

# The Code-Mixing of Japanese, English and Thai in Line Chat

Premvadee Na Nakornpanom

**Abstract**—Code-mixing in spontaneous speech has been widely discussed, but not in virtual situations; especially in context of the third language learning students. Thus, this study is an attempt to explore the linguistic characteristics of the mixing of Japanese, English and Thai in a mobile Line chat room by students with their background of English as L2, Japanese as L3 and Thai as mother tongue. The result found that insertion of Thai content words is a very common linguistic phenomenon embedded with the other two languages in the sentences. As chatting is to be ‘relational’ or ‘interactional’, it affected the style of lexical choices to be speech-like, more personal and emotionally-related. A personal pronoun in Japanese is often mixed into the sentences. The Japanese sentence-final question particle か “ka” was added to the end of the sentence based on Thai grammar rules. Some unique characteristics were created while chatting.

**Keywords**—Code-mixing, Japanese, English, Thai, Line chat.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE internet has developed into a social environment for people to ‘meet and talk’ every day and has become a part of one’s lifestyle [1]. In Thailand, more than 25 million of the country’s 66 million people are using the internet and more than 18 million are social media users. In the social-networking scene today, the mobile messaging chat app LINE dominates Thailand with more than 15 million users from the country [2].

Line is a proprietary application for instant communications on electronic devices, such as smartphones, tablet computers and personal computers. Line was designed and launched in Japan in 2011 and has rapidly attracted social media users in Japan and worldwide. A direct pop-out message box for reading and replying of the application makes it easy for users to communicate. Users can see a real-time confirmation when messages are sent and received or use a hidden chat feature, which can hide and delete a chat history after a time set by the user. Texts, images, video and audio, emojis, stickers and emoticons can be exchanged among the users. Users can also chat and share media in a group by creating and joining groups of up to 100 people.

As this means of communication has been widely used in daily life, internet users have brought elements of daily communication from the real world into cyberspace. It is interesting that these communications are presented in the form of written speech, yet these communications are presented in the form of written speech, yet they do not conform to the conventional grammar of the written language [3]. Linguistic

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features that have been quantified and compared across or within online communities include emoticons, unconventional spellings, representations of spoken language features, regional dialect features, obscenities, and code-switching [4]. communicating By such means, they are introducing a new form and meaning to social activities. It is the emergence of “Internet language; short and instant [5]. Language itself changes slowly but the internet has speeded up the process of those changes. The internet is an amazing medium for language [6]. By means of those changes we can notice them more quickly.

It is interesting that code-mixing now is also used at the written level even though it can be written with already existing words for concepts expressed in the Thai language. English is the predominant language spoken in many countries around the world. Japanese is the popular language taught in Thailand over forty years since Japan became the most significant external influence on Thailand’s economy, and a growing influence on its modern culture. This has caused fragments of their lexicon to surge into the Thai language.

In recent years, the sociolinguistic theory of language shift has been a source of great interest among researchers. Language mixing in spontaneous speech has been widely discussed, but not in virtual situations, especially the mixing of three languages: Japanese, English and Thai in Line chat. Thus, this study is an attempt to explore the characteristics of the mixing of those three languages in Thai dominant utterances observed from Line chat room of Japanese students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Bangkok.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aims of this study are to investigate the linguistic characteristics of sentences mixed with Japanese, English and Thai during texting in a Line chat room by Thai students as well as the occurrences of code-mixing under the headings of insertion and translation.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data extracted from smart phone’s Line chat room of 日本語の3年生 *Nihongo no san nensei* (the third year students of the Japanese language) at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Bangkok, Thailand. The total 26 samples are from third year students majoring in Japanese and minoring in English, and all of them have Thai as their mother tongue. The data collection covered a week in early April 2014 that focused on two topics: ทำไม *Nihongo no gakusei* ถึงง่วงนอน in a study time. (Why do Japanese class students feel sleepy during study

time?), and *คุณ think ในกับ picture นี้*. (What do you think about this picture?). The research intends to focus on the two topics in Line chat for this study since the majority of the student's chats were related to their study and general topic were individual privacy was not violated. Moreover, the language features in their Line chat met the objectives of the study. The total number of replies were 66 but only 28 with trilingual mixing were extracted. The length of each data varies from a few words to a sentence. However, there was a limitation in collecting data due to the topics of the chats were often changed and the trilingual mixing in Line chat was rarely found when topics were changed.

