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VIETNAMESE-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING IN DIGITAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: LINGUISTIC PATTERNS AND COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS ON YOUTUBE

Bui Nhu Nguyet [1], Nguyen Thi Hoan [2]

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Ha Long University, Quang Ninh 02309, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

This study investigates Vietnamese-English code-switching in digital media discourse, focusing on video content produced by the knowledge-sharing platform (Spiderum)on Youtube. Utilizing a mixed methods approach, the research examines how digital creators blend languages across different structural types, including intra-sentential switching, tag-switching, and inter-sentential transitions. The finding shows that intra-sentential mixing is the most widespread pattern, demonstrating creators' bilingual proficiency and syntactic fluency, while tag-switching and inter-sentential shifts are used to set conversational tone and navigate thematic transitions. Beyond structural patterns, code-switching serves critical communicative and sociolinguistic functions: it enables precise communication of specialized concepts lacking direct local equivalents, projects professional expertise and cultural hybridity, and strengthens engagement with young, globally connected audiences. Ultimately, the study illustrates how bilingual linguistic practices function as an adaptive resource for navigating the intersection of local identity and globalized media culture.

Keyword: code-switching, digital media discourse, Spiderum,

1. INTRODUCTION

Code-switching, the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation, is a prominent phenomenon in bilingual communities worldwide (Poplack, 1980). With the rise of digital media platforms, code-switching has transcended traditional conversational settings and established itself as a crucial element of online discourse. YouTube, as a platform that fosters multilingual creativity and communication, provides a rich context for studying code-switching. Among Vietnamese digital platforms, Spiderum stands out as an influential knowledge-sharing community that frequently incorporates bilingualism into its content, making it an ideal subject for linguistic analysis.

The rapid globalization of Vietnam and the increasing penetration of English into Vietnamese communication, particularly among urban and tech-savvy communities, have given rise to dynamic bilingual practices. As content creators embrace code-switching to engage audiences and convey nuanced ideas, examining its linguistic and social functions becomes imperative. This research aims to analyze the linguistic patterns and communicative purposes of code-switching in Spiderum YouTube videos, contributing to broader discussions on bilingualism, digital discourse, and media engagement.

1.1 Rationale

Code-switching in digital media reflects the evolving linguistic strategies of bilingual speakers navigating both local and global influences. Previous studies have extensively explored code-switching in traditional conversational contexts (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993), yet there remains a gap in understanding its use in video-based platforms like YouTube. In Vietnam, the increasing integration of English in Vietnamese communication has been observed, but limited attention has been given to its manifestation in bilingual digital content, such as Spiderum videos.

Spiderum, as a platform that combines personal narratives, educational discussions, and cultural analyses, provides a natural environment for code-switching to emerge. This research is significant in offering insights into how Vietnamese-English bilingualism is strategically employed in digital discourse. By analyzing how Spiderum creators utilize code-switching for various communicative purposes—such as

audience engagement, emphasis, or identity signaling—this study will advance the understanding of bilingualism in online spaces. Moreover, this research aligns with global discussions on multilingualism in media (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Dovchin, 2020), bridging gaps in the study of Vietnamese digital bilingualism.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the linguistic patterns and communicative functions of code-switching in Spiderum YouTube videos, with a focus on its role in content delivery, sociolinguistic dynamics, and audience engagement.

To achieve this aim, the specific objectives are as follows:

- To identify and classify the types of code-switching present in Spiderum videos using established linguistic frameworks.
- To analyze the linguistic and discourse functions of code-switching in these videos.
- To explore the sociolinguistic factors, such as speaker background and content genre, influencing code-switching practices.

1.4 Research questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of code-switching are most commonly used in Spiderum videos?

