'Me inda nampak' – Pronoun Use in Malay-English Codemixed Social Media Texts

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Abstract. This paper investigates the use of English the first-person singular object pronoun 'me' as a subject in conversation on WhatsApp and Telegram between university students in their twenties. It was found that the feature occurs more when interlocutors are code switching, especially in paired chats when 'me' often replaces the Malay pronoun *aku* or *saya*. This paper explores reasons for this, and how this feature has come to be used in synchronous electronically mediated conversations between young Bruneians. The findings show that using 'me' serves as a polite speech marker which is perceived as a softer expression than Malay *aku* in conversations, depending on the interlocutors.

Keywords: *code switching; Malay-English; pronoun; social media;*

INTRODUCTION

In a bilingual or multilingual society, code switching is a common phenomenon (Fatimah Haji Awang Chuchu, 2007). Code switching is the use of two or more languages or varieties in a conversation, mostly by bi- or multilingual speakers. In Brunei, we find Malay-English language alternation to be common, as Malay is generally the first language of the population and English serves as a second language (Jones, 2007). With more than one language at their disposal, interlocutors are able to choose which one is most convenient to convey their meaning. In fact, code switching is a common choice for Bruneians in both written and spoken contexts (Deterding, 2009; McLellan & Noor Azam Haji-Othman, 2012). The ability to code switch between languages arises because interlocutors have high levels of language proficiency (Wood, 2016) as a result of the bilingual education, family background, and exposure to social media and entertainment which are mainly in English.

Bruneians, especially those of the younger generation, tend to use common phrases in English, such as 'I love you' or 'I'm sorry' because they are accustomed to them as opposed to the equivalent Malay phrases, which they might find more unnatural and awkward as they are rarely used. Most studies on code switching in Brunei seek functions and reasons why interlocutors code switch (Fatimah Haji Awang Chuchu, 2007; Deterding & Salbrina, 2013; Faahirah Rozaimee, 2016) but they rarely look at the choice of pronouns used.

In Malaysia, the use of pronouns is influenced by gender. In a Malay-medium sentence or conversation, females have the tendency to use English pronouns while the males are more likely to use Malay pronouns (Normala Othman, 2006). Women from urban areas would use English pronouns whereas men's choice of pronouns is affected by whom they are talking to. According to Lukman (2009), the use of pronouns is influenced by age, social status and the level of closeness in a relationship and Nor Shahila Mansor, Normaliza Abd Rahim, Roslina Mamat and Hazlina Abdul Halim (2018) also reported that the use of pronouns is heavily affected by social status and relationship of the interlocutors as well as the context of the conversation.

On other countries practicing Malay pronouns, as such in Indonesia, only the use of first person plural pronouns differs between formal and informal Indonesian with little variation towards other pronouns (Sneddon, 2002). Instead, they substitute pronouns with kinship terms or personal names. Other politeness strategies Indonesians use would be to use softeners or hedging which makes the them sound softer (Sneddon, 1996). Like Malaysia, the choice for personal pronouns are affected by factors such as age, social status and social setting (p. 134). Their first person singular pronoun 'gua' or 'gue' is associated for informal situations used between equals or from higher to lower.

This paper investigates the use of the English first person singular 'me' pronoun as the subject of a sentence. This is because English is considered to be the language of the young (Ożóg, 1992). Sometimes, 'me' is also used as a possessive pronoun. This pattern can be seen when interlocutors are code switching between Malay and English.

PRONOUNS

Malay personal pronouns differ from those of English. Firstly, Malay does not distinguish between subject and object pronouns (Othman Sulaiman, 2010) while English does. For possessives pronouns, Malay adds –*ku*, –*mu* and –*nya* suffixes (Asmah Haji Omar, 1982). Informal pronouns such as *aku* (I), *kamu* (you), *engkau* (you), *ia* (him/her), *kami* (we) and *kita* (us) are indigenous to Malay. In both Brunei and Malaysia, formality and respect are complicated, especially in age, social rankings as well as the proximity in a relationship.

Unlike English, Malay does not have any gender-specific pronouns, but it does have the distinction between formal and informal pronouns. Asmah Haji Omar (1982) describes Malay pronouns into three categories; polite, neutral and intimate, in which the first two are considered as formal. Formal pronouns (*saya/kita*) are rarely used in a daily conversation, often associated at the workplace or during interviews. This is seen as a form of politeness, as well as using specific terms of address that comes with it in terms of seniority and/or the indication of social status of the individual.

