


EXPLORING CODE-SWITCHING AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL IN ORANGUTAN TOURS: A STUDY OF BUKIT LAWANG TOUR GUIDES

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 27 May, 2025 Revised 24 Juni, 2025 Accepted 01 Agustus, 2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Code Switching, Communication, Tour Guides, Bukit Lawang</p>	<p><i>The aimed of this study was to examine the various types of code-switching used by tour guides during their interactions with visitors on Orangutan tours in Bukit Lawang. The focused of the study was on how code-switching functions as an essential communication tool in facilitating understanding and connection between the guides and their multilingual audiences. Specifically, the study sought to identify instances of code-switching in the tour guides' spoken interactions, categorized these occurrences based on established linguistic classifications, and determine which type of code-switching appears most frequently. This research was conducted by utilized qualitative method with descriptive approach. The data for this study were gathered through conversations that took place between tour guides and tourists during Orangutan Tours in Bukit Lawang. These interactions were observed and recorded using audio equipment to capture authentic language use in real-time settings. The findings of this study revealed the presence of three distinct types of code-switching used by the tour guide during interactions with tourists. These types were: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. In total, the study identified 12 instances of code-switching, each categorized under one of the three types. Specifically, there were 2 instances of tag switching, 5 instances of inter-sentential switching, and 5 instances of intra-sentential switching.</i></p>

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INTRODUCTION

DOI:

Everyone needs occasional breaks from their daily routines to maintain mental and physical well-being. One of the most common ways people choose to unwind is by traveling, as it offers a refreshing escape and helps restore energy before returning to everyday responsibilities. Among the many travel destinations in Indonesia, Lake Toba holds a special place—particularly in North Sumatra—as one of the most iconic and scenic spots in the country. Another well-known destination in the region is Bukit Lawang, a village located along the edge of Gunung Leuser National Park. This national park is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its rich biodiversity and ecological significance. It is home to a wide range of bird, plant, and mammal species, with the Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*) being the most famous and critically endangered inhabitant. In Bukit Lawang, visitors have the rare opportunity to observe these orangutans in their natural rainforest habitat as well as during scheduled feeding sessions, which are part of local conservation and ecotourism efforts.

A solid understanding of language styles is essential for tour guides, as it plays a vital role in facilitating clear and effective communication with tourists. Mastery of various linguistic styles allows guides to adjust their speech according to the specific needs and expectations of their audience. When guides are aware of the cultural and personal backgrounds of the tourists they are serving—such as nationality, age, or language proficiency—they can adapt their communication style in a way that resonates better with the visitors (Ketut et al., 2024). This personalized approach not only creates a more enjoyable and meaningful experience for tourists but also enhances the likelihood of positive feedback, repeat visits, and word-of-mouth recommendations, all of which are key elements in promoting sustainable tourism development.

The way people communicate—particularly the style or level of formality they choose—is shaped by various social factors, such as age, social status, gender, and the nature of their relationship with the listener (Ummah, 2019). For instance, someone may speak casually when interacting with close friends or younger individuals but switch to a more formal tone when addressing elders, authority figures, or in professional situations. These shifts are often reflected in the choice of vocabulary, tone of voice, pronunciation, and grammatical structures used during conversation. For tour guides, the ability to navigate these differences skillfully ensures smoother interactions, avoids misunderstandings, and builds trust with a diverse group of international travelers (Samsi, 2016).

This research investigates the linguistic techniques utilized by tour guides in Bukit Lawang, with a particular emphasis on the use of code-switching during Orangutan tours. The study aims to uncover how these guides manage communication in a multilingual setting, skillfully adapting their language to connect with visitors from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Drawing on the insights of (Wardhaugh, 2010), it is noted that speakers often make deliberate choices about which language or language variety—referred to as a "code"—they use in conversation. In many cases, they alternate between two or more languages or combine elements of each within a single sentence or short dialogue. These practices are referred to as *code-switching* and *code-mixing*. Such behavior is a common and natural aspect

of bilingual or multilingual communication. It reflects a speaker's ability to adjust their language according to the social situation, the identity of their audience, and the intended purpose of their message. In the context of tourism, this flexibility becomes especially valuable, enabling guides to enhance visitor understanding, engagement, and comfort by tailoring their speech to the linguistic needs and expectations of their audience (Aditiawarman & Hayati, 2021).