2. What are the linguistic and discourse functions of code-switching in these videos?

3. What social and contextual factors influence the use of code-switching in Spiderum content?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept and types of code-switching

Code-switching, broadly defined, refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a single conversation or discourse (Poplack, 1980). This linguistic phenomenon is prevalent in bilingual and multilingual communities, where speakers utilize multiple languages to navigate diverse communicative contexts. Poplack (1980) proposed a typology of code-switching, categorizing it into three distinct types. Intersentential code-switching occurs between sentences, often signaling a shift in topic or emphasis. Intrasentential code-switching takes place within a single sentence or clause, requiring speakers to navigate grammatical and syntactic constraints between languages. Tag-switching involves the insertion of short phrases or tags, such as discourse markers, from one language into another. These classifications form the theoretical basis for analyzing the structural aspects of bilingual communication.

Building on these foundations, Myers-Scotton's (1993) Matrix Language-Frame (MLF) model provides a framework for understanding the grammatical structure of code-switching. The model posits that one language, the matrix language, provides the syntactic framework for a conversation, while the embedded language contributes lexical or semantic elements. This approach is particularly useful for examining the structural and grammatical features of Vietnamese-English code-switching, as seen in digital content on platforms like YouTube.

2.2 Sociolinguistic perspectives

From a sociolinguistic perspective, code-switching functions not merely as a linguistic practice but as a versatile tool for achieving specific social and communicative objectives. Gumperz (1982) introduced the concept of code-switching as a contextualization cue, emphasizing its role in signaling shifts in meaning, topic, or social roles during interaction. Within this framework, code-switching operates as a dynamic strategy that allows speakers to navigate diverse conversational demands. For instance, bilingual speakers might switch to English to underscore professional expertise, authority, or to align with globalized contexts, while reverting to Vietnamese to invoke familiarity, intimacy, or solidarity within local or personal interactions. This practice reflects the complex interplay between language and social meaning, as speakers adapt their linguistic choices to match the expectations of their communicative environment.

Auer (1998) expanded on this conceptualization by framing code-switching as a conversational resource that extends beyond signaling shifts in context to actively constructing social identity. According to Auer, bilingual speakers employ code-switching as a means of aligning themselves with interlocutors, thereby fostering social

cohesion and mutual understanding. Furthermore, it serves rhetorical purposes, enabling speakers to achieve specific interactional goals such as persuasion, humor, or emphasis. By alternating between languages, speakers demonstrate linguistic dexterity while simultaneously negotiating their place within sociocultural and interpersonal frameworks.

These sociolinguistic perspectives underscore the functional flexibility of code-switching, particularly in contexts where language use contributes to identity construction and audience engagement. This adaptability makes code-switching especially relevant to digital discourse, where creators and contributors often rely on linguistic creativity to connect with diverse, multilingual audiences. On platforms such as YouTube, code-switching not only facilitates engagement but also allows speakers to navigate the intersection of local and global influences, reflecting their cultural hybridity and adaptability in a digitally connected world.

2.3 Code-switching in digital media

The advent of digital media has fundamentally reshaped the practices and perceptions surrounding code-switching, particularly on platforms like YouTube, where the interplay of languages reflects the dynamics of a globalized audience. As noted by Androutsopoulos (2015), multilingualism in online spaces transcends mere linguistic alternation to become a strategic tool for fostering inclusivity and engaging diverse viewers. On platforms such as YouTube, code-switching is intricately linked to multimodal communication, wherein creators merge spoken language, visual elements, and textual cues to cater effectively to bilingual or multilingual audiences. This transformation elevates code-switching from a traditional conversational strategy to a sophisticated means of navigating complex digital interactions.

Dovchin (2020) highlights the distinctive challenges and opportunities posed by multimodal environments, emphasizing that code-switching in video content extends beyond the linguistic domain into performative and visual dimensions. The integration of multiple modalities enables creators to interact dynamically with audiences, employing code-switching not only as a linguistic bridge but also as a performative act that resonates across cultural and social contexts.

