

# PATTERNS OF VIETNAMESE-ENGLISH CODESWITCHING: A CASE OF A VIETNAMESE TV SHOW

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**Abstract:** Codeswitching has remarkably drawn interest from many linguists around the world. However, the amount of research in Vietnamese-English codeswitching is still limited and few of them have studied this phenomenon in Vietnamese TV shows. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the patterns of codeswitching instances in a Vietnamese TV show called “Người Ấy Là Ai” (Who is Single?). Data presented in this paper was gathered from a 138-minute episode in the show and then analysed based on the framework of Poplack (1980). It was found that the speakers employed different types of CS, among which intrasentential switches being the most popular compared to other categories. Some implications for the appropriate uses of codeswitching in the mass media industry will also be mentioned.

*Keywords:* Sociolinguistic, codeswitching, patterns, typology, intersentential, intrasentential, tag switching, TV show, Vietnamese language

## 1. Introduction

Codeswitching (CS) - the process of switching languages within a single conversation - has attracted the attention of a number of researchers. In different contexts, the switch between English and another language has been observed, such as in countries where English is a native language, such as Canada or Australia, or in countries where English is a foreign language, such as Vietnam. However, there has been little research exploring CS within the Vietnamese context. As a contribution to the burgeoning field of Vietnamese-English CS research, this article investigates code-switched instances found in the top-rated TV show “Người Ấy Là Ai?” (Who's single Vietnam), which airs on Vie Channel. The study aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of CS in the Vietnamese context, particularly in Vietnamese TV shows.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Definition

The term “codeswitching” (CS) has been defined differently in the existing literature. For example, Blom and Gumperz (1972) considered CS as an act when a speaker switches to another language during a conversation and does not switch back after a significant period of time or does not switch back at all. Meanwhile, Jendra (2010) defined CS as the speaker’s shift from one language to another and they do it consciously. This was quite similar to that proposed by Milroy and Muysken (1995); however, Milroy and Muysken (1995) did not mention the consciousness of the speaker when performing CS. In the current study, the definition of code-switching proposed by Milroy and Muysken (1995) was adopted for two main reasons. Firstly, this research focuses solely on investigating the frequency and patterns of CS, without delving into the underlying conversational intentions. Secondly, Milroy and Muysken’s (1995) definition provided a clear and straightforward framework that facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the collected data.

CS typology can be divided into contextual and grammar-based CS (Blom & Gumperz, 1972). Contextual CS pertains to the reasons for switching in bilingual speeches, while grammatical type relates to the location of CS instances within and between sentences (Blom & Gumperz, 1972). Further details will be presented as this research focuses on CS from a grammatical perspective.

Grammatical CS, according to Poplack (1980), can be divided into intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching. Intersentential CS indicates the alternation of languages beyond clause or sentence boundaries in which each clause or sentence is in a different language. Meanwhile, switches of language within a sentence are called intrasentential CS. Additionally, tag switching includes interjections, tags, idiom expressions, and single nouns (e.g. I mean, Oh my god, well, etc.). Figure 1 illustrates clearly this grammatical typology of CS proposed by Poplack (1980).

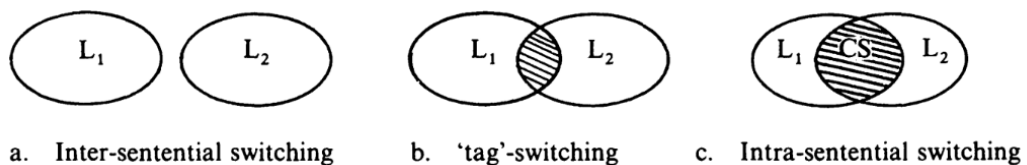


Figure 1. Poplack's (1980) classification of grammatical codeswitching

Some illustrations of Spanish-English CS patterns in Poplack's (1980, pp.1, 600) research are provided as follows (see *Example a, b, c*). The switched segments are bolded.

a. *Intersentential CS*

“Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English **y termino in espanol**”.

(Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English and I finish it in Spanish.)

b. *Intrasentential CS*

“Tenian patas flacas, pechos **flat**”. (They had skinny legs, flat chests.)

c. *Tag switching*

“Mi mai tuvo que ir a firmar y **shit** pa' sacarme, **you know**”. (My mom had to go sign 'n shit to get me out, you know.)

