and more aware of the meaning of words if they are kept original being quoted.

Also, it is evident from my data analysis that judges' Vietnamese switches function as qualifying messages of their English quotes when they provided their feedback on the contestants' performance. Occasionally, some terms are unfamiliar to candidates and the audience, so judges' switching back (to the language they started) facilitates their comprehension. It is possible that judges feel more secure when they make sure to understand others by switching back to Vietnamese for their message qualification.

4.2. Social function

In their studies, scholars such as Auer (1988), Baker (2006) and Hoffman (1991) found that speaker switches serve as establishing a relationship and building a good rapport with each other. In their view, code-switching is a signal for a speaker to show their change in feelings and attitudes towards others. These social functions are evident in judges' switching in this study and as instances of being more intimately close to and releasing pressure on the contestants.

Populous English switches belong to these social functions found are "Okay", "Yeah", "Wow", "Yes", "Humm", and "Yup". These functional words do not carry direct meaning, but in terms of discourse, they are used to express agreement, satisfaction, praise or aboutness.

Example 8:

Judge X: Em đã rap rất tốt. *Wow*, cái hook em làm nghe rất *catchy*.

(You have *rapped* very well. *Wow*, the *hook* you did sounds *catchy*)

(King of RAP, Episode 4, 50:30)

Example 9:

MC: Tlinh có một cái khôn khéo, là từ cái *melody* nối qua các phần trình diễn của mình rất khéo [...] (Tlinh is very *clever* in a way that from the melody to connect her performance)

Gudge J: Cái Tlinh làm rất là thông minh, bạn ấy tạo rất là nhiều sự bất ngờ trong cái cách đi giai điệu. (That Tlinh did is very smart, she created big surprise by the way she gave melody)

Gudge R: Chính cái đoạn anh T [MC] vừa đọc ấy... *Yeah*. Đúng đoạn ấy đấy. (That's the one brother T [MC] has just read...*Yeah*. That's exact it).

(Vietnamese RAP, Episode 9, 42:28)

In example 8, after seeing a contestant's performance of the King of RAP 2020, a judge with the nickname of Big Daddy switched from Vietnamese to English "Wow" in his comment on the contestant. Big Daddy was so surprised at her performance because it was beyond his expectation. "Wow" is the switch that all judges employed. Judge R (example 9) occurred after the MC's comment on another contestant. His "Year" shows his agreement with the MC about that performance.

5. CONCLUSION

Code-switching is evident to occur to a greater extent with those who can speak two or more languages. Scholars whose interest in this research topic have extended to carry out studies to grasp an understanding of the language phenomenon of code-switching as a common feature of any bilingual. In Vietnam, this language practice has been explored in educational settings, and a gap in knowledge of code-switching needs bridging in other contexts. This study was done using a data set of 30 videos of Vietnamese TV music contests downloaded freely from the two selected channels. The focus is placed on the functions of the judges' switches in their interactions at the three programs. It shows that their switches serve certain functions

such as discourse functions (quotation and message qualification) and social functions (relationship establishment and good rapport building). The present study's findings pose questions for further research with additional Vietnamese TV shows and more aspects are expected to explore regarding code-switching functions such as the levels of code-switching and the reasons for this common and natural language practice.

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