Switching for Power: How Code-Switching Shapes Pakistani Political Talk Shows

Aqsa Batool
MPhil English (Linguistics), Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha
aqsabatool1314@gmail.com

Dr. Hafiz Ahmad Bilal
Professor, Higher Education Department, Punjab
ahmadbilal.uos@gmail.com

Dr. Ijaz Asghar
Professor/Chairperson, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha
ijsaz.asghar@uos.edu.pk

Dr. Naveed Nawaz Ahmad
Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha
naveed.nawaz@uos.edu.pk
Corresponding Author: * Dr. Naveed Nawaz Ahmad naveed.nawaz@uos.edu.pk

Abstract

Codeswitching refers to the act of changing between two or more languages or dialects in a conversation and is a common characteristic of multilingual societies, Pakistan is no exception. In the Pakistani talk shows, code-switching has various communicative and social purposes including the linguistic diversity, cultural identity, and social hierarchies of the viewers and the speakers. This paper will examine the different uses of code-switching in televised talk shows and the theme addressed in signaling group membership, asserting solidarity or authority, making points, clarifying meaning, and controlling interpersonal relationships. The chosen talk shows, in Urdu and English media, were used to gather data and apply the qualitative discourse analysis to investigate code switching cases and their contextual meaning. The results indicate that hosts and guests often alternate languages in a strategic way to entertain the audience, bargain courtesy, establish social identity, and meet various needs of different audience groups. Also, code-switching is used as one of the stylistic devices to make the rhetorical effect, humor, or emotional outburst more effective. The study highlights the relevance of sociolinguistic value of code switching in media discourse which reflects the larger cultural, social, and pragmatic aspects in language choice. The insights are part of the interpretation of multilingual communication strategies in Pakistani media and their contribution to the creation of the discourse of people.

Keywords: Codeswitching, talk shows, solidarity, authority, group membership

Introduction

A powerful means of communication, identity formation and social interaction is language. In multilingual communities such as Pakistan where two or more languages are used concurrently, however, the decision to use a particular language in communication may have a more profound social, cultural, and practical context. Code-switching is one of such linguistic phenomena that have received a lot of focus in sociolinguistic studies. Code-switching can be described as the tendency to switch language or language groups in the course of a conversation, a sentence, or a discourse. This is not only a linguistic habit, but it has a variety of communicative purposes, which represent the social identity, cultural belonging and the needs of the speaker in different situations. In Pakistan, where Urdu and English and

Punjabi, Sindh, Pashto languages collide in the various social fields, code switching is a common and natural element of daily communication. It is most evident in the mass media, particularly in TV talk shows, which are not only a form of entertainment, but also a medium through which people discuss issues of politics, social issues and cultural issues publicly (Asghar et al., 2021).

Pakistan has been characterized by talk shows in which there is interactive communication between the hosts, guests and in some cases live audiences. The language variety of such shows is such that the participants must be able to move between languages strategically, which makes the communication process dynamic and interesting. An example is that English can be used to show power, modernity, or technical expertise, whereas Urdu or local languages can be used in order to build rapport, show solidarity, or emotional attachment to the audience. However, code-switching in talk shows is not incidental, as it is a conscious and contextually motivated option that can be characterized by particular social, psychological, and rhetorical objectives. It serves as a negotiating tool by speakers to establish meanings, take a social position, cope with politeness, and accommodate all audiences with varying linguistic abilities (Tariq et al., 2013).

The sociolinguistic research has been long accepting the multifunctional nature of code-switching in discourse. Myers-Scotton (1993) and Gumperz (1982) stress that the process of code-switching is tightly connected with the social identity, the relations of power and the communicative purpose. The phenomenon acquires further layers of meaning in case of Pakistani talk shows because of the play of colonial legacies, educational policies, and media practices. A case in point is the English language, which is associated with prestige, professionalism, and elite, and Urdu as a national language and one that connects with the masses in general. The interchange of these languages enables the participants of the talk show to cross social hierarchies and highlights cultural identities and communicate with the audiences of various social levels. In addition, code-switching may also serve as a stylistic and pragmatic tool and allow speakers to pick out the message, add humor, explain complicated concepts, or convey emotional undertones.

The other significant aspect of code-switching in Pakistani talk shows is its contribution to the participation of the audience. In talk shows, there is a tendency of the hosts to alternate different codes to cater to various groups of audience at the same time. As an example, the content raised in Urdu can be enhanced with English terms to attract the educated urban viewers, whereas the inserts with regional language can be inserted to reach the viewers in particular provinces. Such evocation of alternation makes it more inclusive and relatable to a language-diverse audience. Additionally, the possibility of switching languages may show that the speaker perceives social environment and interpersonal relations and reveals the formality, solidarity, or humor according to the situation. It is therefore an important characteristic of practical ability in televised talk.

