

# **Nghiên cứu về chuyển đổi ngôn ngữ Anh-Việt trong việc học tiếng anh của học sinh Việt Nam**

## **TÓM TẮT**

Trong khoảng những năm gần đây, khi tiếng Anh trở nên rất phổ biến ở Việt Nam thì cách sử dụng “Chuyển mã” (code-switching) trong các cuộc trò chuyện đã trở nên rất quen thuộc. Bản thân tác giả cũng rất thường kết hợp cả tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt khi giao tiếp hằng ngày và trong giảng dạy. Do đó, tác giả đã thực hiện nghiên cứu với 200 học sinh từ lớp 9 đến lớp 12 ở thành phố Hồ Chí Minh về việc chuyển mã giữa hai ngôn ngữ: tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh. Nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng nhu cầu xã hội, bản chất cố hữu của ngôn ngữ và sự riêng tư là những nguyên nhân chính khiến cho các em học sinh thực hiện “code-switching”. Mục đích của nghiên cứu giúp làm rõ hơn động lực và nguyên nhân, từ đó giúp người lớn cũng như giáo viên có cái nhìn khác đối với việc học sinh kết hợp hai ngôn ngữ khi giao tiếp, từ đó linh hoạt trong phương pháp giảng dạy tiếng Anh.

**Từ khoá:** *Giảng dạy tiếng Anh, chuyển mã, tiếng Việt.*

# An investigation into code-switching in Vietnamese teenagers' learning English

## ABSTRACT

In Vietnam, researchers and teachers have been studying code-switching, which is when young people switch between their native language and English when they have difficulty communicating. A study was conducted on 200 students in grades 9 through 12 in Ho Chi Minh City to examine the impact of using both languages in English classes. The study showed that social dynamics, the nature of language, languages experienced as most difficult, and privacy, were all motivators behind actual language used by the students. In their English classes, the students used Vietnamese in order to assert their identity and fit, or not, into communication patterns. This research is translated into practical advice for teachers wishing to embed both languages into English lessons: without limiting students in achieving high levels of English proficiency.

**Keywords:** *Code-switching, teaching English, language.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A real struggle in learning a new language comes when we want to express ourselves in the most fluent manner. In the Vietnam situation of Vietnam teenagers study English, many Vietnamese teenagers have a habit of code-switching (using some words of their first language and in English), switching between native language (L1) and English (L2), especially when they are confused about how to convey ideas from the thought to English. Educators and researchers, myself included, have found this phenomenon curious as it raises questions about the importance of L1 in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom and how it impacts their English language usage.

The main objective of this study is to address the following questions:

- ✓ How frequently do Vietnamese teenagers use code-switching in their speech?
- ✓ What are the different types of codes they use in their speech?
- ✓ What factors influence their use of code-switching when communicating with each other?

Our objective is to conduct a survey to understand how frequently Vietnamese teenagers incorporate both languages into their conversations. We will explore whether they use words, phrases or

complete sentences in their interactions and delve into the motivations, behind their choices. Ultimately our aim is to examine how this research impacts education as a whole and specifically influences the teaching of language.

The study was conducted on a limited number of selected students. Although the questionnaire was distributed to students from various backgrounds in certain parts of Vietnam, it may not be representative of all Vietnamese teenagers, as this is a large and diverse group. Additionally, the focus of the study is on high school students who are exposed to English education, but there are still many areas where students have limited or no access to English learning opportunities. To minimize inaccuracies, this research aims to gather as much information as possible by including teenagers from different backgrounds and incorporating insights from previous scholars.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Language choice and language contact

In a social communicative world, language plays one of the most important role in helping people contact with each other in every different situations or different settings in linguistic aspect. It is the flexibility of using a language that accounts for a person's option to pick up the most relevant language for the safe side, especially for

those who are bilingual or multilingual. They often put themselves in the position of making intelligent choices to fit with the social and cultural features. Language contact is a substitute element of language choice, or sometimes seen as a smaller unit of language choice, for choosing a language and using it for communication do not always share the same meaning. A Vietnamese student going to take an academic course in the USA tends to contact with many people around by English – the common language in America – rather than his or her native language. It is not hard to understand this shifting from one language to another, the motivation of adapting to the life and people in an English-speaking country enables them to create this modification. Even though there are a lot of evidences for us to realize the appearance of language contact in many situations, it is not obviously easy to define that term. Sarah Grey Thomason has made a simple statement “language contact is the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time.” For instance, two workers from two distinct countries in the world at first cannot communicate with each other, since they do not share any common language; however, if they work together for about four or five hours, we will easily see them try to speak a few words in the native language of their partner, which cause something called “language contact”. Thus, the occurrence of language contact does not mean that a person has to acquire an excellent bilingualism or multilingualism. It happens when this language has one or more influences on the other language, which requires the speaker to borrow some foreign words or mix them together to clarify their conversation. In conclusion, it can be asserted that “language contact is a norm, not the exception. We would have a right to be astonished if we found any language whose speakers had successfully avoided contacts with all other languages for periods longer than one or two hundred years.”<sup>1</sup>

## **2.1. Code-switching**

### *2.1.1. Definition*

It is no wonder when we have no difficulty viewing a lot of cross-cultural conversations in the world around us because we are trying to integrate with a wide range of interesting cultural features worldwide. Additionally, code-switching appears as a solution for those who are not very proficient at their friend's native language, for example, my

English friend is learning Vietnamese and we are talking with each other in Vietnamese, however it seems to be awkward and some utterances become so oversimplified; thus some English words inserted in the speech will be a good way for our talk. As a result of that demand, code-switching is defined as “the embedding or mixing of words, phrases and sentences from two codes within the same speech and across sentence boundaries”<sup>2,3</sup>. Another scholar, Haughen, has put code – switching in a situation when “a bilingual introduces a completely unassimilated word from another language into his/ her speech”. The switch express a variation in social situations or sometimes due to the appearance of a new participant in the conversation. “Switches motivated by the identity and relationship between participants often express a move along the solidarity/ social distance dimension [...] A switch may also reflect a change in the other dimensions, such as status relations between people or the formality of their interaction” (Janet Holmes, p. 42). Therefore, a lot of approaches are being made by many researchers in investigate this linguistic phenomenon from different angles.