While this framework of Poplack was developed quite long ago (1980), it is among the most influential frameworks that have been used in analysing CS in different contexts (Ho, 2014). The framework of Poplack (1980) will be employed as the conceptual and analytical framework for this study.

2.2 CS studies on TV shows

CS studies in the entertainment industry in general and on TV shows in particular were popular around the world. Most of them reflected the social motivations of interlocutors while utilising CS. For example, the TV presenters in an Indonesian TV talk show employed Indonesian-English CS to shift between the situations associated with general topics and personal sharing (Puspitasari & Dewanti, 2020). Researchers also found that language choice represents

celebrity status and professional prestige, as the mentors in the TV reality show who adopted Thai-English switching in Ruanglertsilp's (2018) study. The researcher additionally revealed the connection between gender and CS frequency which stated that females were dominant in CS employment (Ruanglertsilp, 2018). Apart from TV shows, drama series were a resourceful data to explore CS practice in conversations between characters. Ting (2010) explored the local identity of young Malaysians in a TV drama via their Malay-English pronoun switches for politeness reasons. As the English pronouns "you" and "I" showed more respect towards the listeners compared to their equivalent in the local language, the interlocutors preferred switching those pronouns during their daily conversations. Moreover, a few studies on CS in TV content have approached the grammatical features in the language binding process. A recent study investigating the patterns of CS was conducted by Abbas and Setiawan (2020) on four popular Indonesian talk shows. The researchers found that switches within a sentence or clause (i.e. intrasentential CS) were the most frequent while those beyond sentence or clause boundaries (i.e. intersentential CS) and those consisting of linguistic tags, interjections, and idiom expressions (i.e. tag switching) were not that popular.

### 2.3 CS studies in the context of Vietnam

Most research on Vietnamese-English CS has been conducted in the context of daily conversations in foreign contexts. A study by Nguyen (2013) on university students in Honolulu (Hawaii, United States of America) found that the speaker's CS served interactional purposes, including topic change, a new greeting, and alignment jokes. From a grammatical perspective, Ho (2014) examined the daily CS practice of immigrants in Melbourne (Australia), focusing on intrasentential distribution (i.e. switching between words, phrases, and clauses in sentences). Another context that has drawn the attention of researchers is the setting of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). In Nguyen and Duy's (2019) study, teachers used CS to explain grammar lessons, clarify complex concepts, or identify students' comprehension levels. The use of CS was not limited to teachers, as students also benefitted, as they could speak fluently in speaking classes, overcoming their lack of confidence when speaking in English. In addition to attitudes, studies on CS in schools reflect the students' perceptions of CS and their way of using it. Phan (2021) reported a positive level of advantages over disadvantages among university freshmen and sophomores. In CS practice, students (similar to Nguyen and Duy (2019)) were able to clarify new words and meanings.

In terms of CS in media, most of the limited CS research in Vietnamese context examined the data in written forms such as Vietnamese newspapers and magazines. Tran and Do (2015), by adopting the framework of Ho (2014), offered an analysis of intrasentential CS categorisation in six series of a youth magazine called "Hoa Hoc Tro". The researchers found that nouns were the dominant switched words in the data and the most-switched tokens were mainly in such entertainment fields as pop music and cinema. Meanwhile, the content of TV shows received little to none attention from Vietnamese researchers. Do (2017) did a study mentioning this kind of media; however, the researcher only summarised the general trends that Vietnamese interlocutors involved in CS practices, such as naming stage names and youth campaigns in English.

Despite the rapid popularisation of broadcast media (i.e. TV shows) with the extension of diverse CS instances, studies exploring this Vietnamese-English alternation phenomenon in Vietnamese shows are extremely scarce, especially those approaching grammatical features in

the process of language contact. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by investigating the CS frequency and patterns performed by Vietnamese speakers in one of the most popular TV shows in Vietnam, “Người Ấy Là Ai”. To be more specific, it aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How frequently does code-switching occur in the chosen episode of the game show “NALA”?

RQ2: What patterns of code-switching are employed in the chosen episode of the game show “NALA”?

