

Code Switching and Code Mixing in Karo Communication

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ABSTRACT

In daily communication, there are some people in the same tribes or even different tribes making interactions by using their majority own language, such as Karo language. With their different tribes or even the same tribes, it is possible for them to utilize code switching and code mixing. The method of writing this research is by observing in the field while the community doing communication, such as in the party, in coincidence talking, hence, it is called qualitative research. The analysis of this research is that the researcher found that now a days, the Karo people tend to use code switching and code mixing among them. On the basis of the observations, it is common or frequent for the people of Karo use these types of language. The conclusion is that the use of using code switching and code mixing cannot be avoided any more due to the development of economy, communication, and also the unawareness of the native speakers to their own language.

Keywords: Code Switching, Code Mixing, Karo Language, Communication.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a system or tool for communication in our daily lives. Without language, humans cannot interact with one another. It transfers ideas or messages from the speaker to the hearer. This system becomes the culture of the people through oral or non-oral communication.

There are two languages that are mutually exchanged while Karo people interact Karo and Indonesian. Indonesian is our language of unity that is officially used in schools, offices, seminars, and other formal events. On the other hand, it is very commonly used by the Karo people in the event of traditional culture and also in coincidental meetings.

The phenomenon of language usage in Karo language very often involves code switching and code mixing due to its multi-lingual nature, in which the speaker masters or knows at least Karo language and Indonesian language.

Why do I discuss this topic? The answer is that the Karo people, even though they are all Karo tribes, quite many of them use code switching or code mixing. In my opinion, the reason for that this is as follows:

- Influenced by the national language unity that is Indonesian language.
- Their love to their unity language.
- Most youth migrate or come to town to continue their education.
- Digital communication technology at this moment.

Code-switching is a term in linguistics that refers to the use of more than one language or variety in conversation. Sometimes, bilingual speakers have problems when they have a conversation with another bilingual, so they switch their language from one code to another in the construction of the sentence background, and they may do so many times (Waris, 2012:123-135).

Code mixing refers to the alternation between two or more languages or language varieties within a single conversation or discourse, often at sentence or clause boundaries (Myers-Scotton, 1989 in Huda, 2025).

In linguistics, the renowned sociolinguist Richard A. Hudson (1996) defines **code-switching** as the inevitable result of bilingualism or multilingualism, occurring when a single speaker alternates between different language varieties (languages, dialects, or registers) depending on the social context or situation.

Communication in a community between two or more people, the most important thing is that the intention or purpose of interaction can be understood by the hearer. Sometime, the cause of switching or mixing is not only from the side of the hearer themselves, but it can be from the side of the speaker of his or herself. The

problem is caused by the speaker himself/ or herself getting difficulties about the local language. While the speaker confronted with the problem of vocabulary, he or she may switch or mix the language into another language or out of their own native language.

Native speakers of Karo language may also be university students, and they can also engage in code switching and code mixing in the classroom by switching into Bahasa Indonesia or English. Similarly, Setiawan (2016) and Sumarsih et al. (2014) in (Huda 2025) found that Indonesian students switch to English in the classroom for technical terms and to align with perceived academic prestige.

The specific types of code switching and code mixing can be divided into the following:

a. Code Switching refers to larger shifts between languages.

- Inter-sentential (between sentences) a switch occurs at a sentence boundary, where one sentence is in one language and the rest are in another.

For example:

Saya pergi sekarang, perbahan lit dahinku

I go now due to having job [poss.my]

"I need to go now, due to having my job".

- Intra-sentential (within sentences): A switch occurs within a single clause or sentence boundary, as in

For example:

Saya katakan kepadanya, aku berkat ku juma

I said to [poss.obj] I depart to farm

"I said to him, I depart to the farm.

- Tag-switching (Tag-phrase): A tag-phrase

The Karo people are mostly spread across North Sumatera, particularly in Karo land, and they speak the Karo language. However, they sometimes use Indonesian while communicating. They have become bilingual communities.

II. METHODS

This research used a qualitative method design to explore the collections of data in code switching and code mixing done by Karo people in their activities, particularly at the time of formal and informal events, such as marriage parties, meeting one another in plazas, markets, bus stations, and so on. Qualitative research is liable to be done by the researcher for this research as it enables the researcher to find in-depth insights into participants' linguistic behavior, social interactions, and underlying motivations in natural settings (Flick, 2022 in Huda, 2025).

In the research setting and participants, the research was conducted in many places and events in Karo land, the Deli Serdang region, and so on in North Sumatera, Indonesia. Participants were randomly selected from various events. In Karo traditions, such as marriage parties, it is very familiar to see that many persons want to advise the couple of marriage, even though the advice messages are similar between one and another in terms of meanings.

On the other hand, the data were collected using library research, such as the Internet, text-books, and research articles.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was based on observations in the field, while traditional culture, meetings among Karo people, and many events were conducted in formal or informal situations. It is acknowledged that if the society among Karo people gather, they must use their second language, Indonesian. Among family members at home, they use their own language, that is, Karo language, but mostly outside the Tanah Karo Region, they use Bahasa Indonesia and in coincidence, they use Karo language, whether it is as Code Switching or Code Mixing.