The current research will examine the roles of code switching in Pakistani talk show both in sociolinguistic and communicative dimensions. Through the cases of language alternation, the study will attempt to learn how code-switching leads to the effectiveness of talk show discourse as a whole, its role in identity formation, communication with the audience, and the expression of rhetoric. The paper also looks into code switching patterns and motivation, which gives an understanding of how multilingual communication is carried out in the media and how it depicts society and culture in the wider picture.

Overall, the phenomenon of code-switching in Pakistani talk shows is not just a language phenomenon, but a socially and culturally coded process that manifests the multilingual nature of the reality of the country. Speakers negotiate meaning, exert power, express feelings and relate to audiences, through strategic use in subtle ways. The knowledge of these functions offers a good insight into the nature of the

language in media discourse as well as the socio cultural factors contributing towards communication in Pakistan. The study forms part of the continuum of sociolinguistic studies on code-switching that highlight the practicality of the issue in the modern media.

Research Questions

Research questions are:

- What are the sociolinguistics and communicative functions of code-switching in Pakistani political talk shows?
- How hosts and guests use code-switching to construct and negotiate social identities during political debates?
- In what ways code-switching serve for managing power relations, politeness and authority in political talk shows?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In sociolinguistics, code-switching has been generally mentioned as alternating between two or more languages or dialects during one conversation. The foundational literature by Gumperz (1982) defines code-switching as a conversational technique that signifies social meaning, group identity or stance of the speaker. The Markedness Model by Myers-Scotton (1993) also adds that the speakers should use a specific code when it suits a social role or a situational expectation. Such models continue to play a key role in explaining code-switching in media where speakers are very conscious of audience and social positioning as it is in case of talk shows.

And local languages living in both the high and low. This has been investigated in various genres of media and has presented the background to analyze the talk shows.

Pakistani Media Code-Switching

The studies of code switching within Pakistani television have largely concentrated on the advertisements and news giving an understanding of the motivation and social consequences of language alternation. Riaz (2019) conducted the analysis of seventy (n=70) Pakistani TV commercials that appeared during 2011-2015 and discovered that the English language had a strong impact on the Urdu language due to code-mixing and code-switching. Her quantitative and qualitative analysis proposed that English is not only applied in technical or trendy use but also in the spirit of modernity and prestige.

Equally, Imran and Hussain (2024) analyzed code-mixing in television advertisements of the large Pakistani TV channels that included PTV, GEO, ARY, and HUM. Their mixed-methods investigation revealed a lot of code-switching patterns that occurred and how language use affects English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners. They discovered that this type of media talk does influence the linguistic behaviors and attitudes of the viewers that may affect their identity and language preference.

Other than commercials, the social aspects of code-switching have also been examined. Khan (2014) has done a sociolinguistic study of intra-sentential code-switching in Pakistani television advertisements and especially beauty and health product advertisements. According to her findings, the linguistic change points are social category such as gender, class, education and geographic background, that is to say that advertisers play with bilingual discourse to appeal to various segments of consumers.

These media analyses demonstrate code-switching in the Pakistani television is not an accidental linguistic event. Instead, it is closely connected with social identity, consumer attractiveness, and classes.

The Code-Switching in Political Talk Shows

Although advertising research prevails in the literature, code switching in Pakistani talk shows more so political shows is also becoming an important field of research. Shah and Un Nisa (2024) have performed a content analysis of political talk shows (such as Jirga on Geo News and 11th Hour on ARY News) in order to analyze the Urdu-English code-switching mechanisms of dispute-defeating. Based on such theories as the Translanguaging Theory and the Markedness Model, they discovered that speakers consciously switch to English to use language to convey authority or credibility, whereas to convey emotionality and cultural affiliation, they utilize Urdu. With their analysis, they discover that code-switching is a strategic process in dealing with face-threatening action: the disagreement is mitigated by using polite contradiction and euphemism in the English language, but they preserve the culture rapport through Urdu.

This observation is particularly beneficial to your research since it has a direct relation to code-switching to discourse functions in talk shows, i.e. code-switching is not merely decorative, but is employed with tactile strategies of negotiating power, politeness and relationships between speakers.

Code-Switching within Other Pakistani Realms of Discourse

The sociolinguistic landscape of Pakistan has also been broadly researched and therefore informs us about code-switching in the media. In their example, Baloch, Ali, and Noor (2019) explored code-mixing and code-switching in Urdu news stations. They conducted a study on the hegemony of English in news broadcasts, which showed that anchors and specialists usually introduce English terms and words into the Urdu programs. According to their qualitative investigation, the given bilingualism is correlated with professionalism and perceived credibility which implies that there is a prestige-based drive to code-switch.