### 3. Methodology

The TV show, “Người Ấy Là Ai?” (“Who is Single?”- the original English name of the show), is a popular TV show targetting audiences of different ages. The show has been broadcast for five seasons, each of which includes 12-16 episodes. Each episode achieved an average of more than 10 million views on YouTube platform.

The show format includes five rounds. In the first round, the single lady (main character) is introduced to the five male participants through their short fore-recorded videos and is asked to eliminate one after the consultancy of the advisors. Next, in round two, the remaining four participants take part in an interactional game with the advisors and another man is eliminated by the main character at the end of the round. The third round is when the participants are allowed to talk and answer the advisors’ questions based on their given hashtags. Coming to the fourth round, the advisors give their overall evaluations towards the three remaining males and facilitate the main character to choose her most suitable partner. Last but not least, the lady listens to each participant’s final persuasion before her decision of choosing only one man and eliminating the other two. If the chosen participant reveals his relationship status as single, the main character succeeds.

As the main purpose of this study is to investigate the CS practice performed by Vietnamese speakers in TV shows, “Người Ấy Là Ai” (NALA) has been chosen for four main reasons. First, it is considered one of the most trending and famous TV shows throughout all seasons not only to young people but also to the older audience with an average of three million views per episode. Secondly, its YouTube channel, Vie Channel, is highly subscribed with more than 10.5 million subscribers. Third, people in this show come from a variety of backgrounds and professions and therefore, may create CS practices in diverse fields. Fourth, most importantly, the show is made by Vietnamese producers, hosted by Vietnamese interlocutors, and conducted in Vietnamese language for Vietnamese audiences. Hence, Vietnamese-English CS instances observed in the show offer an interesting linguistic phenomenon.

The data presented for this article is from Episode Five Season Three. The researcher chose this episode for this article data set for the following reasons: first, this episode had a high view number with more than 16 million views at the research time; and second, CS instances identified in this episode are most diverse compared to other episodes. Its total time length was 138.2 minutes. However, as the research aim was CS practices in the speeches of first-language (L1) Vietnamese interlocutors, the time allocation for unrelated content such as speeches of Vietnamese non-native speakers, music, show cues, break-time advertisement, and the show’s

intro and outro were excluded. Therefore, the total speaking time length of the native Vietnamese speakers was 103.87 minutes.

The primary interlocutors were the Vietnamese host (Tran Thanh), four Vietnamese advisers (Huong Giang, Erik, Duc Phuc, and Hoa Minzy), and the Vietnamese main character (Cara). Additionally, the male participants included four Vietnamese (Thanh Lam, Trong Khanh, Gia Bao, and Noway) and a Russian (Yura Po). However, as this research objective was to study CS instances made by Vietnamese speakers in the TV show, Yura Po’s speeches were excluded from the transcription. However, the English switches of Vietnamese speakers during conversations with Yura Po were still counted and investigated in a separate group.

The episode was first transcribed manually. Then, some Vietnamese utterances were translated into English to present the research findings in Section 4. A colleague with high English proficiency was asked to proofread the translation. Based on the framework of Poplack (1980), the data set was categorized into three main groups: intersentential, intrasentential, and tag CS. In the category of intrasentential, sub-groups of word and phrase CS instances were also considered. The utterances between Vietnamese speakers and Yura Po (the foreigner) were classified into the ‘Exception’ category for a separate examination. In addition, English human names were not counted in this research data. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, a cross-checked coding process of the sample data was employed between the two authors.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

Table 1 presents the total number of CS instances of the Vietnamese interlocutors in Episode Five - Season Three of NALA TV show.

**Table 1.** The use of Vietnamese-English codeswitching patterns

Total number of CS instances	Intersentential CS N(%)	Intrasentential CS N(%)	Tag CS N(%)
360	37 (10.28)	179 (49.72)	74 (20.56)

As demonstrated in Table 1, speakers in the show employed CS 360 times in 103.87 minutes of speaking time length, which means that, on average, there was one CS instance produced every 0.53 minutes. Among three patterns of CS (Poplack, 1980), intrasentential switching was the most common one with a percentage of 49.72%, which was over twofold that of tag switches (20.56%) and almost five times higher than that of intersentential instances (10.28%). The dominant occurrence of intrasentential switches in this Vietnamese show was in line with the result of Abbas and Setiawan’s (2020) research on an Indonesian TV program.