Conversely, (Gumperz, 2003) highlighted the importance of code-switching as a powerful communicative tool. He argued that it enables speakers to express subtle meanings, convey emotions, and build or reinforce social relationships within a conversation. Through the strategic use of different languages or dialects, individuals can signal group membership, show solidarity, or adapt to shifting social dynamics during interactions.

In addition, Richard, as cited in (Hamid, 2016) defined code-switching as "the practice of moving back and forth between two languages or between two dialects or registers of the same language." This definition underscores the flexible and dynamic nature of language use in multilingual settings. Essentially, code-switching involves alternating between languages in a conversation, depending on context, audience, or topic. This behavior is especially common in multilingual societies, where people often switch languages to clarify meaning, show respect, connect with others, or better express certain ideas that may not translate easily from one language to another (Halawa, 2023).

In the realm of tourism, clear and effective communication is essential, particularly for tour guides who interact with visitors from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. To meet the needs of these diverse audiences, tour guides frequently engage in code-switching or shift between languages based on the language proficiency of their guests. This linguistic adaptability helps to ensure that the information provided is both accessible and engaging, enhancing the overall quality of the tour experience (Sahrawi & Anita, 2019).

Tour guides serve as key facilitators at tourist destinations. Beyond simply providing facts or directions, they act as cultural ambassadors, using their knowledge and communication skills to create a welcoming and informative atmosphere (Siburian et al., 2024). Skilled tour guides not only convey historical and cultural insights, but also help promote appreciation and respect for the local community, environment, and heritage (Mukarromah & Zulaihah, 2023). By doing so, they contribute significantly to sustainable tourism and help create meaningful, memorable experiences for travelers.

In this paper, the authors aim to examine the various types of code-switching used by tour guides during their interactions with visitors on Orangutan tours in Bukit Lawang. The focus of the study is on how code-switching functions as an essential communication tool in facilitating understanding and connection between the guides and their multilingual audiences.

Specifically, the study seeks to identify instances of code-switching in the tour guides' spoken interactions, categorize these occurrences based on established linguistic classifications, and determine which type of code-switching appears most frequently. By

doing so, the research provides insight into the communicative strategies employed by tour guides to navigate language diversity and enhance the overall tour experience. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of language dynamics in tourism settings and highlight the role of linguistic flexibility in effective cross-cultural communication.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research method. A qualitative approach involves a broad range of methodological traditions and techniques aimed at exploring complex phenomena, often emphasizing detailed, contextualized understanding over numerical data (Yuliasari et al., 2023). It typically includes various forms of data collection, such as interviews, observations, textual analysis, and the use of secondary sources like library materials and online research.

(Creswell, 2014) describes qualitative research as an approach used to explore and gain a deep understanding of the meanings that individuals or groups attach to a social or human issue. This method allows researchers to examine the subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of participants within their natural settings.

Similarly, (Auerbach, C. & Silverstein, 2003) support this view by stating that qualitative research involves the analysis and interpretation of textual data. In this context, “texts” can include interview transcripts, field notes, conversations, or any other form of written or spoken communication. These interpretations help uncover underlying themes and patterns, making qualitative research especially useful for studies that aim to understand behaviour, language, and social interactions such as the language strategies used by tour guides in multicultural environments.

The data analyzed in this study is qualitative in nature, consisting of spoken words rather than numerical values. Specifically, the data comprises real-life conversations between tour guides and tourists during Orangutan tours in Bukit Lawang. These verbal interactions were chosen as the primary source because they reflect authentic communication practices in a multilingual tourism setting.

