

# A Study of Code Switching in the Movie *I Not Stupid Too*

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**Abstract:** With the development of globalization, it becomes a common thing for people to communicate with each other in more than one certain language. When two or more languages exist in a speech community, speakers frequently switch from one language to another. This phenomenon is known as code switching. Under this background, an increasingly attention is paid to code switching. The chief task of this article is to discuss code switching in the movie *I Not Stupid Too*. This study tries to introduce the different definitions of code switching by some scholars and analyzes the functions of code switching in Singaporean movie *I Not Stupid Too*. This paper aims to reveal the different types of code switching in the movie with the use of quantitative analysis. Certainly, The main aim of the paper is to help people to be aware of the phenomenon which is called “code switching” and have a better understanding of the significance of code switching in our society. What’s more, people may change their inappropriate mind that code switching is a faulty wording or formulation in actual use. Code switching could be reexamined and used suitable.

**Keywords:** *I Not Stupid Too*, Code Switching, Function, Cross-Cultural Communication

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## 1. Introduction

With the rapid development of global economy, transportation, information and communication technology, the interaction among people from all over the world has been increased obviously. The interpersonal communication requires people to master more than one language. This kind of phenomenon is called code switching which was first proposed in the 1970s. Scholars have studied it in different linguistic approaches within the framework of linguistics including the sociolinguistic approach, the psycholinguistic approach and the conversational approach. In addition, scholars still have drawn on the experience for reference from many other aspects, such as sociology, psychology, education and so on. Under the influence of globalization, an increasing number of people who not only acquire different languages and also gain a insight into other different cultures chose to move to Singapore for a living or for business. The migration leads Singapore to become one of the most well-known multilingual nations. Most people who live in Singapore could communicate with others in English mixed with other languages such as Mandarin, Malay or Tamil. The phenomenon of code switching becomes more and more

popular in Singapore.

In addition, the Singapore movie *I Not Stupid Too* embodies code switching typically, in which characters are usually involved in their daily communication. *I Not Stupid Too* is a well-known Singapore movie, which describes a story about the educational problems of children. Many scholars pay their attention to this educational movie. In Zhou Jianqiu & Pan Xiqin [12]’s paper which named *Analysis of the Code Switching Phenomena in I Not Stupid Too*, they discuss the code switching in this movie and analyze the background and reasons of code switching in the movie. And then, they also discuss the types of code switching and concentrate on the use of social function of code switching.

In this paper, I would like to introduce the concept “code switching”, compare and analyze the code switching in the movie *I Not Stupid Too* to find out the main types and functions of code switching in this movie.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition of Code Switching

Definition of code switching varies from one scholar to

another. According to Zhao Yilong [14], the most widely accepted definition is that code refers to all the symbol system which speakers use to communicate with others, such as languages, dialect, style, register and so on. Based on this Zhao's definition, people could have an intuitive understanding about code switching.

In the broad sense, according to the theory of Gumperz [5], code switching is considered as the use of at least two languages or dialects in the same conversation. In practical application, code-mixing and code-alternation exhibit the resemblance to code switching. Some scholars like Kachru [7] hold the view that inter-sentential switching is code switching, while intra-sentential switching is code-mixing. Also, Auer [2] uses code switching to take place of inter-sentential considered that code-alternation is the super ordinate of code switching and code-mixing. Some scholars, such as, Myers-Scotton [10] and Clyne [4] argue that there is no need to distinguish code switching from code-mixing, it is considered an umbrella term.

In addition, we have to know the difference between borrowing and code switching. Heath [6] puts forward a theory that borrowing refers to the word which comes from other languages. Borrowing is usually related to a single word which has blend into the lexical system of target language. However, code switching means spontaneous switching from one language to another language. And there is an obvious boundary between code switching and target language. But from the reality of language, it is difficult for us to distinguish between borrowing and code switching. Mesthrie [8] provides an answer that borrowing means speaker does not master the borrowing code, but code switching is regarded as the symbol that speaker is already master the borrowing code. Muysken [9] discusses the distinction between code switching and borrowing in clause and word. In the terms of borrowing, loanword has entered lexicon. But, in code switching, it means speakers use two grammars or languages to complete a sentence.