These theoretical insights provide a compelling framework for examining the Vietnamese-English code-switching practices on Spiderum's YouTube channel. By incorporating English terms, phrases, and cultural references into predominantly Vietnamese discourse, Spiderum contributors showcase their bilingual expertise and cultural adaptability. This practice reflects the platform's engagement with a diverse audience base, where linguistic hybridity serves as a mechanism for connecting local and global perspectives. The use of code-switching in Spiderum videos underscores the transformative impact of digital media in fostering linguistic creativity and bridging cultural boundaries, aligning closely with the sociolinguistic theories proposed by Androutsopoulos (2015) and Dovchin (2020).

2.4 Vietnamese-English code-switching

In the Vietnamese context, English plays a significant role in shaping contemporary bilingual practices. Nguyen and Hamid (2021) examine Vietnamese-English code-switching on social media, arguing that it facilitates cross-cultural communication and reflects broader trends of globalization. Their study shows how Vietnamese speakers strategically employ code-switching to express modernity, authority, or expertise in online platforms. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among urban, digitally connected speakers, making platforms like Spiderum rich sites for bilingual analysis.

The integration of English in Vietnamese media is not limited to lexical borrowings but extends to complex code-switching patterns that reflect sociolinguistic and cultural dynamics. For instance, Spiderum creators use code-switching not only for rhetorical emphasis but also as a way to signal alignment with international norms and values. This bilingual practice underscores the adaptability of Vietnamese speakers in navigating the interplay between local and global influences.

3. METHOD

This research will employ a qualitative and quantitative approach to analyzing code-switching in Spiderum YouTube videos. The data will be collected from a selection of 5 videos featuring bilingual content across various topics, including education, entertainment, and technology. The videos will be transcribed, and instances of code-switching will be identified and categorized according to established linguistic frameworks. A

functional analysis will be conducted to determine the communicative roles of code-switching, such as emphasis, humor, and audience engagement. Additionally, sociolinguistic factors, including speaker background, content genre, and audience expectations, will be examined to understand the contextual influences on code-switching. The study will utilize a combination of frequency analysis to quantify occurrences of code-switching and thematic analysis to explore discourse functions in depth.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Types of code-switching

The pie chart provides a clear visualization of the distribution of different types of code-switching observed within the dataset. Intra-sentential code-switching, characterized by language alternation within a single sentence, emerges as the most frequently employed type, constituting 50% of all identified instances. This prevalence underscores its integral role in facilitating seamless bilingual communication, particularly in informal and dynamic contexts where linguistic fluidity is essential. Tag-switching, which involves the insertion of discourse markers or isolated lexical items from one language into another, accounts for 31% of the total occurrences. This form serves pragmatic functions, enriching discourse by enhancing precision, adding nuance, or maintaining conversational flow. Lastly, inter-sentential code-switching, defined as language alternation occurring between separate sentences, represents the least frequent type, comprising 19% of the data. Its relatively lower frequency suggests its specialized use, often marking transitions in topic, tone, or speaker intent.

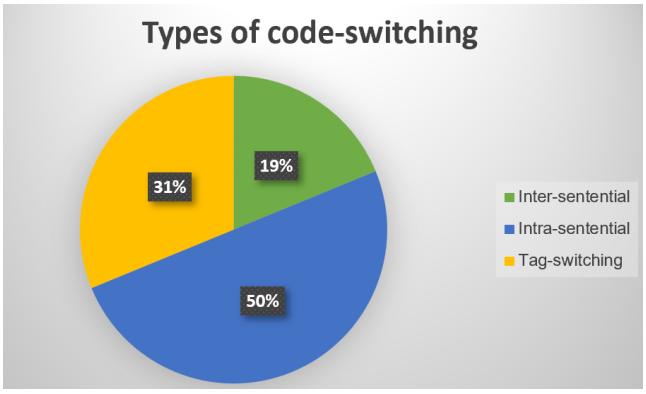


Figure 1 Types of code-switching

Code-switching patterns reveal complex sociolinguistic dynamics, and a deeper analysis of the types helps understand their linguistic intricacies and functional purposes. Intra-sentential code-switching is the most prevalent in the provided data, characterized by seamless language mixing within a single sentence or clause. This form showcases high bilingual proficiency, as evidenced in the following example:

“Xin chào Nga mình là Phoebe hay còn là tên trên gọi là trên ID á trên giấy tờ là Trần Mai Phương.”

