

The phenomenon of code switching on social media of Generation Z

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Abstract

The phenomenon of code switching – alternating between Vietnamese and English – on social media of Vietnam’s Generation Z (those born from mid-1990s to early 2010s) has attracted a significant amount of attention in society. As global citizens in the digital age, they have employed this method of communication with massive frequency, despite being conscious in choosing the object as well as the scope of use. This article will first present the causes of this phenomenon, then recommend solutions and direction for further research.

Keywords: Generation Z, social media network, code switching

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I. OUTLINING THE PROBLEM

According to Wikipedia, researchers and popular media, Generation Z is determined as those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s (or from 1997 to 2012). They are said to have been exposed to the Internet and digital devices from an early age. With the explosion of social networks and globalization, this group needs a fast, practical and effective approach to communicate information. They are not only the generation leading the trend but also becoming the trendsetter, which is clearly reflected in the language’s diverse forms such as: mixing mother tongue with foreign languages, using new structures, using abbreviations, using numbers combined with words, popularizing slang, changing word forms, etc. In this article, I will analyze the current situation, causes of code switching in Generation Z on social media, propose some solutions to the above problem. It should be noted that code switch primarily denotes the alternation between Vietnamese and English.

II. CONTEXT

To investigate the phenomenon of code switching in Generation Z on social media, we surveyed 850 students from Grade 10 in high school to 4th year of university in Ho Chi Minh City using pre-designed questionnaires.

2.1. *Frequency of use.* With the question "What is the extent to which you use English words in online communication?", we obtained the following results: “sometimes” accounts for 56.2%; “regularly” for 33.4%; “rarely” for 9.9%; and “never” for the lowest rate of 0.5%. It can be inferred that this phenomenon is common, and almost all students have code switched at least a few times.

2.2. *Target audience.* With the question "With whom do you often code switch in online communication?", the results were as follows: “with peers of the same age group” accounts for 82.4%, “with older siblings” for 9.3%, “with people who are younger” for 7.6%, “with people who are significantly older” for only 0.7%. This partly reflects that students are very conscious in choosing the target audience when code switching.

2.3. *Scope of use.* With the question "Where do you often code switch in online communication?", only 0.6% of students responded that they code switch in all online communication, 19.2% code switch in online communication within their families, 27.4% at school, and 52.8% elsewhere. The above results show that students consciously choose the appropriate setting when code switching.

2.4. *Emotion.* With the question "What do you feel about code switching?", the results are as follows: 15.2% of students answered with "like a lot", 24.6% said they “liked” it, 47.2% said it was normal, 12.3% did not like it and only 0.7% said they very much did not like it. This shows that a majority of students are interested in code switching.

2.5. *Reason for use.* Through the question "Why do you like code switching in online communication?", we obtained the following results: 29.8% correspondents chose “To save time”, 31.4% chose “I find it interesting”, 30.5% chose “I follow my peers” and only 8.5% did not give a reason. From these figures, it can be understood that age-related psychology has a significant influence on students' decision to code switch.

3. *Causes.* as mentioned above, Generation Z was born in a special historical and social context, so the causes of code switching carry both subjective and objective factors:

- (1) The rapid development of the Internet, social media sites and the absorption of elements of foreign languages, the need for global integration.
- (2) Psychologically, at this age, young people often like to prove themselves, and they have a high need to express their identity, their own ego, and to appear stylish.
- (3) Code switching can reduce the number of keystrokes, saving time and effort.
- (4) The language that young people create is highly confidential (i.e. not easily accessible) to adults or people not in the same group.
- (5) Code switching is used as a euphemism, making the mother tongue richer and more diverse.
- (6) This limits the case that the translation from English to Vietnamese is too long or it is difficult to find suitable words or there are no such words in Vietnamese.

III. THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE PHENOMENON.

For a long time, the use of foreign languages has been very common in both real life and literature.

Chinese rule era. Our ancestors mixed Chinese with Vietnamese, which can be seen in various words such as: new family (tân gia), horse keeper (giám mã), Thai mountain (Thái sơn), Truc lam pagoda (Trúc lâm tự), Long river (Trường giang), big brother (đại ca), sisters (tỷ muội), brothers (huynh đệ), master (sư phụ), etc. According to the estimates of researchers, Sino-Vietnamese words account for about 70% of the vocabulary in the political and scientific style.

French colonial era. During over 80 years under French domination, Vietnamese has borrowed many words from the French language, such as café (coffee), crème (cream), carotte (carrot), ham (ham), moutarde, mustard), maillot (may umbrella), chemise (shirt), veston (suit), blouse (blu), acide (acid), vaccine (vaccine), and vitamine (vitamin).

Based on the socio-cultural approach, it can be seen that the addition of foreign languages is a phenomenon with a long tradition. It is the combined result of some ethnic characteristics of the Vietnamese people.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the rapid rise of code switching among young people, three attitude trends can be identified: approval, condemnation and recognition with a conciliatory attitude, and each has its own merits. Based on the survey, we propose some recommendations, which are: 1/ Clarify the difference between online social media language and traditional Vietnamese language; 2/ Instruct students to code switch reasonably when communicating; 3/ Enhance students' awareness of language norms; 4/ Maintain an open-minded attitude towards this linguistic phenomenon, in order to contribute to the standardization, education and use of the language today.

V. CONCLUSION

Language exposure and borrowing is a normal and common phenomenon in most languages all over the world. From the socio-cultural approach, the addition of foreign languages in Vietnamese life can be seen to be a phenomenon with a long tradition. Moreover, languages are not fixed but always changing. Code switching of Generation Z is a manifestation of change, and also a way for young people to assert the voice of their generation. Every change has its potential positive and negative factors, and for this phenomenon, our attitude cannot be impatience and seek to resolve in a forceful manner. Society will filter and refine the appropriate elements according to the laws of elimination and natural selection.

How to use code switching depends on the perception and consciousness of the users. Using it at the right time, at the right place, with the right audience will bring positive values and vice versa. To have a more objective and thorough understanding of this issue, the author proposes more extensive and in-depth research of the phenomenon of code switching in terms of phonetics, grammar, semantics, language attitudes in communication and society's attitudes towards this phenomenon.

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