## **2.2. Function of Code Switching**

Why do speakers make code switching in the same conversation? Various answers are given by different scholars. In this paper, I will explain this question according to the theory of Appel & Muysken [1] who make a conclusion that code switching can be divided into six kinds of function.

### **2.2.1. Referential Function**

When a language is short of words which can express some objects or concepts, speakers could borrow words from another language to convey their mind more accurately. It is considered referential function of language.

### **2.2.2. Directive Function**

When a group of people communicate in the same conversation, sometimes, bilingual or multilingual will make code switching to let someone cannot understand or only the special one could get meaning. This phenomenon is called directive function.

### **2.2.3. Expressive Function**

Speakers could use two or more languages in the same conversation in order to express their mixing identity in society, which is regarded as the expressive function of code switching.

### **2.2.4. Phatic Function**

Appel & Muysken [1] does not have a clear explanation of this function. We could infer that phatic function means that code switching could indicate the change of tone or intonation for the sake of making the focal points of conversation stand out. In addition, people may carry out code switching when their mood changes in the conversation.

### **2.2.5. Metalinguistic Function**

Using a language to explain another language is the metalinguistic function of code switching.

### **2.2.6. Poetic Function**

In the poem, many poets use code switching to rouse the memory of readers about ancient civilization. For example, many poets in Renaissance used many words belong to ancient Rome and Greece in order to make readers feel the feelings of ancient Rome and Greece.

## **2.3. Previous Study of Code Switching in *I Not Stupid Too***

Code switching, as a widely used communicative skill, has become a focus in the study of many literature works, songs, advertisements and movies. A lot of researchers and scholars have done study on code switching, and they have shown great achievements to us.

Many scholars study code switching in literature works. Wang Zhijiang [12] studies how James Joyce uses code switching to create stream of consciousness in *Ulysses*. In his article, he applies quantitative analysis methods to study *Ulysses*. He points out that code switching in *Ulysses* is mainly reflected in two aspects: mind activity and conversation of characters. The results of his study are that using code switching provides a better method to reveal the inner world of characters and makes it more believable.

Also, a lot of scholars pay their attention to code switching in songs. Li Manliang [11] discusses code switching mainly in lyrics based on Chinese characters. In his thesis, Li Manliang [11] analyzes the features of code switching in lyrics. According to Myer-Scotton's [10] Matrix Language Frame Model, Chinese is a matrix language and English is an embedded language in lyrics, which reflected in that thesis. In addition, it is found that code switching is usually used in popular music, especially when the theme is love. If we utilize it appropriately in lyrics, both singers and the audience could enjoy a feast.

Code switching is not only an universal linguistic phenomenon, but also an objective social phenomenon. It is perfectly reflected in advertisements. Ye Xiulan & Qin Xiubai [13] studies code switching in the advertisements of newspaper in Guangzhou region. She applies quantitative analysis to her thesis in order to investigate and analyze the trend of code switching. In addition, she also discusses the

distribution of code switching in various type and discourse structure of advertisements. Meanwhile, she analyzes models of code switching in the advertisements of newspaper. In addition, she shows the typical features of code switching.

*I Not Stupid Too* is a well-known Singapore movie, which describes a story about educational problem of students and children. This movie arouses heated discussion among people. Teachers and parents rethink their ways of educating their students and children. Thus, many scholars pay their attention to this typically educational movie. As is known to all, Singapore is a bilingualism country for the history reasons, so code switching between Chinese and English appears a lot in this movie. Scholars have noticed code switching in this movie and done their researches.

Zhou Jianqiu & Pan Xiqin [15] in their article *Analysis of the Code Switching Phenomena in I Not Stupid Too* discusses the code switching in this movie. In their thesis, they analyze the background and reasons of code switching in the movie. And then, they discuss the type and social function of code switching.

Besides the above-mentioned scholars, there are still many scholars have studied the code switching in this movie. Hence, it is full of significance for us to study the code switching in this movie.

### 3. Investigation

#### 3.1. Research Questions

The aim of this research is to unravel two questions through comparing and analyzing various kinds of literatures and discussing the code switching in the movie *I Not Stupid Too*. The two questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the types of code switching in Singapore movie *I Not Stupid Too*?
- (2) What are the functions of code switching in Singapore movie *I Not Stupid Too*?