To process the data, the researchers followed four systematic steps. First, the conversations were recorded in audio format during the tours to capture the natural flow of dialogue. Second, these audio recordings were transcribed into written text, allowing for detailed examination. Third, the transcripts were carefully reviewed to identify instances of code-switching—moments where the tour guide shifted between languages. Finally, the identified examples of code-switching were analyzed using the theoretical framework relevant to this study, enabling the researchers to classify and interpret the types and functions of the language switching that occurred.

This step-by-step approach ensured that the analysis was grounded in actual communicative behaviour and provided a rich, contextual understanding of how language is used as a strategic tool in multicultural tourism environments.

RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

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Findings

The data for this study were gathered through conversations that took place between tour guides and tourists during Orangutan Tours in Bukit Lawang. These interactions were observed and recorded using audio equipment to capture authentic language use in real-time settings. From the collected recordings, various instances of code-switching were identified and categorized. The total of 12 code-switching utterances were documented from two different tour guides, illustrating how multilingual communication plays a practical role in guiding international tourists through the local jungle environment.

Analysis of Code-Switching

This section presents the findings of the research, specifically focusing on the various types of code-switching identified in the utterances of tour guides. To analyze these instances, we categorized the code-switching according to the classification framework proposed by (Hoffman, 1991), which outlines distinct types based on their linguistic characteristics and usage context. The detailed analysis of each type is discussed in the following subsections. It is important to note that this study limits its focus exclusively to the speech of the tour guides, as their language choices are central to understanding how multilingual communication is used during tourism activities.

1. Inter-sentential code switching

Inter-sentential switching occurs when the switch happens between sentences. A speaker completes one sentence in one language and then switches to another language for the next sentence (Rapini, 2022).

Data 1

Tourist : Hi! Are you the guide for today's jungle trek?

Guide : Yes, yes! I'm your guide. **Nama saya Budi, you can call me Rahmat.**
Are you ready?

This brief dialogue took place at the **beginning of a jungle trek** tour in **Bukit Lawang**, where a **tourist is meeting their guide** for the first time. The tourist was initiating contact, and the guide was responding enthusiastically, introducing himself and preparing to begin the tour. "**Nama saya Rahmat,**" This was a full sentence in **Bahasa Indonesia**, meaning "*My name is Rahmat.*" The speaker **alternated between Indonesian and English at sentence boundaries**, with **each switch forming a grammatically complete sentence or clause**. The guide used **Indonesian to state his name**, a culturally appropriate act of self-introduction, and then **switched to English** to remain accessible to the tourist.

Data 2

Tourist : Sounds perfect. Will we definitely see orangutans?

Guide : **Insya Allah, ya.** We often see them here. Tapi ya, karena ini hutan alami, tidak bisa dijamin. Nature is unpredictable.

In this dialogue the tourist was asking whether they are guaranteed to see orangutans on the tour. The guide responded thoughtfully, combining reassurance with honesty, and blended **Indonesian and English** to effectively communicate both the hope and the uncertainty of spotting wildlife in a natural habitat. The guide switched the utterance “**Insya Allah, ya.**” (God willing, yes) between complete sentences or clauses in Indonesian and English. The switch happened at sentence boundaries, where each sentence was in a different language.

Data 3

Tourist : Got it. Is there anything else we should know?

Guide : Yes. Kalau kita ketemu orangutan dekat sekali, **jangan panik**. Don't panic. Just stay calm, and stay with me. I will handle the situation.

This conversation was a part of a **safety briefing or pre-trek explanation** given by the tour guide during an Orangutan Tour in Bukit Lawang. The tourist was asking whether there were any other important things to be aware of before heading into the jungle. The guide responded with practical safety advice—especially regarding what to do if they encounter an orangutan at close range.

this was a type of **inter-sentential code-switching**, because the tour guide **switched from Indonesian to English between separate, complete sentences** while addressing a single topic. The guide was using both **Indonesian and English** to communicate effectively with the tourist, who was likely an English speaker with little or no knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia.