### *2.1.2. Why do teenagers code-switch?*

It is no easy job to find the reasons for this problem which involves several complicated factors. In general, most people often code-switch so as to express their meaning, clarify the ideas or learn a new kind of vocabulary on the account of sensing new cross culture and ethnicity as MA. Lourdes S. Bautista<sup>4</sup> has said in an article “they hear English spoken and they think they understand what's going on and suddenly there's a stretch they can't understand”, which make them think that there is a “back and forth” between English and their mother tongue. The reasons discussed in the part include: teenagers want to emphasize their point or messages to their listeners; learn new vocabulary and they want to show their own identity through the language use within a group.

One of the reasons that is given for the desire to clarify an idea or a concept. Teenagers are at the age of exploring new things around them, they often exchange information with many people around like their friends, teachers or even their parents. Some complicated problems consisting of a lot of terminology enable the teenagers to directly borrow this word or phrase in their utterance. Let's take an example, when explaining a grammatical

point in French, one student say, “in English, we have the phrase ‘a red shirt’ but in French, the position of adjective and noun is converted as ‘une chemise rouge’”. In such a situation, this student have no choice but use a French phrase to make his explanation clearer. This purpose of code-switching can usually be found in classroom when both the teacher and students are dealing with a foreign language rather than their mother tongue or when a student is trying to work out a point to their peers.

A further reason why I advocate an attitude of this linguistic phenomenon is that the teenagers want to learn new words even in their speech just because they do not know that word or they have forgotten it. A notable example is to look into a short conversation between two Vietnamese students who are practicing English. Student A: “What is the English word for ‘nhà hàng?’”; Student B: “restaurant”. The combination of L1 and L2 in acquiring a second language is one of the important strategy in language teaching. For an ESL, ‘the process of code-switching requires a sophisticated, nonrandom, rule-governed, cognitive and linguistics manipulation of the two languages’<sup>5</sup>.

Last but not least, the assertion of the language preference within a group is becoming more and more popular nowadays. The teenagers use another language beside their L1, for they want to show their own identity separated from the others. We can hear a student ask her friend, “Mày có nộp cái assignment 1 chưa? Deadline là ngày mai đó”. The reason for using ‘assignment’ and ‘deadline’ in such a Vietnamese utterance is not that there is no equivalence in Vietnamese, but due to the fact that she wants to employ the words which are only understood by those studying in the same course with her. An outsider may not take in the conversation if they do not know about the situation.

To sum up, the knowledge of two languages today encourages teenagers to utilize their bilingualism in the best way to strengthen their speech in many different aspects. “Bilingualism is a resource, and the switching between languages is an additional resource. And so it is good that the disparagement of code-switching in general is now a thing of the past”<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1.3. Benefits of code-switching

The trend of learning languages nowadays is communication, so we can undoubtedly believe that every country is applying one other foreign language into its education, which means that bilingualism classrooms are becoming more and more popular. As a result of that, it can be avoided that code-switching will happen in the process of teaching and learning or even in their daily lives. Some people still hold the opinion that a student’s native language is considered to interfere the learning of a second language; however others disagree with it. As it used to be reported<sup>6</sup>:

“It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his minds works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium.”

In this study, it is better for us to mention the benefits of code switching among teenagers, especially in two certain incidences: inside and outside educational environment.

As far as I am concerned, my favor goes to the benefits of code switching in day-by-day life first. Being aware of one’s culture is crucial and essential for one’s identity. When living in a family with different nationalities, code-switching in conversations sometimes can reduce the avoidable conflicts, or young children who are growing up to grasp various cultures need to use their native language beside their second language to help them understand some cultural features in depth<sup>7</sup>. For instance, my cousin living in the USA for 3 years communicates with teachers or his peers at school and in social relationships outside in English, but when coming back home, Vietnamese is more superior to English. Yet, a long time in the USA makes him unable to completely speak Vietnamese without borrowing some English words in his daily conversations with his family. The reason can be understood easily: cultural background cannot be forgotten, to do this, he is unallowed to forget Vietnamese. Moreover, when talking with the others from the same language about a particular topic, code-switching will often make a stronger sense in comparison with a monolingual speech. The ties in a community will be made closer when

a speaker can combine two languages flexibly in a situation.

The advantages in educational environment may carry more weight. If making an experiment with two Vietnamese students learning French in the same class, one has learnt English before and the other has not, we can see their acquisitive abilities are not the same. The former with the previous knowledge of English will discuss the issue about lessons easily and effectively with his teacher or his peers when there is some common points between English and French. Code-switching enables a student's cognitive ability, they can take advantage of the situational clues to absorb the problems faster and sometimes can transfer the knowledge of one language to another. This happens frequently in a language classroom, especially those elementary or even intermediate level. The knowledge of second language is not enough for a student to explain an inquiry to the teacher or even express their thoughts; thus the interference of L1 in their speech will work best in such situations. Therefore, in a classroom, code-switching seems to be as a tool for clarification, comprehensive checking, procedure explanation and cohesion as well.

