
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis of Chinese-English Code-mixing among Undergraduates in Colleges: A Case Study of Qianjiang College

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| ABSTRACT

With the increasing trend of globalization and closer ties between China and Western countries, more and more Chinese people can use English for daily communication. Thus, the phenomenon of Chinese-English code-mixing is becoming more and more common, especially among college students. Based on a questionnaire survey among 218 undergraduates of Qianjiang College of Hangzhou Normal University, this paper tries to analyze the characteristics and reasons for Chinese-English code-mixing on campus and explore the individual preference and tolerance for it so as to reveal the influence of the phenomenon on the study and growth of undergraduate college students and meanwhile obtain a deeper understanding of code-mixing in bilingual practices. The research findings show that college students hold an affirmative attitude towards Chinese-English code-mixing and in the aspect of their preference and tolerance for it, there exist some differences between English majors and non-English majors.

| KEYWORDS

Chinese-English code-mixing, preference and tolerance, undergraduates

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

With the accelerating globalization process and the continuous development of technology, more and more Chinese people can use English for daily communication. Thus, Chinese-English code-mixing is becoming more and more common, especially among college students who are deeply influenced by English. Living on campus and frequently participating in social activities, some college students of different majors are in the habit of using Chinese-English code-mixing words and expressions in Chinese discourse under various contexts because of the comprehensive results. Hence, this new phenomenon stole the limelight in the area of sociolinguistics.

In China, the research on code-mixing began in the 1980s due to closer ties between China and Western countries. After entering the 21st century, Chinese-English code-mixing has attracted greater attention from scholars and has been considered one of the most talked-about topics in the field of sociolinguistics. Since code-mixing is very common on campus among college students, the study of this phenomenon will be practical for us to probe into the college students' perception of language, culture, and themselves, and meanwhile, it could help to deepen our understanding of code-mixing in bilingual practices.

With a focus on the Chinese-English code-mixing phenomenon in the oral Chinese of the undergraduates of Qianjiang College of Hangzhou Normal University (hereafter known as QJC), by using a questionnaire survey and face-to-face interview, this paper analyzes the characteristics and reasons for the phenomenon in campus, explores the individual preference and tolerance for it and reveals the influence of Chinese-English code-mixing on the study and growth of undergraduate college students.

2. What is Code-mixing

From what we can see, code-mixing consists of two simple words—code and mixing. Mixing means the act or an instance of mixing something or someone together. In comparison, code is relatively more difficult to explain. Based on the borrowing from semiotics, code refers to “a set of rules or an interpretive device known to both transmitter and receiver, which assigns a certain meaning or content to a certain sign”(Dyer, 1982). According to Carol Myers-Scotten, the term code includes language, dialect, different styles of a certain kind of language, and also various language systems being used in the conversation (Myers-Scotten, 1988). Besides, in the ideas of sociolinguistics, the term “code” is defined as a language or a variety of languages (Wardhaugh, 2000). In summary, terms like dialect, standard language, pidgin, and Creole are intended to arouse universal emotions, while code is a neutral general term that can be used to refer to any kind of system in which people opt for communication.

Most scholars reckon that code-mixing and code-switching are very similar, and both of them are frequently used in daily communications. Hudson(1999) holds the belief that code-switching is the inevitable consequence of bilingualism (or, more generally, multilingualism). Milroy and Muysken(1995) trust that people who speak more than one language choose between them according to circumstances. It means switching may occur between the changes of different speakers in the conversation or between utterances within a single turn. Gumperz(1982) proposes one of the classic definitions of code-switching is a language juxtaposition that belongs to two language systems or subsystems in one discourse. In addition, Bokamba (1989) sheds light on both concepts: Code-switching is the mixing of words, phrases, and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within the same speech event; code-mixing is the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes(bound morphemes), words(unbound morphemes), phrases and clauses from a co-operative activity where the participants, in order to infer what is intended, must reconcile what they hear with what they understand. (Bokamba, 1989). In a word, code-mixing is the change of one language to another in the same sentence. It is a very common phenomenon, especially in countries where two or more languages are used.