##### 4.1 Intrasentential CS

Speakers in the chosen episode of NALA TV show tended to apply intrasentential switches the most in their Vietnamese conversation. Table 2 illustrates the findings of switches at word and phrase levels; additionally, CS involving acronyms and abbreviations were also detected, with less frequency rate.

**Table 2.** The use of intrasentential codeswitching

Total	Word level n(%)	Phrase level n(%)	Acronym n(%)	Abbreviation n(%)
179	139 (77.65)	30 (16.76)	9 (5.03)	1 (0.56)

Among the different categories, Vietnamese-English CS at word level was the most common during the show, making up the major proportion of 77.65% out of the total intrasentential instances. There were 58 different tokens marking the switches from Vietnamese to English. A list of ten most-switched tokens and their percentage in the total intrasentential instances is presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Ten most-switched words

Word	Frequency n(%)
game	25 (13.97)
men	8 (4.47)
clip	7 (3.91)
dancer	7 (3.91)
green	7 (3.91)
streamer	6 (3.35)
showbiz	4 (2.23)
hashtag	4 (2.23)
gameshow	3 (1.68)
style	3 (1.68)

As can be seen from Table 3, these tokens were all nouns. The result of nouns being the most-switched words was also discovered by Ho (2014) in the data of daily conversations of Vietnamese long-time immigrants in Melbourne, Australia.

Apart from the adjective token “green” (a term used in a part of the show’s format), all the tokens in the list were nouns and were used frequently in entertainment and social media. Among them, the most significant statistic worth mentioning belonged to the token “game”, which was the switched word that appeared the most, with 25 out of 179 instances. As “game” has a high frequency in “the TV Corpus” (retrieved from English-Corpora.org) with 74,890 instances, it is likely that this word was popular on TV shows and taken widely by Vietnamese media users. An example of this token (see *Example 1*) is given in the bolded text as follows.

**Example 1.** Context: Hoa Minzy asked Noway about his career as a professional gamer.

*Ý là **game** bây giờ đã trở thành một bộ môn thể thao để có thể đi thi các đấu trường rồi đúng không ạ?* (I mean gaming has been a kind of sport that can be competed in tournaments, right?) (Hoa Minzy)

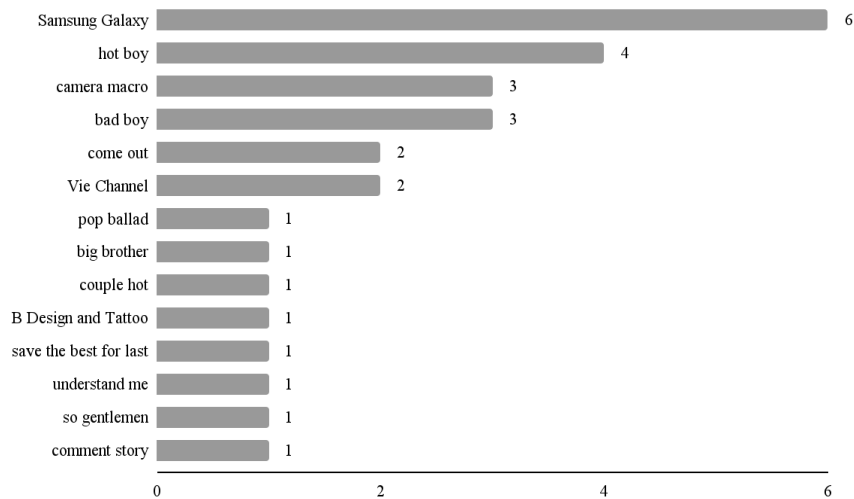
Most of the switches relating to the token “game” were in the context of discussing a player’s (i.e. Noway) profession. Only two in 25 instances referred to the interactional game hosted in the show, as can be seen in Example 2.

**Example 2.** Context: Huong Giang commented on the way Noway played the interactional game in the show.

*Em có cảm giác như là chứng minh rằng là ta chỉ đang play cái **game** này thôi chứ không có ý định gì với cả chị nha.* (I feel like he was proving that we are simply playing this game and he did not have any intention with me.) (Huong Giang)

As can be seen in the above examples, “game” carried two different meanings when it was code-switched in Vietnamese utterances. As indicated in Example 1, its first meaning was online games which was featured in a professional gamer’s career. Its other meaning was observed in Example 2, which referred to an entertaining activity or sport in general.