A growing number of sociolinguistic analyses have observed how code-switching and code-mixing apply in social domains, including education, media, workplaces, and traditional cultural activities (Muyers-Scotton, 2020). In educational settings, particularly where students come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, these practices are increasingly common and often serve as strategies to manage communication barriers, express solidarity, or accommodate interlocutors (Canagarajah, 2011a; Ser, 2001 in Huda, 2025). It cannot be avoided that not only for the purpose of education, but also it is the factuality of language use by the common people in their activities or communications.

Code Switching and Code Mixing are well-known traits in the speech pattern of the average bilingual in any human society the world over, where both of them are the most obvious and widespread, used at different

languages (Waris, 2012: 123-135).

On the other hand, code-switching and code-mixing may occur in society due to environmental influences. Based on these observations, there are two reasons why the speaker uses the two codes.

- a. The speaker may not be fluent in their native language, so they use a second language, mostly Bahasa Indonesia. Som-times, code mixing is used due to the speaker's limited vocabulary. For examples:

1. Advice to the couple of marriage:

1.a *Ijenda kukataken man kena gelah perjabun kena bahagia, rukun, banyak rejeki dan diridhoi Tuhan.*

1.b *Sayangi orang tuandu kedua belah pihak.*

1.c *Selamat man bandu kedua mempelai menempuh hidup baru.*

1.d *Kepada kelian mempelai, sikeleng-kelengen kena duana rasa metua.*

1.e *Kupeseh man kena duana, hindari petengkaran dalam rumah tangga, walaupun ada pertengkaran harus segera diselesaikan berdua.*

Note: the italic letters are the forms of Code Mixing.

Elaborations of the above examples:

1.a *Adi enggo erjabu, ula lit dusta diantara kelian berdua.*

In sentence (1): a), the speaker uses two languages or code mixing, such as: *Ijenda kukataken man kena gelah perjabun kena bahagia, rukun, banyak rejeki dan diridhoi Tuhan.* "I, herewith, said to you both so that your family will be faithful, harmonious, prosperous, and blessed by God."

1.b *Sayangi orang tuandu kedua belah pihak.* "Please love your both sides of parents".

1.c *Selamat man bandu kedua mempelai menempuh hidup baru.* "Congratulation to both couple of marriage in running your new way of life".

1.d *Kepada kelian mempelai, sikeleng-kelengen kena duana rasa metua.* "To both couples, please love one another until your old life."

1.e *Kupeseh man kena duana, hindari petengkaran dalam rumah tangga, walaupun ada pertengkaran harus segera diselesaikan berdua.* "I speak to both of you to avoid quarrelling in the family. even though it happens, it must be solved by your selves."

- b. The speaker may use Code Switching while communicating, such as in the event of engagement in which the sides of the groom and bride talk about the marriage party. Even though the event is formal between the two sides, it is common for the speaker to use Bahasa Indonesia instead of Karo language, particularly when one of the couples is from a different tribe. If the speech is addressed to a couple of different tribes (not Karo people), the speaker may use Bahasa Indonesia. For example:

"Sentabi aku manbadu kerina kam sini pulung ijenda, nungkun aku man kedua pengantin. Kepada kedua pengantin, apa kah kelian sudah saling mencintai? Saya berharap kalau sudah saling mencintai dan siap mental untuk membentuk mahligai rumah tangga, maka kami orang tua kelian akan melaksanakan acara pernikahan yang sakral ini."

Translation:

"First, I apologize to all of you who are gathering here, and I ask the two bride and groom. To the bride and groom, do you already love each other? I hope that if you already love each other and are mentally prepared to build the palace of a household, then we as your parents will carry out this sacred wedding ceremony."

It is known that Bahasa Indonesia has plenty of up-to-date or modern vocabularies, foreign loanwords, or specific words that do not have direct synonyms in Karo. Instead, native speakers of Karo language usually use descriptive phrases or borrowing terms in Bahasa Indonesia".

Code Mixing can be used due to the lack of Karo Language Vocabularies. The following are grouped as the vocabularies of Bahasa Indonesia that are not found in Karo language, for example:

1. Modern and Technological concept.

Vocabulary related to new technology and the digital world do not have root words in Karo

and are often borrowed from foreign languages. For example:

- From Internet: the speaker may adopt the word from internet
- Handphone: the speaker may adopt the term becoming “HP” or “Telephone.”
- Computer: the speaker may use the word “Laptop” or “Computer.”
- Television: the speaker may use the term “TV”.

2. The concept of Academic, Government, and Law.

The term administrative, which is derived from the loan word of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Europe, does not have a similar tradition in Karo agricultural culture, such as:

Democratation

Ministry

Constitution or Law.