#### IV. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

##### A. The Distinction between Code Switching and Code Mixing

Code switching and code mixing refer to the same phenomena in "which the speaker stops using language 'A' and employs language 'B'" [7]. Code switching is viewed as a phenomenon that occurs in a continuum where both Code switching and code mixing are distinct based on the place where the alternation occurs. If code alternation occurs at or above clause level, it is considered code switching, but if it occurs below clause level then it is considered code mixing [8]. Some scholars considered code-switching as the shift of two languages within a discourse, sentence or constituent. By this means, an inter-sentential switching occurs when alteration is made beyond a single sentence [9].

In linguistics, code-switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation. Speakers practice code-switching when they are each fluent in both languages. Thus, code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety in a manner consistent with the syntax and phonology of each variety.

Code-mixing is defined as the embedding of various linguistic units (affixes, words, modifiers, phrases, clauses and sentences) from the two distinct grammatical systems within the same sentence and speech event [10]. This is viewed in terms of the appropriate use of more than one language in a single sentence to convey the speaker's intent. In short, code-mixing involves various levels of language without changing the topic of conversation. It is thus intra-sentential switching.

The usage of the terms code-switching and code-mixing varies. Some scholars use either term to denote the same practice, while others apply code-mixing to denote the formal linguistic properties of language-contact phenomena, and code-switching to denote the actual, spoken usages by multilingual persons. Some researchers may employ the term "code-mixing" to cover these two alternations [11]. In the stage of mixing, the function word; especially nouns are the largest proportion of the usage [12], [13].

##### B. Characteristic of Code-Mixing in Line Chat

Most of the words being mixing during line chats are single items, particularly nouns. This finding is consistent with the previous studies of [14] and [15] stating that nouns are the largest proportion of the switches. However, pronouns in Japanese are also most of the words being mixed. Content words like verbs, adjectives/adverbs, especially in Thai are often inserted as an integral part of a sentence.

The Japanese personal pronoun *私 watashi* "I" is preferred to mix with Thai and English while chatting. In contrast, they rarely used English or Thai personal pronouns in their chats.

It is interesting to find that the Japanese sentence-final question particle like *か ka* is used with a WH question words in English to form a question.

However, a large proportion of the words being mixed are Thai words as shown in Table I. This can be considered that it was an easy way for the chatters to express their intent in real-time communication.

TABLE I  
 FREQUENCY OF THE WORD LISTS USED IN LINE CHAT ROOM (%)

Categories	Japanese	English	Thai
Nouns	17.65	32.35	50.00
Pronouns	50.00	25.00	25.00
Verbs	31.48	18.65	49.87
Adverbs/Adjectives	30.00	25.00	45.00
Conjunctions	22.22	33.34	44.44
Question words/question particles	40.00	20.00	40.00

##### C. Linguistic Function

###### Lexical Insertion

Since the language in the Line chat is produced under the constraint of real-time interaction, functioning to be 'relational' or 'interactional', rather than to transmit facts or information, these factors affect the style of lexical choices [16]. It is to be speech-like, more personal and emotion-related, while an individual style shift might be involved. Content and function words are the largest proportion of the mixing, follows by question particles (Japanese).

###### Content Word Insertion

The Thai content words embedded with the Japanese and English are commonly occurred with a variety of innovation. The code-mixing is occurred with Thai grammar rules as in the examples.

Because *私 超 好き เทลลินเกินไป*  
 (Because I enjoy watching TV series too much.)

be cos *私 ใ้งามค่ะ*  
 (Because I am beautiful)

เพราะ *midnight 読書 してる* นียามอยู่  
 (Because it is midnight and I am reading a novel.)

*私 มันถึงวง very much*

(I also feel so sleepy.)

私は 心を送るのと同じ in *cookie run* 中

(I have been sending my heart in a cookie run game to my chat's friends.)

*Celeb* 何しても 可なり

(Whatever the Celebrity does, it is acceptable.)

可愛 so cute!!!

(Pretty. So cute)

怖い picture 怖い

(It is a scary picture.)

先回り good 先回り

(Go-ahead if you think it is good.)

*Beautiful* in 世界ส่วนตัว

(It is beautiful in your private world.)

#### Function Word Insertion

Function words as pronouns are often used. Japanese pronoun usage dominated English and Thai words. The Japanese pronoun 私 *watashi* (I) is widely used as the subject of a sentence. In Japanese, it is possible to form a complete sentence with a single verb because subjects and objects can be omitted if the context makes them clear. 私 *watashi* can be omitted, and it will sound more natural to a Japanese person. In a conversation, 私 *watashi* is rarely used. This is the same as in Thai words that would be considered essential in an English sentence are frequently dropped in Thai. Both the subject and/or the object of a sentence are likely to be dropped if they can be worked out from the context. This has the effect of making many Japanese and Thai sentences somewhat ambiguous in their meaning, and so it's commonly necessary to rely on the context to understand the intended meaning.