In terms of phrase level, there were 14 different English-switched phrases used during the show, with the distribution of each token illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The distribution of intrasentential codeswitching at phrase level

The most switched phrase was ‘Samsung Galaxy’ with the meaning of a product name for a smartphone model, occurring six times in the data. The high frequency of this token could be attributed to the fact that Samsung sponsored the show and ‘Samsung Galaxy’ was required to be introduced multiple times during the show. Such names for objects also appeared in other tokens as ‘camera macro’ (i.e. a name of camera technology in smartphones) with three instances, ‘Vie Channel’ (i.e. a name of a Vietnamese television channel) with two instances, and ‘B Design and Tattoo’ (i.e. a name of a tattoo studio) with one instance. These kinds of proper noun phrases for products and services were gradually becoming popular not only on media content but also on advertisement banners and shop signs. In terms of other phrases in the data, they were related to the youth’s pop culture. “Hot boy” and “bad boy” were popular in social media content and youth magazines. In addition, “comment story” was used by Facebook users, one of the most prevalent social platforms in Vietnam. For “pop ballad”, as this is a genre in the pop music industry, it was switched with the English original form rather than adapted with the Vietnamese language features.

Apart from word and phrase levels, intrasentential CS also included those related to acronyms and abbreviations. The only occurrence of abbreviation was “Insta”, which is a short form of an app named Instagram, as in Example 3.

**Example 3.** Context: Erik explained why he knew Yura Po (a male participant).

*Em biết Insta bạn ấy.* (I know his Instagram account.) (Erik)

Besides, three acronyms were switched with a total occurrence of nine, including ‘MV’ (i.e. music video), ‘SIM’ (i.e. Subscriber Identity Module), and LGBT (IQ) (i.e. Less, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual, and Queer). The examples of these three acronyms are given in Example 4, 5, and 6.

**Example 4.** Context: Duc Phuc explained why he found a male participant familiar.

*Khi mà đi xem MV với cả phim chiếu rạp thì em cũng có thấy anh này rồi.* (While watching MVs and movies in the cinema, I have seen this man.) (Duc Phuc)

**Example 5.** Context: Tran Thanh referred to what a salesman once persuaded him to buy their product.

*Anh ấy nói “À không sao anh. Bên em cũng có bán luôn cái SIM số đẹp”.* (He said, “That’s okay. We also have SIM cards with special numbers”.) (Tran Thanh)

**Example 6.** Context: Cara showed her respect to a male participant.

*Em, bản thân em, em thật sự rất yêu quý những người trong cộng đồng LGBT.* (I, myself, really love the people in the LGBT community.) (Cara)

## 4.2 Intersentential CS

32 out of 37 tokens of intersentential CS were used fully in English by one interlocutor in one uttering turn. In this case, the switching acts as a response to the other interlocutor’s Vietnamese utterance, as in Example 7. This example is also an illustration of the switches of incomplete sentences (lack of an element of subject or predicate). This tendency was recognized in the majority of intersentential CS tokens (27 out of 37 tokens).

**Example 7.** Context: Huong Giang disagreed with Hoa Minzy on the comment on the personality of Gia Bao, one of the male players.

*Không đến mức đấy đâu.* (Not to that extent.) (Hoa Minzy)

*Too dangerous.* (Huong Giang)

The other five intersentential switches were recognized in the middle of an utterance of one interlocutor, as in Example 8.

**Example 8.** Context: Tran Thanh gave advice to the main character.

*Cái nhân vật này nè, quen ai thì người đó phải đa nhiệm phải rất bao dung phải biết chăm sóc lo lắng. That’s it. Là vậy đó.* (Tran Thanh)

(For men like him, his girlfriend needs to be multi-tasked, tolerant, and caring. That’s it. That’s the way it is.) (Tran Thanh)

As demonstrated in Example 8, the switch was in the form of a complete sentence, which was employed scarcely by the interlocutors in the show, with only ten out of 37 tokens of intersentential instances.