(Hello Nga, I'm Phoebe, or as it says on my ID and official documents, Trần Mai Phương.)

(Spiderum, 2024, 2:38-2.42)

The prevalence of intra-sentential switching suggests that speakers frequently navigate dual linguistic systems with ease, often reflecting informal contexts or natural conversational flow.

Inter-sentential code-switching, while less common, occurs between distinct sentences, exemplifying intentional transitions between languages. This pattern often arises when speakers shift between different topics or address diverse audiences, providing emphasis or clarity in multilingual discussions.

Tag-switching involves inserting single words or phrases into a sentence primarily composed in another language.

"Sorry thi thoảng anh cũng sẽ hơi aggressive."

(Sorry, sometimes I might be a bit aggressive.)

(Spiderum, 2024a, 54:10-54:13)

In this utterance, the English word "Sorry" is seamlessly integrated into a Vietnamese context. This illustrates how speakers employ tag-switching to express nuanced emotions or convey politeness that might be culturally associated with the borrowed term. Such usage often reflects the speaker's awareness of the sociolinguistic context, as they strategically incorporate foreign words to resonate more effectively with the listener.

4.2 Functions of code-switching

In the context of Spiderum, code-switching performs multifaceted discourse and social functions that are fundamentally intertwined with the bilingual nature of communication on this platform. From a discourse perspective, code-switching plays a pivotal role in enhancing the

precision and clarity of interactions, particularly through intra-sentential and tag-switching mechanisms. Intra-sentential code-switching allows for the seamless integration of linguistic elements from both English and Vietnamese within a single sentence. This linguistic blending enables contributors to articulate nuanced concepts that may lack equivalent expressions in either language alone. Such integration often reflects the strategic use of English terminology to convey specialized or culturally significant ideas within predominantly Vietnamese discourse. For example, instances where English phrases are embedded into Vietnamese structures highlight how this type of switching supports the effectiveness of bilingual communication by ensuring lexical accuracy and semantic depth. Similarly, tag-switching, which involves the insertion of English words or phrases as pragmatic markers, contributes to the structural and rhetorical coherence of discussions. The pragmatic role of tag-switching is evident in its ability to emphasize politeness, emotion, or social alignment, thereby enriching the conversational tone and facilitating greater engagement among users. Together, these forms of code-switching contribute significantly to textual cohesion and linguistic adaptability, underscoring Spiderum's role as a platform for meaningful, multilingual exchanges.

From a social perspective, code-switching on Spiderum reflects the dynamic interplay between linguistic choice and identity construction, emphasizing its importance as a marker of cultural hybridity and social belonging. Through their bilingual practices, contributors signal their membership in a cosmopolitan and linguistically diverse community, fostering a sense of shared cultural competence and inclusivity. Inter-sentential code-switching, where contributors alternate between complete sentences in different languages, further enhances the social function of bilingual communication by accommodating a broader range of audiences. This form of switching enables contributors to engage both monolingual and bilingual viewers, creating an inclusive environment that reflects the platform's multilingual ethos. Additionally, tag-switching serves as a symbolic representation of cultural hybridity, bridging linguistic gaps and demonstrating contributors' ability to navigate complex social and cultural boundaries. The deliberate use of code-switching strategies on Spiderum not only enriches interactions but also reinforces contributors' bilingual identities as individuals who mediate between global and local cultural landscapes. These practices highlight the adaptive strategies employed by users to maintain linguistic fluidity while addressing the diverse expectations and preferences of their audience.