According to these definitions, different languages, dialects, styles, etc., that are used in the process of dialogue are different code systems, and they hold distinct features from the corresponding code system. Seeing from the languages used in colleges, the Chinese language, and the English language are totally different codes; various Chinese dialects are different codes, and varied styles used on different occasions are also different codes.

This paper takes the Chinese and English languages used in daily communication on campus as the research object and tries to find out the characteristics, reasons, and influence of this code-mixing phenomenon.

3. Analysis on Chinese-English Code-mixing Among Undergraduates in QJC

This part mainly presents the overall situation of the phenomenon of Chinese-English code-mixing on campus in four aspects: the preference and tolerance of it, the reasons for it, its features, and its influence. What’s more, to assess the overall situation, a questionnaire named Chinese-English code-mixing in QJC was designed in Chinese with the aim that the subjects, who were all Chinese native speakers, would feel free and comfortable answering these questions. The design of items was based on existing bilingual theories as well as the author’s observation about code-mixing on campus. Before answering the questionnaire, the students were required to give their basic information, covering gender, grade, major and English proficiency which were in the form of multiple choices.

3.1 Preference and Tolerance of Chinese-English Code-mixing

To figure out the preference, tolerance, and other questions below about Chinese-English code-mixing on campus, the survey targeted undergraduates in QJC. The participants were students from different departments of QJC, which comprised English majors and non-English majors.

Cluster sampling was used in this preference survey. 218 participants were selected from QJC: 35 English majors, including 15 students from junior grades and 20 students from senior grades; 183 non-English majors, including 82 students from junior grades and 101 students from senior grades. (see Table 1) Meanwhile, there is a survey of students’ mastery of English vocabulary. Based on the results, there is a comparatively high percentage of students whose range of vocabulary stays on 2000-4000 and 4000-6000. (see Figure 1)

Table 1 Source of Participants

	Non-English majors	English majors	Total
Students from junior grades(Grade 1&2)	82	15	97
Students from senior grades(Grade 3&4)	101	20	121
Total	183	35	218

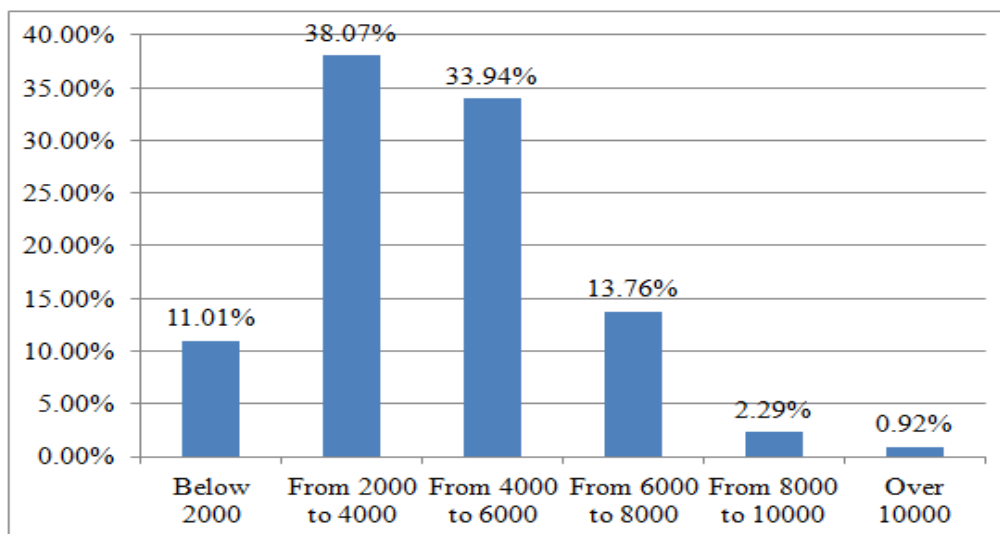


Figure 1 Range of Vocabulary

Table 2 Preference and Tolerance of Chinese-English Code-mixing

Items	Total score	Average score
Do you accept Chinese-English code-mixing in daily communication?	100	50.09 (Yes)
Do you feel uncomfortable when your friends use Chinese-English code-mixing?	100	50.18 (No)

Table 2 shows the average scores of students' degrees of tolerance of Chinese-English code-mixing in daily communications in general, and the results indicate that the proportion of acceptance to non-acceptance of students from different departments is almost half to half.