Overall, code-switching has some advantages, both in everyday life and also in academic education. It increases the strong relationship between person and person in a society, and the close sentiment in a family. Furthermore, language barrier in teaching and learning process will not be the barrier anymore if a student is clever and flexible in applying code-switching in his/ her utterances. Code-switching serves as a bridge for learners to connect their native language and their second language or foreign language unconsciously and more efficiently.

## **2.2. Language and its relationship with power and identity**

It has long been considered only right and proper that language plays an important role in a classroom, which mainly contributes to a student's identity, development and achievement. Many sociolinguists have discovered a connection between one's language and his identity from a social view. Language works as a key for a speaker to confirm his or her distinctiveness in the conversation or in the relationship with the others; the choice of language at that time has a big

considerable function in forming one's identity<sup>8</sup>. From my own perspective as an English teacher, when a teenager code-switch a second language, they really want to get more resources on the language they are learning. Besides, when a teenager communicate with others, the use of two codes in the same speech encourages them to define their self and their interaction with the society. In psychology, this is called self-esteem, which has put a little influence on a student's use of language. According to psychologist Schumann<sup>9</sup>, self-esteem involves three different aspects: global (overall assessment of one's work), specific (self-evaluation in various life situations) and task (self-evaluation in particular tasks). It is not absolutely true when claiming that self-esteem creates a student's success, but we can be assured that a student should be encouraged to mix words or phrases from two different codes, of course in a limited allowance.

Nowadays more and more people are beginning to be aware of the seriousness of the power of language in a society. A recent research<sup>10</sup> has shown that the predecessor tend to uphold and conserve the mother tongue as well as its ethnicity; however, the second generation develop to put themselves in the sea of dominant language of a dominant culture. A persuasive illustration for this phenomenon is the development of our language along with the ups and downs of our history. While in the past, most Vietnamese people use some Russian words in their everyday speech, at the present time, Russian is replaced by American, not because American is easier to learn but because of the American's power. Nevertheless, it needs to be made clear that code-switching does not mean assimilation. A teenager picking up some American terms in his saying cannot be seen as an attitude of ignoring his L1, but an approach to the new culture through its language. Moreover, Asian in general are well-known for preserving the traditional, social and moral values rather than European, which leads to the fact that Asian people do not assimilate to American norms but positively mix its language with their mother tongue in a situation called code-switching, or sometimes code-mixing. Nonetheless, the present state should make us ponder over the combination of some inferior languages. What would happen for a student to use Cockney rather than the standard English when he or she were living in London where Cockney is seen as a language for the lower class? There is likelihood that there would be some disregard from

his classmates, his teachers or the people around him. A language of a weaker country will betray us right the time we utter that kind of language.

A student choice of language more or less cause some inferences from the speakers in communication with him. The code chosen in a speech can tell a lot about one's identity as well as one's position in a social net based on the language power. Code-switching is not an exception, the language mixed definitely represent one's background and social status. Most of that kind of language choice happen in the teenagers' community, the explanation for that problem will be discussed further in the part below.

### **2.3. Adolescent development**

As our study is paying attention to a certain age "teenagers" – the most active age to adapt to the new things around with little filtration, it is crucial for us to have a deep look into the adolescent development to see how that growing-up can affect the language ability as an assertion of Tiffany Silverberg: "Although the majority of language development occurs in the critical infant through preschool years, development continues into the adolescent years. Because the development is less acute, the study of this linguistic period in a child's life is relatively new, and is shaped heavily by language disorders."

It cannot be disagreed that adolescent age is the most important period for forming and bettering one's linguistic acquisition and the personalities as well. A reduction in academic achievement of a large number of students at the high schools has been found in a research<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, Thomas<sup>1</sup> has made a clear observation on the alteration in the attitude to the academic and non-academic subjects, and also some behaviors to teachers. Two-year experiences at the high school helps me learn that teenagers are very fast to the language exposition, yet they are still too young to differentiate the best among the sea of all kinds of languages. The social and individual motivation has drawn them to accidentally fall into a 'linguistic aspect' : code-switching, which they themselves are not even aware of it. They associate all the languages absorbed to make their speech understood and see it as an intelligent way for communication. As a teacher, it is important for us to help them define the benefit of mixing such languages and how to limit it in the best way in order for them to still keep their identity. A

student's need has to be met despite any features as racial discrimination, stereotypes, low social status, etc. Furthermore, what is spoken needs to be accepted by a student's peers, who help to make a small speech community of an individual in the classroom. At this age, the approval from classmates and close friends around is considered to me more relevant than that from adults, including their parents and teachers. Relationships will fail to the extent to which the other person desires or needs emotional support, warmth and intimacy.

Another judgment in this teen years, they are curious about the outside world and want to explore various fields. Such questions as: *How could they do that? Why do we have to comply with this? Or Does it work for my life?*, which conveys to us a another step in a teenager's mind, they yearn for being treated as an adult with the right decision on their deeds and their futures rather than a young student at the beginning of life<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, the lack of linguistic knowledge for expression will quickly cause a constraint and discourage them from shaping their mind in their own way. They desire to be "seen" and "heard", an active and natural participation in many social activities will increase a sense of confidence.