The Malay first person pronoun used by Bruneians in an informal context would be *aku/ku*, which could be used both as a subject and object pronoun, often used by friends who are close with each other or by 'a superior to an inferior, either in age or in social status' (Othman Sulaiman, 2010). English, on the other hand, has different pronouns for these function, which are 'I' and 'me'. The subject 'I' comes

before the verb, while the object 'me' comes after the verb, of which Wales (1996) refers the subject to as the reflection of the ego, or the speaker.

This paper emphasizes the use of the first person singular pronoun, 'me', and how it mimics the functions of 'I' and *aku* in Brunei's context in electronically mediated communication (EMC) conversations through the social media platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram. This may help us to understand the use of pronouns by young people in Brunei might come to be and how code switching affects their choices.

RESEARCH METHOD

The data are taken based on electronic conversations (WhatsApp and Telegram) by Universiti Brunei Darussalam students with their consent over a period of two weeks between May 2016 and February 2017. The data were collected from the dates prior of the research being conducted, thus eliminating the participants' feeling of being 'observed' on what they said, and to ensure that the conversations are reasonably natural (Labov, 1972). The chats were then narrowed down to focus on synchronous conversation. Names and places were then made anonymous to ensure their confidentiality. All 11 participants are in their twenties and are bilingual in Malay and English.

There are four paired chats and two group chats, making six datasets in total. Two paired chats are female-male interactions and the other two are female-female interactions, while one of the group chats is between three females and one male interaction, and the other is between three female participants. The female participants are henceforth referred to as F(n) while the males are M(n), with (n) being the participant's number. For example, F1 for the first female participant and M2 is the second male participant.

Using Myer-Scotton's (1997) Matrix-Language-Frame Model (MLF), the analysis focuses on code switching where the Matrix Language (ML) is the dominant language supplying the majority of the morphemes, and the Embedded Language (EL) supplies only a proportion of the lexical content. In an attempt to make it simpler, only the language switches will be looked at, adopting Jacobson's (2001, p. 61) view, in which 'one language occupies a dominant position and the other is subordinated' together with the MLF model. In this context, the dominant language is the ML and the other language present is the EL. For instance, example [1] has English as the ML as it has a higher number of words than Malay, which is the EL.

[1]
       F1:   I dont know *aku* stay *sampai* what time tho

                       `I       until      ABBR-though`

       ('I don't know I'll stay until what time though')

                                       (Sample C: F1)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below shows an overview of the use of first person singular pronouns in English and Malay from the data. The paired chats are labelled as samples A, B, C and D, while the group chats are labelled as sample A1 and B1. For samples A and D, the chats are between female-female participants, and for samples B and C, between female-male participants. Sample A1 has four participants of three females and one male, while sample B1 consist of all-female participants of three.

Table 1 *The use of English and Malay first person singular pronouns found in the datasets*

	me (%)	I (%)	*aku* (%)	Total
Sample A	6 (24)	4 (16)	15 (60)	25
Sample B	33 (55)	15 (25)	12 (20)	60
Sample C	4 (3.67)	40 (36.7)	65 (59.6)	109
Sample D	51 (37.5)	83 (61)	2 (1.5)	136
Sample A1	15 (20.3)	26 (35.1)	33 (44.6)	74
Sample B1	16 (16.7)	79 (82.3)	1 (1)	96
Total	125 (25)	247 (49.4)	128 (25.6)	500

Looking at the data, there are some differences in the use of pronouns between the two languages. Overall, the subject first person singular pronoun 'I' has the highest percentage of use with 49.4% making it the popular choice of pronoun used in both paired and group chats. This could be due to the high number of monolingual English (44.21%) and predominantly English (13.37%) messages found in the data. This is followed by the use of Malay first person singular pronoun *aku* with 25.6% and English's object first person singular pronoun 'me' with 25%. Developing the argument that interlocutors are using the 'me' pronoun as subject, it is not surprising that it has the same percentage as its Malay counterpart. This suggests that these two pronouns might be used interchangeably following the same function. The analysis will only look at the use of 'me' pronouns by the interlocutors as a subject, object first-person and possessive pronoun.