#### 3.2. Methods of the Study

All of the data for this study have been drawn from The Movie *I Not Stupid Too*. The general research method in this paper is quantitative analysis. First, A list of specific data about the code switching uses in the movie is showed in the following, and then all the data is statistically analyzed. According to the results, The author tries to analyze the type and functions of the code switching in the movie. What's more, The author proposes a lot of examples to make it easier to convince the reader while discussing the type and functions of the code switching in the movie.

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1. Types of Code Switching in Singapore Movie *I Not Stupid Too*

According to the factor of social and context, Blom & Gumperz [3] distinguished code switching into two types as

situational switching and metaphorical switching.

##### 4.1.1. Situational Switching

Situational switching indicates the code switching caused by the change of situational factors. It means that in order to make others understood, speakers should transform their language to other according to the situational factors.

Here is an example. The computer of Tom's father breaks down and he loses very important data. He does not know how to repair it, so he tries his best to explain it to his boss. At that moment, Tom comes to his company to send his computer, which Tom fixes. The dialogue happens like this:

Boss: What do you mean? What does happen to the PPT?

Tom's Father (talk to Tom): 怎么了, 什么事?

Tom: 爸, 我修好了

Tom's Father: 修好了? 一定是你拿去玩对不对, 然后把它弄坏了, 现在赶快修好把它还我。

Tom: 我。

Tom's Father: 我什么我, 你是不是又逃课了? 上课比较重要, 赶快去!

Tom's Father (talk to boss): 老板, it is OK!

In this dialogue, with the change of situation and communicators, Tom's father uses different languages to talk to them. He uses English when he talks to his boss, but he chooses to use Chinese when he talks to Tom. The situation is changed. So is language. This is the situational switching.

##### 4.1.2. Metaphorical Switching

Metaphorical switching indicates that speakers carry out code switching in order to change the tone or the relationship with each other. Under the same situation, speakers carry out code switching through the change of tone, emphasis or the role relationship to achieve the desired results. Metaphorical switching breaks the rules between situation and the choice of language, so it costs more energy to have an accurate understanding about the word speak says.

We could find some examples in this movie. When Chinese teacher explains the idiom “僧多粥少” in the class, a short dialogue happens:

Jing Jing (student): What is “粥”?

Chinese teacher: 粥就是稀饭。

Jing Jing: So, what is “稀饭”?

Chinese teacher: 稀饭就是用米加很多水煮出来的, 如是水放少一点煮出来会是什么呢?

Cheng Cai (student): Cao da. (Hokkien dialect, it means scorch.)

From this dialogue, we find that Cheng Cai could have answered Chinese teacher's question in English. He definitely knows how to express it in English, but he chooses Hokkien dialect. The dialogue conveys dissatisfaction of Cheng Cai to his teacher. In this example, the circumstance does not change, but the relationship between Chinese teacher and Cheng Cai changes. This code switching occurs without any changes of circumstance, and it is a typical metaphorical switching. In addition, the word “Cao da” is not supposed to occur in Chinese class. It makes us feel that Cheng Cai does not treat Chinese teacher as his teacher but a person who he wants to make fun of.

## 4.2. Functions of Code Switching in *I Not Stupid Too*

According to the theory of Appel & Muysken [1], I will introduce the functions of code switching *I Not Stupid too*. The frequency of the different function of code switching in the movie is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of the functions of code switching in the movie.

| Function             | Times |
|----------------------|-------|
| Phatic Function      | 15    |
| Expressive Function  | 9     |
| Referential Function | 6     |
| Directive Function   | 4     |
| Total                | 34    |

We could find that code switching occurs 34 times in the movie. Phatic function accounts for 15 times; expressive function accounts for 9 times; referential function is 6 times; directive function list the rest of 4 times. It is not hard to find that phatic function is the most important function of code switching in this movie. The second is the expressive function, then the referential function and the last is the directive function. I will discuss all the function in the next part.