To recapitulate, many readers will raise a question in mind: "What is the relationship between adolescent development and code-switching? Why do we have to consider this aspect?". As we have mentioned above, teenagers at this age want their needs to be met by the adults around, get the approval from their peers and approach the world in a sense of competence and independence. Therefore, if this student can use engage his native language in communication, the other students can as well. This create a diversified environment in education to aid students in freely express themselves. The responsibilities of educators in such situations are to balance the exchange of different languages, both social and educational, since code-switching is "defined as the practice of switching between a primary and a secondary language or discourse"<sup>13</sup>

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Frequency of code-switching among Vietnamese teenagers**

In a small survey I have made at some high schools and outside schools in our city with my questionnaire (see Appendix 1) about where and when the teenagers use another language (i.e.

English) beside their mother tongue, some interesting findings can be discovered. Nearly 95% of Vietnamese teenagers, including those learning English and those do not, combine English in their everyday speech through some common words such as “Hi”, “Hello”, “Sorry”, or “Yes/ No” when they want to express their agreement or disagreement with a particular problem. Another sign of code-switching happens in the word “thanks”. Most teenagers nowadays tend to use this English word instead of “cảm ơn” when conveying the appreciation with their peers or at the same age with them; however, when talking with the older people, such English words are not found in their speech. About 92.4% claim that they just speak English in combination with Vietnamese when they are in class or an educational environment. As coming back home, they rarely have any chance to speak English, for their family do not know English or are not familiar to use English in daily conversations because English is now a foreign language in Vietnam, not a second language. The rest of 7.6% teenagers admit that their parents sometimes borrow English at home, not for natural communication but for academic practice. Some parents try to speak the simple English with their children to help them get acquainted with English through their own lives outside the course book.

In company with the questionnaire, we also have some small talks with two students in Vietnam and one Vietnamese student studying in America for about 10 years. Toàn – a grade-10 student at LHP High School – says that most members in his family are sellers with small business, they do not know any English; thus he never code-switches at home. Yet, things are different at schools, almost every utterances he uses to interact with friends or teachers consist of both English and Vietnamese. Even in an English class, Vietnamese are not approved, he still at times borrow his native language because, in his opinion, he does not have enough command of English to get a complete communication in L2 without inserting some Vietnamese words or phrases. Moreover, when meeting his friends or acquaintances accidentally, “hi” is his preference rather than “chào” or “xin chào”, which he pleads for it as a habit.

Mai is a student of “continuing education” – a kind of education of those who cannot apply for a state school. At that school, English is an optional subject and Mai chooses not to learn it. Nevertheless, it is not for such a reason that she

never approaches to English. She concedes that she does not deliberately add English words in her sayings but sometimes it comes naturally. For instance, when her friend gives her a birthday present, “thanks” is always on the tips of her tongue, or occasionally, she asks her teacher “Cô có nhận được email của em chưa?”. The reason, from her point of view, may be the fact that we do not have the habit to translate such words like “email” into Vietnamese.

The last person being interviewed is one of my friend, Vivian. She moved to America with her family when we were in grade 8. It is about 10 years since she last went back to Vietnam. Unlike many of her Vietnamese friends, she still communicates in Vietnamese, especially when talking with her family. However, her little exposure to Vietnamese causes some difficulties for her to speak the “true Vietnamese” (the word my friend uses to describe her use of L1). When she does not know how to explain a notion in L1, L2 is put into use in such situation. On the other hand, as interacting with her Vietnamese friends at school, she reports that she seldom speaks their native language, due to the fact that Vietnamese is an inferior language to American or English.

As a whole, Vietnamese teenagers are the group that code-switch the most in conversations. They are the young generation in the development of our country, so they have the more opportunities to grasp such new things from the world outside very quickly. They tend to grow more self-confident and self-conscious to adapt to a new environment. Their parents are too old to absorb such those new things; therefore it leads to a result that students mostly use one language (their native language) when communicating with their parents or family at home. Nonetheless, in everyday speech of the life outside and in their academic incidences, code-switching can be easily caught everywhere and every time students talk to one another as François Grosjeans<sup>14</sup> has asserted in his book about bilingualism, the use of another language along with their mother tongue in the same speech “will go through his or her daily activities quite unaware of the many psychological and sociolinguistic factors that interact in what are probably complex weighted formulas to help choose one language over another”. Students who are studying at schools in general code-switch more often than those who do not go to school any more, just because they do not have any exposure to English except for

listening to some slangs in their social lives. However, some common words such as “yes/ no”, “hello”, “hi”, “sorry”, “bye” or “thanks” are spoken with the same ratio whether that teenager goes to school or not, comes from urban or rural areas. Additionally, when discussing this phenomenon with some of my friends who are living and working abroad (both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries), they admit that they cannot forget Vietnamese at all, since their parents’ lack of knowledge of English enables them to communicate with their parents by native language – Vietnamese rather than English – the main language at school and in society where they are habituating. Yet, they refuse to have a good command of Vietnamese even at home, sometimes English is borrowed to express some complicated notions in their native culture. In contrast, when they adapt to the society around, Vietnamese is not the smart choice for communication in such an English-speaking country like America. Those abroad students tell me that just about 15% of their time is for Vietnamese, the rest is for their second language indeed. To sum up, it depends on the social living environment and the subject being talked to that encourages or discourages the Vietnamese teenagers to code-switch or not, but above all code-switching is becoming a popular phenomenon existing in every single nooks and crannies of Vietnam.