Administration

Infrastructure

- **"Sir" / "Madam"** (The words are polite greetings in English for the male and female). In Karo language, the polite greeting is more specific for those who are older than the speaker. The word greeting can be said **Nande** “Mother,” **kakak** “Sister.” On the other hand, we can call her clan for females, for example: *birng, karo, iting*, etc.
 - **"Dong"** is the task word in Bahasa Indonesia, but such a word cannot be found in Bahasa Karo.
3. **Emphatic Particles:** This term in linguistics refers to particles that function to give emphasis. These are all post-modifiers, which confer varying degrees of prominence to the different constituents that they follow. They are sometimes accompanied by attitudinal meanings. They are all glossed below with ‘EMPH.’

3.1 Particle **kal [kal] or [kəl]** is the most prolific operator in Karo, occurring after all kinds of predicates, subjects, adjuncts, quantifiers, negatives, and interrogative words. For examples:

3.1.1 *Sura-sura-ku nggedang kal*

Ambition-my high EMPH

My ambition is very (EMPH) high

3.1.2 *Pekpekna kal aku ndai*

Beat he EMPH me before

He bit (past) me truly before

3.2 The particle **jine/jineken** modifies subjects, predicates, and negatives in declarative clauses. It means ‘.....self; none other than;in fact’, and often implies a contrast or asserts something as a contradiction to what the addressee might believe. For example:

3.2.1 *ia jumpa ras harimau, buganna jine!*

He/se meets with tiger, male tiger EMPH

He/she meets with the tiger, the male itself!

3.2.2 *Keleng kal jine ateku kam*

Love very much EMPH heart my you

I love you very much.

3.2.3 *Merhat kam nukur baju enda? Meherga jine*

Like you buy shirt this costly EMPH

Do you like to buy this shirt? It is costly.

There are some other particles found in Bahasa Karo, which is why native speakers use code switching and code mixing due to difficulties in using them in Bahasa Karo. Speakers usually switch or mix Bahasa Indonesia.

4. The Particular Nouns/Things

The particular things/objects that are not found in the ancient age of the Karo tribe are:

- **AC** “Air Conditioner”
- **Kipas Angin** “Fan”.
- **Kulkas / Lemari Es** “Freezer”

The way of native speaker to overcome the very limited vocabularies in Bahasa Karo, the speaker usually apply the following, such as:

1. Use loan word from Bahasa Indonesia.
2. Descriptive Phrase: Describing the function or manifestation of the thing in Bahasa Karo.
3. Such names of certain things may not be found in Bahasa Karo, which is why speakers also switch or mix in Bahasa Indonesia vocabularies. For example, AC, Kipas Angin, and Kulkas/ Lemari Es.

Code choice reflects individual identity and is a response to situational demands. Students often adjust their language use to align with group expectations, academic contexts, or affective needs. Thus, code Switching becomes a performative act-a way to negotiate relationships, assert group belonging, or soften linguistic boundaries (Wardhough & Fuller, 2015 in Rojas, 2025 and Huda 2025).

The Code Switching and Code Mixing are commonly used by the speakers at the time of making communication. The following examples are spoken by them in (1) inter-sentential, (2) intra-sentential, and (3) tag-switching (tag-phrase).

Code Switching refers to larger shifts in the spoken sentence. For instance:

- Inter-sentential (between sentences) a switch occurs at a sentence boundary, it means that between one clause and another clause, where one sentence is in Bahasa Karo and the other is in another language.

For example:

Saya pergi sekarang, perbahan lit dahinku

I go now due to having job [poss.my]

"I need to go now, due to having my job".

- Intra-sentential (within sentences): A switch occurs within a single clause or sentence boundary.

For example:

Saya katakan kepadanya, aku berkat ku juma

I said to [poss.obj] I depart to farm

"I said to him, I depart to the farm."

- Tag-switching (Tag-phrase): A tag-phrase.

Tag switching primarily refers to a specific type of **code-switching** in linguistics, where a bilingual or multilingual speaker inserts a short phrase, interjection, or sentence filler from one language into an utterance that is otherwise entirely in another language.

1. Linguistic Meaning (Code-Switching)

In sociolinguistics, tag switching (also known as extra-sentential switching) involves adding a "tag" or conversational marker from a different language at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence. These tags are often used as discourse or ethnic identity markers.

- Key examples:
 - *Saya pergi ke ladang, tapi lakueteh kai man dahinken.*
 - I go to the farm, (but I do not know what to do there.
 - "Give me more examples, *ya?*"
 - "I'll call you later, *inshallah.*"

2. Networking and Computing

In computer networking, tag switching is a packet-forwarding technology originally developed by Cisco. It assigns a short, fixed-length label (or "tag") to data packets. Instead of routers processing complex routing tables for every packet, network devices simply swap and read the tags, significantly speeding up high-performance data forwarding across large networks. This technology is the foundational concept behind Multiprotocol Label Switching (<https://ejournal.upbatam.ac.id>).

IV. CONCLUSION

Code Switching and Code Mixing may occur in every language particularly those who have probably used bilingual communication. It cannot be avoided for everyone to use English due to the influence of the environment of having other languages instead of their own native language. On the other hand, the youth do not use their native language because of their parents. Parents may not use their local language with their children at home in their daily communication, so the youth do not use it, and they do not maintain their own local language. In addition, Bahasa Indonesia is the National Language or Language of Unity in Indonesia.

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