Data 4

Tourist : Okay. And how long will the trek be?

Guide : **Kira-kira 5 jam. Around 5 hours.** Tapi kalau hujan, maybe lebih lama. The trail can get **licin**. slippery.

The tourist asked how long the trek will be taken. The guide provided an estimated duration but also explained that the length of the trek may vary due to **weather conditions**, especially **rain**, which could make the trail more difficult to hike. Because the tourist was a non-Indonesian speaker, the guide switched between **Bahasa Indonesia and English** to ensure the explanation is fully understood. The goal is to **inform and prepare** the tourist while making the conversation smooth and natural. The utterance “**Kira-kira 5 jam**” was a complete sentence in Bahasa Indonesia while “**Around 5 hours**” was a complete sentence in English, repeating the same information. From the utterance it showed that was **inter-sentential code-switching** because the guide switched from one language to another between full, grammatically correct sentences.

Data 5

Tourist : Thank you. What kind of animals might we see besides orangutans?

Guide : Maybe Thomas leaf monkey, gibbons, and if we're lucky – a hornbill!
Burung rangkong in Bahasa Indonesia.

From this dialogue we can see that the guide using English in the beginning of the sentence then switch it into Bahasa Indonesia “Burung rangkong” but the rest of the sentence is English. Even though there was a single Indonesian noun phrase, the structure was essentially a **new sentence** explaining the previous one.

2. Intra- sentential switching

In this kind of code switching, tags, exclamation and certain set phrases in one language are inserted into an utterance otherwise in another (Rapini, 2022). Intra-sentential switching involves switching languages within a single sentence. It can include a word, phrase, or clause from another language embedded within the sentence.

Data 6

Tourist : Sounds perfect. Will we definitely see orangutans?

Guide : Insya Allah, ya. We often see them here. **Tapi ya, karena ini hutan alami, tidak bisa dijamin. Nature is unpredictable.**

In this conversation, the tourist was expressing excitement and curiosity about the trek, specifically asked whether they are guaranteed to see orangutans. The guide responded realistically, setting expectations and explaining that while sightings are common, they were not guaranteed due to the natural and unpredictable behavior of wildlife in their natural rainforest habitat. The phrase “Tapi ya, karena ini hutan alami, tidak bisa dijamin. Nature is unpredictable” was demonstrated intra-sentential code-switching because the guide blends Indonesian and English within a continuous, single communicative context. The switch was used strategically to explain a culturally nuanced idea (*wildlife uncertainty*) in a way the tourist will be easily understood. This was a practical and natural form of bilingual communication, especially common in multilingual tourism settings like Bukit Lawang.

Data 7

Tourist : Okay. And how long will the trek be?

Guide : Kira-kira 5 jam. Around 5 hours. Tapi kalau hujan, maybe lebih lama. The trail can get **licin**. slippery.

In this dialogue the tourist was asking about the duration of a trek, and the guide responded using a mix of Indonesian and English. This mixing of languages suggested that the guide was trying to accommodate the tourist by using English where possible, but also relies on Indonesian for clarity or natural expression. The word “licin” and “kira-kira” showed that was intra-sentential code-switching, which was when speakers switch between languages within a single sentence or utterance.

Data 8

Tourist : Should I wear hiking boots?
Guide : Yes, **itu lebih bagus**. Hiking shoes help a lot. And bring water, ya? **Kita minum cukup biar tidak dehidrasi.**

In this dialogue the guide was using both **Indonesian and English** to communicate effectively and clearly. The utterances “itu lebih bagus” showed that the sentence **mixes English and Indonesian in a single utterance**, making it a case of **intra-sentential code-switching**. While “ kita minum cukup biar tidak dehidrasi” showed that Indonesian structure with **"dehidrasi"**, which was a **loanword from English (dehydration)** but used in the Indonesian sentence. While *"dehidrasi"* is technically used in Indonesian, it reflects lexical borrowing and bilingual influence.