### 3.2. Different kinds of codes

According to Poplack<sup>15</sup>, we have three kinds of code-switching: inter-sentential switching, tag-switching and intra-sentential switching, and a wide variety of codes just circles around four common parts of speech: noun, verb, adjective and pronoun. For instance, Clyne<sup>16</sup> when doing research on code-switching in Australia has considered “noun” as the main code for code-switching; on the other hand, different from Clyne’s announcement, some scholars<sup>17,18</sup> have come to a conclusion that it is not noun but verb and adjective that are the major category in the Cantonese-English code-switching. In particular, in Vietnam, in conducting some interviews and recording some Vietnamese teenagers’ conversations, an interesting thing to be uncovered is that verbs are more preferred than nouns and adjectives. It is going to be made clearer when we look at the example below, which is taken from a Vietnamese conversation between two students in a classroom:

Mai: Eh, hôm qua mày có online không?

Lan: Hok mày ơi, hôm qua tao sleep sớm nên hok online

Mai: Ủ, có điểm môn cuối rồi đó mày, tất cả đều pass hết!

Lan: Woa, hay quá mày, vậy chiều nay relax được rồi đó mày!

This is just a very short conversation about a result announcement, but there is no doubt that most of the verbs “truy cập”, “ngủ”, “đậu” “thư giãn” are replaced by “online”, “sleep”, “pass” and “relax” from English rather than using the Vietnamese words. To explain for this, some students say that English verbs are more popular and easier-to-remember than nouns and using those English verbs will make the sentence become shorter and somehow more private. Another part of speech which accounts for a large number, just following verbs is noun. However, “nouns” in code-switching are mostly some terminology appearing together with the development of culture and economy or the words that cannot be translated into Vietnamese. This phenomenon is sometimes called “borrowing words” by some linguists. Therefore, some utterances made by teenagers like “nhận được email chưa?” or “mai mang laptop cho mượn nha” can easily be found in such normal conversations among Vietnamese teenagers days after days.

Briefly, the codes used in Vietnamese teenagers’ code-switching are not phrases at all, but just some single words to make their sentences shorter and more appropriate in a specific situation. Verbs and nouns are two priorities in code-switching, in which nouns are almost non-existent in Vietnamese customs and are updated to new technology.

### 3.3. Factors influence Vietnamese teenagers’ code-switching

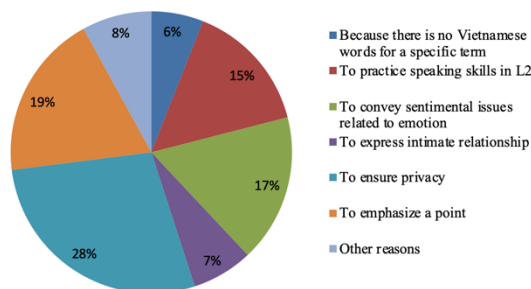
#### 3.3.1. Findings through questionnaires and interviews

A small part about the reasons why Vietnamese teenagers code-switch is attached in the questionnaire of frequency above (see Appendix 2) and distributed at the same time. After the survey, lots of different perspectives about the factors of code-switching can be found. In the questionnaire, we have listed six suggested factors that may enable teenagers to code-switch:



- ✓ Because there is no Vietnamese words for a specific term
- ✓ To practice speaking skills in L2
- ✓ To convey sentimental issues related to emotion in an easy way
- ✓ To express intimate relationship
- ✓ To ensure privacy
- ✓ To emphasize a point
- ✓ Other reasons

In the statistics made from the collected data, it is interesting to discover that out of 200 participants just about 6% said that they borrow English because sometimes when they want to explain a problem, they cannot find the suitable Vietnamese equivalents for a term, their only choice at that time is directly take advantage of English vocabulary. Another tantamount 7% of the participants admit that code-switching can help them manifest their close relationship, for the same way of choosing language can show that they have understood each other well. Moreover, two equal numbers of percents 15% and 17% are shared by two reasons: to practice speaking skills in L2 and to easily convey sentimental issues related to emotion. Most of the participants code-switch in their conversations since they need to gain the privacy.



They themselves advocate that the use of another language beside their native language is not always understood by people around, which make them feel safe when talking about something in secret. To sum up, a clear statistics about those factors is going to be shown in the chart below:

*Figure 1. Factors for Vietnamese teenagers' code-switching*

In the oral interviews, those teenagers who are receiving education at schools agree to use English in their Vietnamese conversations for the privacy purpose. "Sometimes, when we have to talk

about a sensitive problem, it is better to use English for some points so that the other people will not make it out, we often say something like 'Ngày mai thi sociolinguistics đó, học bài chưa?' and it is certain that the outsiders if not study in the same department will be blind of this sentence". However other teenagers who do not go to school anymore borrow English in their speech for intimacy when some common words are spoken rather than Vietnamese. Additionally, another reason has been shared with our reporters: "some English words appear in our everyday speech like an instinct, we do not intend to use or ignore it, it is a habit, on the tips of our tongue"

### 3.3.2. *Evaluations on the reasons for code-switching*

Code-switching occurs in Vietnamese teenagers' everyday lives with a wide range of reasons, since "the choice and the alternation between different languages or varieties is triggered by social or psychological factors rather than by internal linguistic factors of the language involved"<sup>19</sup>. The most chosen factor in the survey is connected to the issue of privacy. We can look at this problem from two distinct angles: in Vietnamese-dominant situation and in English-dominant one. Firstly, in a Vietnamese-dominant incidence where most people are encouraged to communicate in their mother tongue – Vietnamese such as at home or in public places in Vietnam, some teenagers concede to insert some English words without any hesitation. As a result of that, it is realized in some jokes, the main character being made fun of does not know anything about that story due to the fact that they do not make out some foreign languages inserted in the jokes. Another case happens when a few terminology in a specific aspect are used so that the outsiders cannot take in the conversation, for example, an utterance from a Vietnamese girl talking to her friend: "Due date là 3 tháng 8 đó nha!". Furthermore, the same phenomenon occurs in an English-dominant situation. Mai, a student when being asked about the reason she uses English in English class, answers us: "We do not want the teacher to know what we are talking about". This is only right when the teacher is a foreigner and of course he or she does not know Vietnamese or knows too little to understand. Nevertheless, this is not considered the main reason for code-switching in the classroom where English is most of the time encouraged and Vietnamese should be avoided under any