## 4.3 Tag CS

All the cases of tag switching in the data were interjections. Specifically, there were nine different main tokens found in the speeches during the show, and the one applied most frequently was ‘okay’ with 25 times repeated in the data. 11 instances of them were pronounced as /,o’ke/ instead of /,oʊ’kei/ (as in American English) or /,əʊ’kei/ (as in British English). This mispronunciation may be due to the fact that /,o’ke/ is easier to pronounce for Vietnamese people than the original pronunciation in the native English language. Additionally, the ‘okay’ switches tended to be used at the beginning of the utterance for topic shifting, as in Example 9.



**Example 9.** Context: Tran Thanh signalled the end of the comment section of the advisers and shifted to the voting part of the audience.

*Okay, mời quý vị khán giả bình chọn.* (Tran Thanh)

(Okay, please vote.) (Tran Thanh)

Similar to intersentential CS, tag switches also occurred in the middle of the utterance or covered a whole uttering turn of a speaker, as demonstrated in Example 10 and Example 11, respectively.

**Example 10.** Context: Duc Phuc strongly agreed with Huong Giang’s comment on Trong Khanh, one of the male players.

*Yeah, oh wow wow, đúng đúng đúng.* (Duc Phuc)

(Yeah, oh wow wow, exactly exactly exactly.) (Duc Phuc)

**Example 11.** Context: Tran Thanh invited Gia Bao, one of the male players, to reveal himself and Duc Phuc was surprised.

*Mời Gia Bảo.* (Please, Gia Bao) (Tran Thanh)

*Wow, oh my god.* (Duc Phuc)

## 5. Conclusion

The present study investigates the use of Vietnamese–English CS patterns in the Vietnamese TV show ‘Nguoi Ay La Ai’. There are three key findings in this research. Firstly, intrasentential CS was applied the most during the show, with the noun tokens being the most popular. Secondly, intersentential switches could appear in the middle of a speaker’s uttering turn or cover his/her entire turn in English; and the latter was more popular than the former. Thirdly, tag switches were mostly interjections in which the token ‘okay’ was recognized with the highest frequency, and some of its instances had a change in phonetic sound similar to Vietnamese pronunciation.

This research has contributed to the knowledge and statistics of CS phenomenon in general and the CS instances in Vietnamese TV shows in particular. Based on the research findings, some implications are suggested. First, in terms of the mass media industry, a corpus of code-switched words, phrases, clauses, and sentences may help TV presenters themselves adjust their use of CS depending on the show’s context and target audience. It is highly recommended that show producers and presenters take into consideration how languages should be used in their shows appropriately to cater to the audiences from a variety of backgrounds. Also, further research in this area is needed to provide a more comprehensive view of the CS phenomenon in the current Vietnamese society, where English is increasingly popular.

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## CÁC XU HƯỚNG CHUYỂN MÃ NGÔN NGỮ VIỆT-ANH TRONG CHƯƠNG TRÌNH TRUYỀN HÌNH GIẢI TRÍ VIỆT NAM

**Tóm tắt:** Trong thời gian gần đây, hiện tượng chuyển mã ngôn ngữ đã thu hút sự chú ý của nhiều nhà ngôn ngữ học trên thế giới. Tuy nhiên, những nghiên cứu về hiện tượng chuyển đổi này từ Tiếng Việt sang Tiếng Anh vẫn còn hạn chế, và hầu như chưa có một nghiên cứu nào xem xét dữ liệu từ các chương trình truyền hình Việt Nam. Vì vậy, nghiên cứu này được tiến hành nhằm xem xét các xu hướng chuyển mã ngôn ngữ Việt-Anh trong chương trình “Người Ấy Là Ai”. Dữ liệu được thu thập từ một tập chương trình dài 138 phút và sau đó được phân tích dựa vào khung lý thuyết của Poplack (1980). Nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng người chơi tham gia chương trình sử dụng chuyển mã trong câu (intrasentential switches) nhiều nhất trong các xu hướng chuyển mã. Một số gợi ý liên quan đến cách sử dụng chuyển mã một cách phù hợp trong lĩnh vực truyền thông và giải trí cũng sẽ được đưa ra.

*Từ khóa:* Ngôn ngữ học xã hội, chuyển mã ngôn ngữ, xu hướng, phân loại, chuyển mã trong câu, chuyển mã giữa các câu, chuyển mã thể, chương trình truyền hình, Tiếng Việt