Shimawi and Ullah (2025) analyzed fifty Pakistani urban novel works that used the code switching and contended that it serves as an identity sign, assisting authors in depicting the class, ethnicity, gender and urban modernity. This gives another cultural aspect to the phenomenon: code-switching is not merely functional, but symbolic, it carries a multilayered social meaning in fictional texts.

Similarly, Khan et al. (2025) have investigated code-mixing in the novel Holy Woman by Qaisra Shahraz and contended that the mixing of English and Urdu within the novel is a socio-cultural phenomenon in Pakistan. They conclude that code-mixing of literature is beneficial to release cultural identity and fill in lexical gaps, thus, indicating that the use of both languages is entrenched in Pakistan linguistic consciousness.

A recent study by Kanwal, Rashid, and Khan also makes use of the variationist theory proposed by Labov and the concept of linguistic capital as suggested by Bourdieu to examine the concept of code-switching and code-mixing in the Pakistani dramas. Their results indicated morphological code-switching is more typical in older plays, whereas contemporary plays exhibit intra-sentential code-switching. This time shift is an indication of the change in social norms regarding the mixing of languages and possibly shifting power dynamics as the English language gains greater penetration into the popular media.

METHODOLOGY

The method of the research is supposed to scrutinize the use of code-switching in Pakistani talk shows carefully. We also applied a qualitative method since it allows us to investigate the use of language, social interaction of people and how people communicate in actual dialogues. This approach is effective to consider code-switching since it is an act that occurs at a particular situation and is affected by a social aspect. It requires a closer study of the language and intent of that language as well as its social functions.

In this study, the descriptive qualitative approach is employed to examine and analyse actual dialogues of talk shows. It is founded on the sociolinguistic and discourse analysis that assists in understanding why and how people switch their language. The concepts of Translanguaging Theory and the Markedness Model of Myers-Scotton are also applied to the research to comprehend the social and practical motivations of the language shifting when talking with each other.

Video clips of some of the Pakistani talk shows provide the most basic information to be used in this study. We applied a purposeful approach to select the suitable shows, which is based on the admiration of the shows, languages, and the variety of the people in the shows. To ensure that we had a wide variety of conversations to discuss, we chose both entertainment and political based shows. Overall, we obtained 30 hours of recordings of different episodes on these channels as GEO News, ARY News, HUM TV, and PTV, which aired between 2022 and 2025.

All the episodes were transcribed verbatim as said with special attention given to record switching of the Urdu, English and the local language.

Non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, emphasis, laughing, and body motions were also noted down as they tend to occur with switching of languages and aid in demonstrating how language works in communication. Our method of writing this all was according to the normal guidelines of analyzing conversations to make everything consistent, correct and true to what was actually spoken to us.

Two primary approaches were used to study the written data; these include qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis. The data inspection was done through a series of steps:

1. Locating Code-Switching Examples: Each time the person switched languages in a sentence, in between sentences or at the beginning or end of the conversation was identified.

2. Classification of the Reasons: The reasons why language shift occurred were grouped based on the work of Gumperz (1982) and Myers- Scotton (1993). These reasons contained such things as demonstrating group affiliation, expressing dominance, clarifying a point better, being courteous, making a joke, or attempting to resolve a conflict.

3. Checking the Situation: The context and the background of every language switch were studied. This involved who was talking (whether it was a host or a guest), what was being discussed, the audience and the progress of the discussion.

4. Identifying Common Trends: The trends in the manner of using language were observed. These encompassed the languages that were favored in various categories of situations, style use of language and the language used in relation to such aspects as gender, occupation and a level of education.

5. Interpreting the Meaning: The results were related to the language and society theory and media discourses. This assisted in the explanation of the patterns within the context of bigger social and cultural tendencies in Pakistan.

Reliability and Validity

Different researchers check the coding of code-switching examples. When there were differences in how they coded, they talked about it and came to an agreement. The results of the study were made more trustworthy by looking at data from different types of talk shows, episodes channels. This help show patterns that are common in the conversations of Pakistani talk shows.

Limitations

The method used is strong for studying code-switching but there are some things to keep in mind. The study just looked at televised talk shows, so it may not show that how people speak in everyday conversations or online. Also, since the study is based on interpretations, the results are tied to the specific situations studied and it may not apply to all kinds of media in Pakistan.