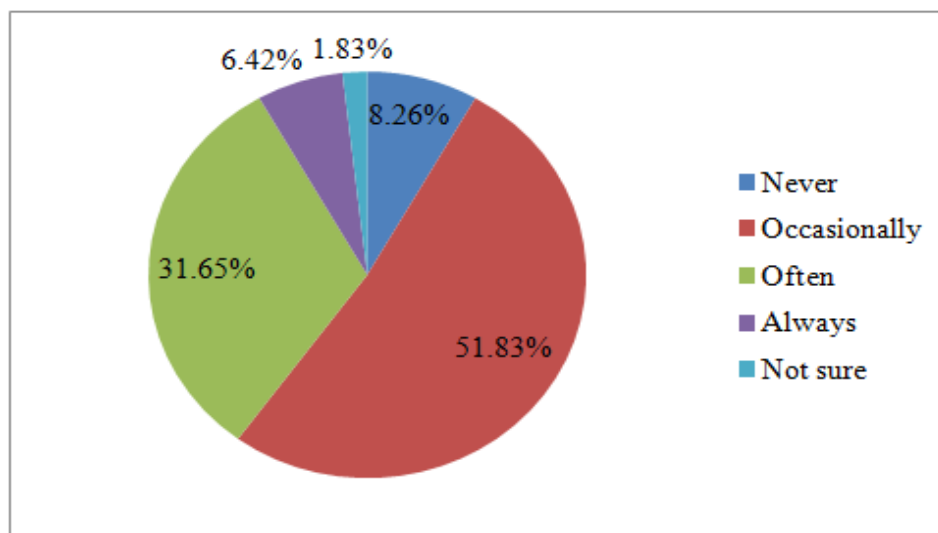


Figure 2 Frequency of Using Chinese-English Code-mixing

From Figure 2, we can see that according to statistics of 218 participants, the students prefer to use code-mixing now and then. It means code-mixing is an extraordinarily common phenomenon on campus. Furthermore, this also reflects the co-existence between the two languages(C&E) on the Chinese campus.

3.2 Reasons for Chinese-English Code-mixing

To have a deeper understanding of code-mixing, the reasons why participants code-mix should be identified.

Table 3 Reasons for Chinese-English Code-mixing

Reasons	Total	percentage
1. For preventing embarrassment, such as using "low" to comment sb	101	46.33%
2. To practice English vocabulary	116	53.21%
3. For regarding it as a fashion	57	26.15%
4. To fill lexical gap	72	33.03%
5. To express some professional knowledge by using some proper nouns, etc.	58	26.61%
6. To show off English proficiency	17	7.8%
7. Out of personal preference and habit	22	10.09%
8. To keep authenticity, such as the names of English songs, films, persons, and places	37	16.97%
9. For seeking for a much easier and more clear expression, such as WTO, BBC, etc.	24	11.01%
10. Having more familiarity with the English expression, such as the word "presentation."	24	11.01%
11. To use English intentionally for making fun, criticizing, or drawing attention; To create particular atmosphere, such as using "out" in a Chinese sentence to express the meaning of "out of date."	72	33.03%
12. For initial language input, such as word, PPT, etc.	47	21.56%
13. To avoid eavesdropping	10	4.59%