circumstances. Students in class will find it easier and faster when discussing or negotiating a problem with their partners in their mother tongue and at times switch from one language to another<sup>6</sup>. In comparison between two groups: one try to discuss everything in English and one code-switch flexibly between Vietnamese and English, we can no doubt see that the code-switching group quickly come to the final conclusion and get a better result. Such members in a group are satisfied with the way of their language choice, for they can understand each other well, which the other groups may not achieve.

In addition, a small reason which may sound nonsense on the surface does still exist in Vietnamese society, that is to expressing emotional feeling. In fact, quite a large number of teenagers today feel embarrassed and unnatural when saying “anh yêu em”, but feel quite normal in proclaiming “I love you” instead. There used to be a saying of Dewaele & Pavlenko<sup>20</sup> in a situation where Russian is L1 and English is L2: “In Russian it has more weight, it is not used as frequently and hence not as devalued. Saying ‘I love you’ in English is somewhat easier.”

Besides, emotion cannot be understood in a narrow meaning like that. In an ESL classroom, when the foreign teacher turn an English term into student’s mother tongue to clarify a problem or to illustrate a point, the teacher in that situation has contributed to build a bridge from the known (native language) to the unknown (foreign language)<sup>21</sup>. By this way, the relationship in a classroom is becoming closer and closer as well as the distance between teacher and students is getting shorter, which will play as a motivation for encouraging the learners to acquire a foreign language in an intimate environment.

In contrast, there are still up to 8% participants give us other reasons for code-switching, one of which is speaking habit that is going to be discussed in this part. In a study<sup>22</sup>, it is claimed that “code-switching has become a habit and most times occur subconsciously [...] because most people may not be aware that they have switched or be able to report, following a conversation which code they have used to utter particular phrases or words”. Some popular words or phrases that are often code-switched in teenagers’ speech are reported:

- ✓ Proper names: Miss, Sir, Madame....

- ✓ Academic terms: school facilities (canteen, workshop, library...), units or chapters, teaching functions (project, guideline, chapter, essay, homework...)

- ✓ Computer terms: Facebook, Google, computer games, sign in, sign out, laptop, CPU...)

Such these words are more accessible than the native language which is quite longer to be translated into L1. Those teenagers acknowledge that reason say that they do not deliberately show off their knowledge or try to become an upper-class person by using foreign language, but just because of the social motivation and the popularity of those words around, which are going to be investigated in the next part about motivation.

### 3.3.3. *Motivation of code-switching*

Everything happens for some certain motivation. As having mentioned in the literature review, the motivations are going to come from the aspects of language identity and adolescent development, and are divided into two main parts for an easier concentration: individual motivation and social motivation.

#### 3.3.3.1. *Individual motivation*

When being asked about this problem, just 5% participants say that code-switching is sometimes a good way for them to practice and improve their L2 acquisition. They tend to apply what they have learnt into reality so that they can get an instinct to interact by the L2 just as their mother tongue. Nonetheless, this is just a small number of participants, most the students when being interviewed cannot give us any motivation for their use of code-switching. They code-switch in every speeches unconsciously, it plays as a habit and the speakers themselves are unaware of such phenomenon. Some words or phrases have become a part of their daily lives, they do not care about the languages used any longer, but how to convey the thoughts and feelings to their partners completely. Especially, teenagers are at the active age, so they are smart enough to approach the new knowledge from the world around and make such new things become an element in their own country and then popularize them. For instance, some words such as “laptop”, “Google”, “unit”.... cannot be on the tips of Vietnamese teenagers’ tongue if there were not the young generation who are always ready to catch up with the worldwide development. In general, there is not any specific personal motivation, but a

long time use of code-switching between Vietnamese and English does help those linguistic combination a common way of communicating among teenagers' society.

#### 3.3.3.2. *Social motivation*

Gumperz<sup>23</sup> has had a well-known saying about language and identity: "what we are doing is just speaking our own language". Consequently, the social motivation in this part will focus on the relationship between language and one's identity in society. First and foremost, in an English-dominant environment like an ESL classroom where students are stimulated to communicate in English all the time, however, some students claim that they occasionally prefer to combine Vietnamese in their leaning a foreign language, for the native language makes it easier for learners to discuss and exchange information with each other in shorter time. In addition, in a larger society where everyone interacts in their first language – English and those Vietnamese-English citizen feel their language choice such a challenge. Some teenagers when being asked show a pride in their mother tongue; they want the other people to respect and learn about their own language because a language "can be an important part of identity formation and can help one retain a strong sense of identity to one's own ethnic group"<sup>10</sup>. The utility of L1 besides L2 in everyday speech of teenagers express a thorough understanding of a person's tradition, culture, ethics, behaviors, which can be a good way of introducing one's country to the other friends on the earth and confirm its position on the world map. On the other hand, this sometimes serves as a trouble for those Vietnamese teenagers living in those English-speaking countries. They have a good command of English and are quite fluent at Vietnamese, but a "language struggle" indeed draw them crazy. Not all of their peers can accept their own language and not all parents can agree and allow a strange and foreign language to come into their traditional home. The teenagers at that time do not dissatisfy any of them, so they need to balance their language choice by mixing two kinds of language. By this way, they can be approved of by both their peers and their family.