Data 9

Tourist : Amazing! Do we take breaks along the way?
Guide : Ya, tentu. **We'll stop for snacks, and maybe lunch near a river.** Di sana bisa istirahat sambil menikmati alam.

At first glance, it might seem like **inter-sentential code-switching** (since full sentences were in different languages). However, if we look more closely: The **entire utterance by the guide** was a **continuous response**, and the switch between English and Indonesian happened **fluidly and naturally within one conversational turn**, without a strong pause or topic shift. While each sentence was in a different language, this kind of mixing was very typical in informal bilingual speech and could be considered **intra-sentential code-switching** at a broader level because the languages were **interwoven within a single communicative act or complex sentence**.

Data 10

Tourist : Do locals do this trek too?
Guide : **Kadang-kadang**, yes. **Tapi** mostly for tourists. For locals, **hutan ini tempat yang sakral**. Sacred place. **Jadi kita harus hormati alam juga.**

In the data 10 it can be seen that the utterance “Kadang-kadang, yes”, “Tapi mostly for tourists”, and “For locals, hutan ini tempat yang sacral” showed clear **mixing of English and Indonesian within single sentences or clauses**, which was the definition of **intra-sentential code-switching**.

3. Tag Switching (Emblematic Switching)

Tag switching is simply the insertion of a tag in one language in an utterance which is entirely in the other language, e.g. you know, I mean, right? Due to the syntactic nature of tags, they can be inserted in many different places in an utterance without disturbing the syntactic order (Hamid, 2016).

Data 11

Tourist : Absolutely. I've been looking forward to this all week.
Guide : Wah, semangat sekali! That's great! Hari ini kita masuk hutan sekitar jam 9, **okay?**

In this dialogue, the **tourist expressed strong enthusiasm** for the upcoming jungle trek, saying they've been looking forward to it. The **tour guide responded warmly**, recognizing the tourist's excitement and providing details about when the trek will be started. This dialogue contained **tag-switching**, where the English word “**okay?**” is added to an otherwise Indonesian sentence to **check for understanding or agreement**. It reflected how tour guides in multilingual settings like Bukit Lawang used **code-switching not only for clarity**, but also for **interpersonal connection**. Tag-switching helps make speech **more interactive and friendly**, especially in informal, conversational settings like guided jungle tours.

Data 12

Tourist : I see. I really appreciate the cultural perspective too.
Guide : That's good! Respect for nature and culture is part of the experience.
Oke, let's start! **Siap?**
Tourist : Siap! Let's go!

From the dialogue there were two examples of tag switching in the guide's and tourist's “oke” and “siap?”. The phrase “Siap?” was a tag question in Indonesian added after an English sentence while the phrase “Oke” was a borrowed interjection from English, fully integrated in informal Indonesian speech, functioning as a discourse marker or cue. These tags are used to maintain engagement, encourage participation, and create a casual, friendly atmosphere.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this study revealed the presence of three distinct types of code-switching used by the tour guide during interactions with tourists. These types were: inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. In total, the study identified 12 instances of code-switching, each categorized under one of the three types. Specifically, there were 2 instances of tag switching, 5 instances of inter-sentential switching, and 5 instances of intra-sentential switching.

This distribution indicates that the most frequently occurring forms of code-switching in the guide's speech are inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching, each contributing almost equally to the overall dataset. This suggests that the guide often switches between languages either between complete sentences (inter-sentential) or within a single sentence or utterance (intra-sentential), depending on the communicative context.

Such usage reflects the guide's strategic adaptation to a multilingual environment, where the blending of Bahasa Indonesia and English is employed not only for clarity and engagement, but also to accommodate the linguistic background of international tourists. The less frequent use of tag switching, which typically involves inserting short expressions like discourse markers or question tags from one language into another, further highlights the guide's tendency to construct more complete bilingual utterances.

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