Looking through the questionnaire(see Table 4) above, we can detect many factors that bring about the final results. In the beginning, the contents of the questionnaire can be briefly classified into several aspects. Category 1 consists of 6 items: item 2 (practicing English vocabulary), item 3 (following the trend), item 6 (showing off), item 7 (personal preference and habit), item 11 (creating a particular atmosphere), item13 (avoiding eavesdropping). Considering the participants are college undergraduates, category 1 contains items of factors directly related to the speaker (items 2, 3, 7) and items of factors independent of particular speakers and particular circumstances (items 6, 11, 13). Category 2 holds items: item 1 (preventing embarrassment), item 4 (fill lexical gap), items 5 and 9 (easy and clear expression), item 8 (keep authenticity), item 10 (have more familiarity), and item 12 (initial language input). All these items have something to do with the actual conversations.

Generally speaking, according to the classifications, factors within the conversations are the main force that causes students to use Chinese-English code-mixing. However, if focusing on the single item that leads to the code-mixing on campus, we can easily discover that practicing English vocabulary is the greatest reason and it's just slightly passing over the reason of "avoiding embarrassment", which may mean the students in QJC have a strong sense of learning and a high emotional intelligence when thinking of others.

3.3 Features of Chinese-English Code-mixing

Table 4 Occasions of Using Chinese-English Code-mixing

Features	Total	Percentage
1. Address teachers with "Miss, Professor", etc.	84	38.53%
2. Use expressions like "写(write) paper, 做(do) homework, 做(prepare)ppt, 建 (build)word文档."	141	64.48%
3. Use newly-acquired English words in daily communication	77	35.32%
4. Use proper nouns in English when talking about professional knowledge	46	21.1%
5. Use expressions like "我的(my) classmate, partner, roommate," etc.	33	15.14%
6. Use expressions like "喝(drink) coffee, 去(go to) WC", etc.	23	10.55%
7. Use expressions like "今天做了(Today I've finished) presentation, 明天要上交 (Tomorrow I will hand in) paper	27	12.39%
8. Use expressions like "Let's go, go shopping."	17	7.8%
9. Use some abbreviations like "BF(boy friend), GF(girl friend)	24	11.01%
10. Use expressions like "去(go to) pub, party, etc."	15	6.88%

11. Use "hello, hi" to greet sb	22	10.09%
12. Use expressions to express one's gratitude or apology, such as "thank you", "sorry."	25	11.47%
13. Use expressions like "goodbye, see you" when saying goodbye to sb	19	8.72%
14. Talk about the entertainment industry, like movies, film stars, etc.	14	6.42%
15. Express one's astonishment by using "oh my god."	16	7.34%
16. Use "Email, call" to replace the Chinese expressions	14	6.42%
17. Use some adjectives like "good, crazy, easy."	6	2.75%
18. Use English expressions like "OK, yes."	17	7.8%

As shown in Table 4, these items in this questionnaire can be conveniently categorized under 5 headings which are about campus study (item 2, 4, 5, 7), campus life (item 1, 3, 9, 16, 17), entertainment (8, 10, 14), daily communication (6, 11, 12, 13) and emotional expression (item 15, 18). Concerning the total percentage of each item, the above results indicate that undergraduate college students are strongly inclined to code-mix English with Chinese in their daily communication and in their discussions about academic topics. For example, they use appellations to show respect to teachers and use greetings, farewells, and apologies in everyday communication; they also use English proper nouns to make an academic discussion.

According to the detailed statistics and individual interviews, English majors use more code-mixing than non-English majors. Moreover, the non-English majors tend to code-mix English words in daily greetings while English majors code-mix English words when talking about campus study and entertainment topics. From the forms of the code-mixing words, non-English majors prefer to use simple English nouns mixed in the Chinese sentences, while English majors prefer to use more complex English words mixed in the Chinese sentences to express themselves.