### 4.2.1. Phatic Function

Phatic function means that code switching could indicate the change of tone or intonation for the sake of making the focal points of conversation stand out. There is an example of phatic function of code switching. Tom fights with others in the school and his father felt disappointed in him. His father said: “跟人家打架，还闹到校长那边去，你知道我们多丢脸吗？I am really disappointed in you.” In this conversation, Tom’s father carries out code switching in order to show his anger and disappointment for what Tom did. This is also the phatic function and it usually occurs when the communicator’s emotions include great changes.

### 4.2.2. Expression Function

Speakers could use two or more languages in the same conversation in order to express their mixing identity in society, which is regarded as the expressive function. Expression function mainly focus on the communicator’s mixing identity in society. Many typical examples could be found in this movie to help us have a better understand of expression function. For instance, Tom’s father finds that Tom calls him at a very important meeting and he answers it.

An Old Man: 你是谁？

Tom’s Father: 我是他爸爸，你们干嘛把我儿子压在地上打？

An Old Man 你儿子？

Tom’s Father: 你们现在在哪里？我马上过来。

The Boss: Ok, this is not your demonstration, right?

Tom’s Father: No, this is not real. You see, my son is in trouble now!

In this conversation, Tom’s father uses two languages to express his mixing identities. He is not only the father of Tom, but also an employee of this company. He uses Chinese to communicate with an old man but English with his boss. This code switching occurs here shows the identities of Tom’s

father clearly.

### 4.2.3. Referential Function

When a language cannot express something, speakers could borrow words from another language to convey their meaning more accurately. There is a very typical example in this movie. Tom wins the first praise in a writing competition, but his mother does not like him writing blogs. His mother says: “什么厉害，什么 Blogging? 写一堆乱七八糟的文章就叫厉害？” In this conversation, Tom’s mother use the English words “Blogging” instead of Chinese word in order to make her means more clears and accurate.

### 4.2.4. Directive Function

When a talk happens among a group people, some people will choose code switching to let someone understand their intention or meanings. Cheng Cai’s father and Tom’s mother are called to meet their headmaster for they fought with others.

The Headmaster: 你的孩子跟人在外面打架，according to the law, 学校 have to 记他一个大过。

Listening to her, Cheng Cai’s father wants to beat Cheng Cai.

Tom’s Mother: Violence 家庭就会有 Violent 孩子。

The Headmaster: 暴力，actually, parents 就是孩子的 role model.

Tom’s Mother: 父母是孩子的榜样。

The Headmaster: That’s correct. 如果你们不以身作则，孩子就会有羊学羊，有牛学牛。

Chinese Teacher: 有样学样

The Headmaster: 对不起啊，我在学华语,请不要笑我。

In this situation, the headmaster chooses to use Chinese at which she is not good to communicate with them. Why? Because Cheng Cai’s father does not speak English, the headmaster carries our code switching in order to make him understand what she says. This is the directive function of code switching.

From the above, code switching have four functions in this movie including phatic function expressive function, referential function and directive function. Code switching is not only a sociolinguistic phenomenon, but also a kind of tool to help us express our emotion better and heighten efficiency of communication. In addition, it promotes the development of languages and causes more and more contacts of different culture. So we should try our best to find more functions of code switching and learn to use it better.

## 5. Conclusion

As we all know, there are four official languages in Singapore: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Most Singaporeans, especially the young generation people, usually communicate in English in daily life. Meanwhile, about 76% people are of ethnic Chinese origin. Singapore government has been popularizing Chinese powerfully in schools, markets and buses. As a typical Singapore child who has Chinese Singaporean parents, such as Tom, Jerry and Cheng Cai in this movie, they usually communicate in Chinese or Hokkien with their families and use English in school. In this situation, code

switching occurs frequently.

This paper makes an analysis about the code switching in the movie *I Not Stupid Too*. There are mainly two main findings about it.

Firstly, according to the theory of Blom & Gumperz [3], it distinguishes two types of the code switching which are situational switching and metaphorical switching. The situational switching indicates the code switching caused by the change of situational factors, while metaphorical switching indicates that speakers carry out code switching in order to change the tone or the relationship with communicative partner.

Secondly, the major functions of code switching in this movie are phatic function, expressive function, directive function and referential function. Not only is code switching a speaking style, but also it is a tool to help us to express ourselves better. We need to learn to use it and regard it as helpful resources of language.

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