Moreover, the code-switching in a Vietnamese-dominant environment does not due to one's ethnic identity, but owing to their desire to show off the knowledge. This case does not account for many percents, for the main reason being circled

around is the language habit. There still exists a few teenagers who are abroad-oriented, they want to be looked at as the modern and fashionable youth through the language they are using. The people with high power in a society tend to code-switch more than the lower class<sup>24</sup>. This may be considered as a natural phenomenon. Just the intellectual have the chance to get familiar with the foreign language, while the common people cannot. In a consequence, in daily communication, some teenagers are about to code-switch some English words in order to prove their broad knowledge of another language aside their mother tongue.

In conclusion, the motivation for Vietnamese teenagers' code-switching mostly come from the identity confirmation in a society and their habitual interaction. The study does clarify the reason why some students abroad still choose Vietnamese in their speech, thee foster for borrowing some English phrases and the positive as well as negative promotion for the use of L1 in an ESL classroom which opens some new suggestions for the educators on allowance or limitations of L1 in class.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### 4.1. Applications in Teaching and Learning Process

The knowledge of code-switching is a crucial part in aiding the teaching and learning process which directly deal with the study of language. Understanding some features of Vietnamese teenagers' code-switching really can bear a few benefits for both teachers and students.

Firstly, it cannot be denied that students can gain a lot of benefits when they code-switch with their teachers or even their peers, because language when spoken is not just a language in the linguistic feature but a signal of culture as well. Language does not only convey the information on the surface but manifest the culture value hidden between the lines; it occurs in a "context of situation" and "context of culture"<sup>25</sup>. As a result of that, when a student code-switch, he/ she can learn more about the culture of that language they are using. If two people coming from two different cultures speak two distinct languages, they are not actually in a real conversation, for they cannot truly understand each other well enough. However, if they can borrow some words or phrases of their partner's language, it will be better for them to exchange the

information as well as get to know another interesting culture, or vice versa, he or she can present their own culture to their friends. Code-switching does help to enrich an effective communication. Furthermore, another recommendation for language learners is the chance of practicing L2 when code-switching. In order to do this, their utterance should be English-dominant, and Vietnamese is just a subordinate whenever an issue cannot be made clear in L2 and L1 is replaced instead. Many students agree that using English in their everyday lives make them more confident and more fluent in communicating by a foreign language beside their mother tongue; sometimes they insert a few Vietnamese, since they are not good at English enough to facilitate it as a native language. Yet, their using of Vietnamese can be explained by their friends who can explain that issue in L2 better than them. In short, the combination of English and Vietnamese in the same sentence as we called it code-switching has contributed a lot in a student's English acquisition whether they use it inside or outside the educational environment.

In addition, it is reasonable to maintain the application of code-switching in teach process, especially on the ESL teachers who are partly responsible for a student's language development. One of the most useful suggestions should be concentrated in this part is the allowance of L1 in an ESL classroom. It used to be thought that English should be spoken or written as much as possible in an English classroom and students' native language (Vietnamese) is considered to interfere the language acquisition. Nevertheless, this study is done with the hope to open a new road for the ESL teachers to take L1 into consideration when teaching the second language. English. According to this research, students' native language should be allowed in classroom, but to some limitations. In order to do this, the teacher had better prepared some strategies to encourage this method. He/ she needs to determine when and where students can use L1 or are prohibited to use it. For example, from my teaching experience, I often require my students to speak English in some common situations in class such as asking for permission, requesting the answer for a question...in such incidences, they have no choice but get familiar with some popular structures for daily interaction, which is also a good method to let learners exposed to the target language. Group

work or teamwork should be encouraged in class activities. The student tend to feel secure in their small group rather than a bigger audience of the whole class. The confidence and security enable them to freely share their ideas with the teammates by English and sometimes Vietnamese without any shyness. The teacher at that time may go around to help them and enable them to limit the use of Vietnamese if possible. Last but not least, the teacher himself at times are advised to take advantage of his/ her students' native language to clarify a difficult point if necessary and to reinforce their identity. They will feel that their own language is not inferior, but still accepted by the others in general, their teacher and peers in particular.

To sum up, most educators and teachers in the current time are quite aware of code-switching, since it is part of bilingual teaching and co-exists in everyday communication among learners. Code-switching plays an important role in increasing the teaching quality and enhancing the learner's language acquisition as well.

#### **4.2. Conclusion**

Although code-switching is not a new topic in linguistic educational research, a study of this aspect among Vietnamese teenagers is a worthy investigation in the development of Vietnam to integrate with the other countries all over the world. This study is useful for future educational research in focus on the frequency of using code-switching of Vietnamese teenagers with different kinds of codes, reasons and motivations for their choice. Generally, Vietnamese teenagers code-switch almost all the time in their lives, both inside and outside the educational environment because they want to gain the privacy and sometimes just because there is not any appropriate Vietnamese phrases for them to express a particular point. On looking at the motivation for this phenomenon, it can be recapitulated that teenagers are often stimulated by both individual and social motivation. This choice is a useful way for them to recommend their own culture to many other friends as well as acquire new culture from them, for languages and culture are intertwined. Moreover, code-switching depends much on the dominant language of a society, some will feel proud when they can apply some of their own language in the conversations with foreigners while others do not, since that language is not respected in the society. Overall, the sheer purpose of this study is to work

as a guidance for the educators and the learners as well. Code-switching should not be seen as a barrier for language acquisition. If it is intelligently applied, a good result is inevitable. Learners can find it easier and natural to communicate in the exchange of two languages – their mother tongue and their second language. For the educators, some suggestions may be helpful in deciding a good solution for combining L1 in an ESL classroom without interrupting the process of second language learning. This study is not the end of a research but a starting point for many important researches in the future.