Broadly speaking, Chinese-English code-mixing differs from traditional Chinese and English, and it presents distinctive features over sentence structure, phonetic characteristics, and semantic change. Firstly, the sentence structure is made up of a few unsophisticated English words and idiomatic Chinese sentence patterns. And most of the words that constitute the sentence are Chinese words. The English words only assist these Chinese words in forming a brief and persuasive sentence. Secondly, it is known to all that Chinese is a tone language while English is an intonational language. As we all know, the Chinese language is deeply rooted in Chinese students. When Chinese students, especially beginner language students, speak another language, they will inherit the way of speaking Chinese unconsciously. Hence, they are much more inclined to say Chinese-English code-mixing sentences in Chinese tone, even neglecting the original intonation of those English words. Finally, the meanings of English words may shrink and transfer when the English words enter the Chinese vocabulary system. Thus with those expressions in particular contexts, the whole sentence will be more dynamic and concise.

3.4 Influence of Chinese-English Code-mixing on Campus

As we can see, it is not rare to see college students mix English with their native language Chinese, in their daily communications on campus, but when facing the compatibility of the Chinese language and English language, different people have different perspectives. From Figure 3 and face-to-face interviews, most students view code-mixing as a good phenomenon, whereas some students regard it as a terrible one. On the one hand, the proponents deem it will have a positive impact on the Chinese language and produce some new developments in the language. On the other hand, the opponents consider it has a negative effect on Chinese, making the language impure. Taking both valid viewpoints into account, the two languages will stay together in the long run if human destiny and national development have always been closely linked. And seeing from this aspect, college students will be more sensitive to different cultures and have stronger adaptability to the multilingual environment. Also, some students' learning abilities will be strengthened due to the influence of inevitable external factors.

Besides, college students are the backbone of the future and play a role in Chinese-English code-mixing, for they are always enthusiastic in the pursuit of fashion. Thus, linguists can analyze the code-mixing phenomenon in the view of sociolinguistics and probe into this phenomenon in a more scientific way.

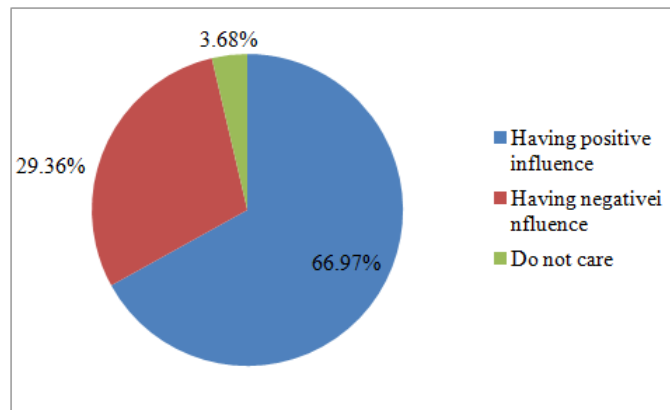


Figure 3 Influence of Chinese-English Code-mixing

4. Conclusion

This survey shows that Chinese-English code-mixing is very common and popular on campus, which is mainly reflected in the following characteristics: the English majors use more code-mixing than non-English code-mixing; the non-English majors tend to code-mix English words about daily greetings while English majors code-mix English words when talking about campus study and entertainment topics. And when it comes to tolerance, the degree of tolerance of code-mixing among college students has already reached a relatively high level, which also means most students hold an affirmative attitude towards the phenomenon.

In terms of the classifications above, factors within the conversations are the main force that causes students to use Chinese-English code-mixing, such as avoiding embarrassment, filling the lexical gap, and expressing more easily and clearly. Finally, through the interviews and surveys, it is found that this phenomenon, to a certain degree, may make college students more open-minded and outgoing and make their speech styles more diverse. Additionally, college students are more likely to accept new things and integrate them into the fresh environment swiftly on the basis of the code-mixing phenomenon.

However, because of the imperfect research methods and conditions, the conclusions of this research are not mature enough. Firstly, this study, based on the analysis of data collected in only one university, is conducted in a narrow scope. Secondly, the questions included in the questionnaire survey are not comprehensive enough. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies could be done in a wider scope, taking more factors into consideration, such as personality, conversational circumstances, etc. In this way, the research results could be more accurate.

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