私 眠たい very much,

(I also feel so sleepy.)

เพราะ midnight 私 読書 中

(Because it is midnight and I am reading a novel.)

Because 私 好き 見る 多

(Because I enjoy watching TV series too much.)

#### Question Particle Insertion

The Japanese sentence-final question particle *か* is often integrated in the sentences, mainly following the Japanese syntax rules. The word order of a sentence does not change by adding the particle *か* to the end of the sentence. We also found WH question words integrated into sentences which ended with the Japanese particle *か*. The sentences are based on English grammar rules.

OMG!!! 動物 何ですか。

(Oh my God!!! What kind of animal is it?)

umm hhhhhh 何ですか。

(Um... what is it?)

Who is 阿姨 ですか。

(Who is this aunt?)

The Thai sentence-final question particle *หรือ รor*; a conversational word was also added in the sentences, following the Thai syntactic rules. It's functioning is as yes-no question particles.

Bell さん ตก ถัง powder หารอคะ

(Miss Bell, did you fall into the bucket of powder?)

#### Slang and Dialect Insertion

Slang is normally favored among teenagers that signal their membership to a youth group or mark others as outsiders [17]. In the Line chat, this fashionable speaking was represented in Thai mixed with Japanese and English.

Bell さん ตก ถัง powder หารอคะ

(Miss Bell, did you fall into the bucket of powder?)

OMG!!! 動物 何ですか。

(Oh my God! What kind of animal is it?)

โอม very 美味しい (หารอแรง)

(Oh! Awesome.)

#### Word Translation

Word mixing by means of translation has been found in this Line chat. The chatters translated the word 美味しい which means "delicious" in Japanese to Thai "หารอแรง"; a Thai Southern dialect meaning "very delicious, great, awesome and often used for expressing bad impressions depending on context". The chatter tried to explain an idea of what was said before by putting the translated words in the brackets.

โอม very 美味しい (หารอแรง)

(Oh! Awesome.)

#### Use of Graphic Sticker Representations

Since graphic sticker representations are available for Line chat, they were often used to substitute a word or phrases. Thus, it not only helped minimize the number of keystrokes and increase the speed of responses, but also made the virtual chat more specialized, attractive and colorful.

In terms of language use, it obviously revealed that code mixing is used as the primary means to facilitate communication among the chatters in Line chat and also to create their ethnic identities in this virtual speech-like world. During chatting, they also tried to overcome the gap of

linguistic competence between the languages. Code-mixing thus was regarded as a communicative strategy to make communication as effective as possible.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The Line chat now has been playing a more significant role in our communication world and spontaneously has come to emergence as a new text language in our society. The messages are short, instant, colorful, real speech and representing identity of the chat group. The chatters introduced some specialized linguistic features which reflected the nature of the chat room as mentioned by [18].

By means of code mixing, content words as nouns are used in the largest proportion as [19], and [20] mentioned. It is interesting to find that the function words as a subject pronoun; especially in Japanese, is a large integral part of the mixed sentences; which was not mentioned in the previous study. Furthermore, some special characteristics of linguistics were created; the chatters can choose appropriate words from three languages: Japanese, English and Thai, which are different in grammar rules to mix in a single sentence to convey the speaker's feelings and intent. In the term of code-mixing, it involves various levels of language that the chatters have to consider before integrating the words into a sentence. This is the new language phenomenon created by bilingual or multilingual people.

#### VI. DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of language use in Line chat is worth investigating for a better understanding of a new variety of language mixing influenced by social networking. People can chat on a variety of topics at any moment with real-time text-based communication. Thus speed in response time is preferred to transmitting facts or information. This brought some new features of linguistics: embedding various linguistic units in terms of appropriate use of more than one language in a single sentence to convey the speaker's intent as [21] mentioned. As more popularity of real-time text-based communications arises, the more phenomenon of language use is created. It helps us to notice that language changes rapidly.

It is interesting to find that the chatters preferred inserting the Japanese personal pronoun *watashi* to omitting in embedded Japanese, English and Thai in a sentence. It makes the sentence clear not ambiguous. This can explain why Thai or foreign speakers of Japanese often say *watashi* after every sentence. That is because of what they learn in their elementary textbooks. It is correct grammatical Japanese, but the Japanese themselves do not speak that way because saying *watashi* too much makes the speaker sound self-important. This should be pointed out for the learners of the Japanese language.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported by the Institute for Research and Development, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University ([www.ssrु.ac.th](http://www.ssrु.ac.th)); especially, the generosity and guidance

systematically from all lecturers and staff at SSRU are highly appreciated.

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