Token Analysis

In the keyboarded conversation, it was found that the use of 'me' is common between interlocutors in three different categories: 'me' as subject, 'me' as object

and finally, 'me' as possessive pronoun. Table 2 below shows the use of 'me' pronoun in its object, subject and possessive form in the paired chats.

Table 2 *'me' pronoun as object, subject or possessive in paired chats*

	Object (%)	Subject (%)	Possessive (%)	Total
Sample A	0	5 (83.3)	1 (16.7)	6
Sample B	2 (6.1)	29 (87.9)	2 (6.1)	33
Sample C	4 (100)	0	0	4
Sample D	23 (45.1)	25 (49)	3 (5.9)	51
Total	29 (30.9)	**59 (62.8)**	6 (6.4)	94

It is found that there is a higher percentage of 'me' as a subject pronoun with 62.8% in paired chats, especially in Samples B and D. Sample B has an equal percentage use of 'me' as object and possessive pronouns with 6.1%, in comparison to 'me' as a subject first person pronoun (87.9%). Meanwhile, Sample D has an almost equal use of 'me' as object (45.1%) and subject (49%) pronouns, and only 5.9% is used as possessive. Interestingly, Sample C only has one function of 'me' pronoun, and that is as an object (100%). This is in contrast to Sample A, in which 'me' is not used as an object pronoun at all, but 83.3% of it acts as subject and 16.7% of it as possessive.

Table 3 *'me' pronoun as object, subject or possessive in group chats*

	Object (%)	Subject (%)	Possessive (%)	Total
Sample A1	2 (13.3)	12 (80)	1 (6.7)	15
Sample B1	16 (100)	0	0	16
Total	**18 (58.1)**	12 (38.7)	1 (3.2)	31

Table 3 shows the use of 'me' pronoun in group chats. In comparison with the paired chats, the group chats have a higher percentage of the 'me' pronoun being used as an object with 58.1%. Although, it is difficult to say that group chats have the tendency to use 'me' in its object form than in paired chats, as Sample A1 has a higher percentage of 'me' as a subject pronoun (80%) than object (13.3%). It is possible that the number of participants in the conversation might affect the interlocutors' choice of pronouns.

The following section discusses the linguistic patterns of the pronoun 'me' followed by English and Malay.

'me' followed by English
There are cases in which the 'me' pronoun is followed by English, although most of the time they are shorter in length. In both examples [2] and [3], the 'me' pronoun is followed by English, regardless whether it is in the beginning or the ending of the utterance.

[2]

    M3:   *yatahwah*. me too

             `Yeah`

    ('Yeah, me too')

(Sample A1: M3)

[3]

    F2:   Ok me logged out   *jalan* time

                      `go`

    ('Okay I logged out, time to go')

(Sample A1: F2)

'me' followed by Malay
From the data, it is found that the use of 'me' is followed by Malay most of the time, as shown in examples [4] and [5]. In [4], all the pronouns used are in English, followed by Malay words inter-sententially. In example [5], 'me' is introduced at the beginning of the utterance, and then followed by Malay. It seems typical in the data that interlocutors would start conversations in English, and then switched to Malay after they use 'me'. This suggests that when using English pronouns, it does not necessarily trigger the interlocutors to switch back to English.

[4]

    I know haha *yetah*   me   *fikir* you   *dtg*

              `that's why`   `thought`   `ABBR-come`

    yang 9.30 *tadi*

    `that  earlier`

    ('I know haha that's why I thought you came to the 9.30 earlier')

(Sample B: F3)

[5]

Nervous me   *isuk*   *ani..*   *takutku*   awkward

              `tomorrow`   `this`   `afraid-POSS`

('I'm nervous about tomorrow… I'm afraid it'll be awkward')

(Sample A1: M3)

It should be noted that, in example [5], M3 used both Malay and English pronouns in the same utterance. It can be said that the 'me' pronoun is interchangeable with *aku* and have a similar function in the sentence. The 'me' and *aku* in the context both represent the object, but when translated it becomes the subject. This suggests that the 'me' pronoun is reflecting the Malay syntax, as *takut* and nervous are both adjectives.

Analysis of data extracts
'me' as the object pronoun
The use of 'me' as an object pronoun can be seen in examples [6] and [7]. In these examples, F3 uses English pronouns while the rest of the utterances are in Malay, making the ML Malay.