In sum, the discourse and social functions of code-switching observed on Spiderum reveal its critical role as both a communicative strategy and a sociocultural phenomenon. By enhancing textual clarity, fostering linguistic creativity, and affirming cultural hybridity, code-switching exemplifies the linguistic dexterity and sociocultural awareness of Spiderum's contributors. This dynamic interplay between language and identity reinforces the platform's position as a space for sophisticated, bilingual engagement that reflects the complexities of contemporary Vietnamese-English communication.

4.3 The influence of social and contextual factors

The use of code-switching in Spiderum content is influenced by various social and contextual factors, which align with broader sociolinguistic research on bilingual communication. Social factors such as the demographics of Spiderum users play a pivotal role. The platform's audience predominantly consists of young, educated Vietnamese individuals who are proficient in English due to exposure to globalized education systems and international media. Code-switching allows these users to express their bilingual identities while engaging with their peers in a culturally relevant manner. This aligns with Gardner-Chloros' (2009) observation that code-switching functions as a marker of group identity and cultural hybridity in bilingual communities.

Another critical social factor shaping code-switching is the symbolic value of English in Vietnam. English is associated with modernity, globalization, and intellectual prestige, and its usage is often perceived as an indicator of sophistication and authority. On Spiderum, contributors employ English terms strategically to enhance the credibility and clarity of their content, especially when discussing topics related to technology, business, or education. This reflects Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model, which posits that code-switching is often used to index

social meaning and signal expertise or higher social capital.

Contextual factors also have a significant impact on code-switching practices on Spiderum. The thematic focus of content determines the type and frequency of code-switching observed. For instance, posts discussing professional fields or global trends often involve intra-sentential and tag-switching to integrate English terminology that provides greater precision. Conversely, content focusing on personal reflections or cultural narratives may rely on inter-sentential code-switching, creating linguistic transitions that emphasize emotional shifts or contextual nuance. This supports Gumperz's (1982) findings that code-switching serves discourse functions such as marking topic shifts and enhancing communicative coherence.

The interactive nature of Spiderum further influences code-switching, as contributors adapt their linguistic choices to accommodate diverse audiences, including bilingual and monolingual readers. The use of English tags, such as "Sorry thi thoảng anh cũng sẽ hơi aggressive," demonstrates contributors' sensitivity to the sociocultural expectations of their audience, bridging linguistic gaps while maintaining conversational flow. These practices align with Auer's (1998) view that code-switching is a contextualized strategy for managing interaction and constructing meaning in multilingual settings.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the multifaceted roles of code-switching in Spiderum YouTube content, illustrating its functions as both a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon. By analyzing different types of code-switching—namely intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag-switching—the research highlights how bilingual speakers strategically navigate their linguistic repertoire to enhance communication, express cultural identity, and connect with diverse audiences. The findings underscore the prevalence of intra-sentential code-switching, reflecting the high linguistic proficiency of contributors in blending Vietnamese and English seamlessly. Tag-switching further serves as a pragmatic tool for expressing nuanced ideas, emotions, and sociocultural references, while inter-sentential switching facilitates shifts in tone or topic.

From a discourse perspective, code-switching enriches Spiderum's content by improving precision, coherence, and engagement. Contributors use English as a resource to introduce specialized terminology and articulate ideas that transcend the expressive capacity of Vietnamese alone. Socially, code-switching reflects the contributors' bilingual identity and cultural hybridity, reinforcing their membership within a globalized, digitally connected community. The symbolic value of English as a marker of modernity and intellectual sophistication further influences its strategic use on the platform, while contextual factors, such as content themes and audience demographics, shape specific patterns of linguistic alternation.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital bilingualism and code-switching, offering new insights into how bilingual speakers engage with sociolinguistic norms and adapt their practices in online spaces. The dynamic interplay between local and global influences observed on Spiderum exemplifies the broader sociocultural transformations shaping Vietnamese-English bilingual communication. Future studies could expand on these findings by exploring other platforms or incorporating audience reception analysis to gain a holistic understanding of the impact of code-switching in digital discourse.

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