## REFERENCE

1. Thomason, S. G. Language contact. In *Edinburgh University Press eBooks*, 2019.
2. Bokamba, E. G. Code-mixing, language variation, and linguistic theory: *Lingua*, **1988**, 76(1), 21–62.
3. Sridhar, S. N., & Sridhar, K. K. The syntax and psycholinguistics of bilingual code mixing. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, **1980**, 34(4), 407–416.
4. Bautista, M. L. S. Tagalog-english code switching as a mode of discourse. *Asia Pacific Education Review/Asia Pacific Education Review*, **2004**, 5(2), 226–233.
5. Miller, N. Bilingualism and language disability : assessment & remediation. In *Newcastle University eBooks*, 2014.
6. Brice, A., & Roseberry-McKibbin, C. Choice of languages in instruction One language or two? *Teaching Exceptional Children*, **2001**, 33(4), 10–16.
7. Portes, A., & Hao, L. E pluribus unum: Bilingualism and loss of language in the second generation. *Sociology of Education*, **1998**, 71(4), 269.
8. Torras, M., & Gafaranga, J. Social identities and language alternation in non-formal institutional bilingual talk: Trilingual service encounters in Barcelona. *Language in Society*, **2002**, 31(4), 527–548.
9. Schumann, K. An affirmed self and a better apology: The effect of self-affirmation on transgressors' responses to victims. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, **2014**, 54, 89–96.
10. Cho, G. The Role of Heritage Language in Social Interactions and Relationships: Reflections from a Language Minority Group. *Bilingual Research Journal*, **2000**, 24(4), 369–384.
11. Mullins, E. R., & Irvin, J. L. Transition into Middle School. *Middle School Journal*, **2000**, 31(3), 57–60.
12. Moore, D. Code-switching and learning in the classroom. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, **2002**, 5(5), 279–293.
13. Coffey, H. Codeswitching. In *De Gruyter eBooks*. 1988.
14. Grosjean, F. *Life with Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Harvard University Press, 1982.
15. Poplack, S. Code switching: Linguistic. In *Elsevier eBooks* (pp. 2062–2065), 2001.
16. Clyne, M. G. *Community Languages: the Australian experience (1)*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1991.
17. Hok-Shing, B. C. (1993). Code-Mixing in Hongkong Cantonese-English Bilinguals: Constraints and Processes. *CUHK Papers in Linguistics*, **1993**, 4, 1–24.
18. Li, P. (1996). Spoken word recognition of Code-Switched words by Chinese–English bilinguals. *Journal of Memory and Language*, **1996**, 35(6), 757–774.
19. Eastman, C. M., Lesley Milroy & Pieter Muysken (eds.), One speaker, two languages: Crossdisciplinary perspectives on code-switching, *Language in Society*, **1997**, 26(4), 600–602.
20. Dewaele, J., & Pavlenko, A. Emotion vocabulary in interlanguage. *Language Learning*, **2002**, 52(2), 263–322.
21. Sert, O. The Functions of Code-Switching in ELT Classrooms. *Internet TESL Journal*, **2005**, 11(8).
22. Obiamalu, G., & Mbagwu, D. Motivations for Code-Switching among Igboenglish Bilinguals: A Linguistic and Sociopsychological survey. *OGIRISI a New Journal of African Studies*, **2010**, 5(1).

23. Gumperz, J. J., & Cook-Gumperz, J. Making space for bilingual communicative practice. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, **2005**, 2(1), 1–23.
24. Scotton, C. M. Codeswitching as indexical of social negotiations. *Codeswitching*, De Gruyter Mouton, 1988.
25. Omar, A., & Ilyas, M. The Sociolinguistic Significance of the Attitudes towards Code-Switching in Saudi Arabia Academia. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, **2018**, 8(3), 79.

## APPENDIX 1

### QUESTIONNAIRE ON VIETNAMESE STUDENTS' FREQUENCY OF USING CODE-SWITCHING

Student's name:..... Age:.....Date:.....

1. Where were you born?..... Countryside/ City.....
2. What language do you use at home?
3. What language does your father speak to you?  
Always  
Usually  
Sometimes  
Never
4. Does he speak English with you?  
How often:..... When:.....
5. What language does your mother speak to you?  
Always  
Usually  
Sometimes
6. Does she speak English with you?  
How often:..... When:.....
7. What language do your brothers and sisters speak to you?  
Always  
Usually  
Sometimes
8. Do they speak English with you?  
How often:..... When:.....
9. What language do you talk with your friends?
10. How often do you listen to music or watch videos in English?
11. What language do you use at some outside social affairs? (birthday, meeting, wedding...)
12. How often do you speak Vietnamese in your English class?.....
13. How often do you practice speaking English in your class? .....

## APPENDIX 2

### REASONS FOR CODE-SWITCHING OF VIETNAMESE TEENAGERS

(Put a tick ✓ at the reasons for your code-switching choice)

Because there is no Vietnamese words for a specific term	
To practice speaking skills in English	
To convey sentimental issues related to emotion in an easy way.	
To express intimate relationship	
To ensure privacy	
To emphasize a point	

Other reasons: .....