[6]

You   *mau* me   *buatkan* yours *lagi*? 😂

       `want`   `do-DM`   `again`

('You want me to do yours again? 😂')

(Sample B: F3)

[7]

Mau me   *tunggu*?

`want`   `wait`

('Do you want me to wait?')

(Sample B: F3)

'me' as the subject pronoun
It is found that there is a high percentage use of 'me' as a subject pronoun which could be perceived as a common feature in Brunei, as seen from Table 2. In example [8], F2 plays with the sentence structure, which does not entirely conform to either Malay or English syntax. This could have been done purposely to emphasize her tired state of mind. It could be closer to Malay, if it were translated to '*palau ku*', making it closer to the loose translation given below.

[8]

Palau   is me

`knackered`

('I'm knackered')

(Sample A1: F2)

In examples [9] and [10], F1 and M3 used both 'me' as an object and subject pronoun, respectively. In [9], the first section of the utterance follows English as the ML, as it complies to its grammatical structure. However, in the second section of the utterance, F1 switched to Malay after 'me', which seems to comply to Malay sentence structure, as it translates to '*aku balum liat hari ini*'. And then, she switched back to English at the end of the utterance, perhaps unconsciously trying to correct her choice of language into the one she started with, which was in English.

[9]

Dont tell me! Me   *balum*   *liat*   today

`not yet`   `see`

('Don't tell me! I haven't seen it today')

(Sample D: F1)

In example [10], the concept of 'me' is the same as saying *aku* (I). In a loose translation, what M3 would have meant to say would be '*kalau aku, aku lari*', which means 'if it were me, I'd run'. However, in order to simplify his message, M3 simply shortened it by mixing the two languages together following the Malay grammatical structure, with English words, except for '*lari*' (run) in the last part.

[10]

if me..me *lari*

`run`

('if it were me, I'd run')

(Sample A1: M3)

Example [11] has Malay as the ML, although it starts with an English object pronoun 'me'. The sentence translates to '*aku inda nampak*', which means 'I don't see'. This is an instance where participants use 'me' synonymously to the Malay pronoun, *aku*.

[11]

Me   *inda*   *nampakkk*

      not   see

('I don't see')

(Sample B: F3)

'me' as possessive pronoun

There are also cases in which the use of 'me' pronoun neither functions as the object nor subject pronouns but is used as a possessive instead. This is in relation to Malay possessive having the same form as the first-person pronoun, which is *–ku*, for example, *buku aku* or *buku ku* (my book). This allows interlocutors to adapt it onto the English pronoun 'me' to make it simpler.

[12]

Me 8.30

('Mine is at 8.30')

(Sample B: F3)

In the example above, the 'me' pronoun functions as an independent possessive pronoun. F3 responds to a question about what time her class would be, in which prompted her to respond simply by addressing herself and the time only. This of course could go in two different perspectives, one of which would be '*aku* 8.30', which is a direct translation of the sentence. This could mean that the Malay sentence structure might have an influence on the use of the 'me' pronoun.

[13]

Me class   *abis* around 1030?

      ends

('My class ends around 1030?')

(Sample D: F4)

In example [13], the pronoun functions as a possessive pronoun. At this point, the use of 'me' pronoun could be considered as habitual (Table 2), as F4 could have easily used 'my' instead 'me'.

Discussion

The use of 'me' for *aku* instead of 'I' is found to be common in a Bruneian context, especially among the younger generation which could be seen as form of creolisation between English and Malay. This is similar to the situation between the Sranan Tongo and Standard English pronoun systems (Sebba, 1997). Stranan Tongo bases their first person 'mi' and second person pronoun 'yu' from the English's pronouns 'me' and 'you'. However, they have simplified the system by turning the English pronoun 'me' into a subject form instead of using 'I' (pp. 153). This concurs

with what was found in the data. Apart from Brunei, Malaysia is also known to alter their English pronouns to fit into their community's language. However, instead of using 'me' in their sentence, Malaysians use the subject first person pronoun 'I', for example 'I *tak suka*' (I do not like), which is a direct translation of the phrase from English to Malay. In Brunei however, English pronouns have the tendency to conform to Malay syntactic patterns in an attempt to simplify language that coincides with what is shown in this study in examples [5] and [10], as it was found by Ożóg (1987).

The use of 'me' instead of 'I' by Bruneians could be to dissociate themselves from Malaysians and claiming this use to be their own sense of identity and of solidarity, just as how they are proud and feel Brunei Malay is superior and different from Standard Malay (Martin, 1996).

In Malaysia, *aku* and *kau* do not occur freely for men depending on who they talk to, while women tend to use 'I' and 'you' more often (Normala Othman, 2006). The study by Normala Othman conducted three different experiments between mixed groups, male-only and female-only conversations and found that the use of Malay and English pronouns were in agreement, male-male would use Malay and male-female would use English while female-female would use both Malay and English, with the latter dominant. This concurs with what was found in the data from Tables 2 and 3, in which most of the conversations of female-female and male-female follow the heavy use of English pronouns and mixed Malay and English pronouns, respectively. Therefore, while Malaysians have 'I', Bruneians have 'me', they aim to show that English pronouns are used to replace Malay pronouns, particularly in code switching which could be argued as an emerging feature of Brunei English.

There may be several factors that lead to this phenomenon, apart from the avoidance of repetition; one of which is politeness. The Malay pronouns *aku* or *kau* seem to be rude or sound rough, and should be avoided especially when talking to strangers, and to someone older or superior (Normala Othman, 2006). In a way, *aku* and *kau* are terms that are used by the older generation to the younger generation only (Nik Safiah Karim, 1995). Because the Malay pronouns have a hierarchical system in terms of respect and seniority, younger people tend to lean on English pronouns as they do not mark any status (Noor Azlina Abdullah, 1979).

By using English pronouns, they successfully make themselves equal to the other participants, regardless of age without offending them. However, the data consist of only interlocutors who are close friends and are within the same age group, and participants still tend to use English pronouns instead. Perhaps, as Krumholz et al. (1995) reported (cited in Siewierska, 2004, p. 219), the use of 'I' is considered as authoritarian, therefore in Sierra Popoloca, they use 'we' which is more normal, although in this case, most people are more comfortable using 'me'. This lead to Bruneians to accommodate politeness strategies in their discourse by using 'me' instead (Kamsiah Abdullah, 2016) for a softer, less assertive and intimate address.

As the majority of the participants are women, they generally tend to steer away from what they consider to be rude and opt for a politer form of communication, which has become known as women's language (Lakoff, 1973). This is supported by one of the participants who claimed that it is easier and friendlier to

use English than Malay when asked about their use of pronouns in texts. However, English pronouns was not limited to women, but was used by men as well, as seen in examples [5] and [10]. It could be said that in a female dominant group, the male might be influenced to use English pronouns as a form of politeness and accommodation. Normala Othman (2006, p. 25) concluded that while men are able to switch between the two languages, women are not flexible in their choices because Malay pronouns "are not available to them" which could be one of the reasons why *aku* is lacking in the all-female interactions, as shown from Table 2 in Samples D and B1, with the exception of Sample A.

 Ożóg (1996) claims that mixed language pronouns "occur very infrequently in Brunei" (p. 186) unlike in Malaysia, but in recent research in the last 20 years, we can say this is no longer true, although there is still importance attached to using "the correct form of address within Bruneian society" (p. 187). Bruneians still strongly believe in the hierarchy system however it does not prevent them from using English pronouns in their interactions.

CONCLUSION

 This paper reveals that although EMC focuses on informal language, there is an avoidance of being impolite or rude between interlocutors. This can be seen through the use of English pronouns instead of Malay. Participants were seen to use the object first person pronoun 'me' instead of 'I' referring themselves, as it gives a sense of closeness. Following Ożóg's (1996) observation, politeness is one motivation to code switch from Malay to English to avoid addressing people impolitely. Arguably, English pronouns sound tamer, softer and shorter than the Malay counterparts and maybe it is due to these characteristics that younger people are more inclined to use them. There is a notion that the use of English pronouns tends to be friendlier and intimate towards the speaker than Malay.

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APPENDIX

Key (for all data examples):
Times New Roman (Regular) - English
Times New Roman (Italics) – Malay
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Courier New (Regular) – English word-for-word interlinear
                       gloss translation
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Times New Roman (Bold) – ('Free translation')
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ABBR – abbreviation
DM – discourse marker
PP – preposition
1P – first person
POSS – possessive
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