FINDINGS

It is found that Pakistani talk shows study demonstrates that there are numerous reasons attributed to communication and language in code-switching. It demonstrates the complexity of language use in Pakistan. The study reveals that language switching is deliberate among both the hosts and the guests, and it depends on the context. This is not simply by coincidence. Various forms of code-switching such as changing in a sentence, between sentences, or the entire conversation were observed in the various kinds of talk shows, including political, entertainment and social discussion programs.

Among the reasons why people change languages is to demonstrate that they are well versed and in control. Hosts, experts, and highly educated guests tend to use English when discussing such things as politics, economics or technical problems. Indicatively, political pundits change to English when they refer to figures, legislations or global happenings. This is equivalent to the concept of Myers-Scotton (1993) that individuals adopt a more prominent language to demonstrate that they are in a respected position. Through the English language, the speakers demonstrate professionalism and competency, thus, becoming more reliable to the subjects. To make the message easier to comprehend by more people, Urdu is generally employed to clarify concepts, narrate or give a sentence an introduction.

Code-switching assists individuals in revealing their belonging to a group and common cultural values. Speakers tend to alternate between the local languages or English and Urdu so as to reach various categories of people. As an illustration, when negotiating on social matters, guests and hosts may speak in Urdu when discussing individual experiences, emotional experiences, or discussing national pride. The local language makes the conversation more personal and they will be better related to the culture and values of the audience. In other cases, speakers can speak the phrases of the regional language, such as Punjabi or Sindhi to support the particular region, particularly when they are speaking about the problems which concern this region.

Important ideas or explaining something can also be emphasized with the help of code-switching. Individuals tend to transform into English in Urdu sentences to emphasise important points, clarify the technical terms or simplify abstract notions. An example would be when a host speaks in Urdu but defines legal or scientific words using English. In so doing, they ensure the message is easy to

understand. It is also practiced when code-switching to repeat or paraphrase what one is saying in the other language, or it will be easier to understand by the listeners. This demonstrates that code-switching is useful in enabling more effective communication in media discourses.

Code-switching was a common phenomenon within political and debate based talk shows as a negotiating tactic to control conflict and remain polite. Visitors and hosts tended to switch to English in their message of critiques, counterarguments or high-contexted statements. This change is used as a softening tool, making the face-threatening effect of disagreement milder and keeping things in order. To give an example a guest can start the critique in Urdu and change to English when making a powerful point, which indicates professionalism without causing direct confrontation. This observation is in agreement with other prior studies (Shah & Un Nisa, 2024) which have pointed out the use of English in face-management and politeness strategies.

When the subject of the show is more entertainment oriented, then code-switching can be used to produce humor and bring a flair of rhetoric and make the language more appealing. The switching of Urdu and English is common between the hosts and the guests to create humorous situations, emphasize the key aspects of a joke, or make a statement more dramatic. As a case in point, a star may narrate a funny tale in Urdu, and use English as a punch line or a twist to the story. This demonstrates that code-switching is not only the means of sharing the information but also the opportunity to become creative and ensure that the audience is engaged so that the conversation becomes livelier and more exciting.

The other notable observation is the fact that code-switching is effective in reaching a broader audience. The participants of the talk shows tend to alternate languages so as to ensure that all the people, those who know a lot of English and those who do not even know English can follow. The connection to the city, well-educated viewers is usually made in English, whereas local language phrases and Urdu are used to make more people included. The ability to blend various languages may enable speakers to retain attention of the audience, ensure they feel involved and help their message to be comprehended by the various groups.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that accommodation to the audience is a major factor, which causes one to change language. The various languages used by the participants are used intentionally so as to suit the needs of diverse people who may speak different languages. The English language will be used to target the educated and urban-based audience, whereas Urdu and regional languages will be used to ensure that more people can comprehend the content. This indicates that talk shows are audience oriented and the appropriate choice of language keeps people involved and engaged. These results indicate the influence of social and cultural factors on the use of language in the Pakistani media. Research also concludes that the way individuals alternating languages differs with regard to the kind of show.

In political talk shows, individuals have more formal and premeditated language switches to cope with arguments, demonstrate expertise, and work with tough subjects. In social conversation and entertainment, individuals interchange more words in one sentence so as to make the conversation amusing and stylish besides reaching the audience. Although the methods of switching are different, the primary goal of switching languages remains the same in all types of shows: to communicate better, place people in social contexts, and establish relationships with people.

To sum up, it is a deliberate and intentional means of communication with people as language switching in Pakistani talk shows. It demonstrates that Pakistan is a multilingual nation, assists to control

relationships, enhances the delivery of messages, and involves various types of viewers. This paper contributes to the existing knowledge in the field of language operation in media by demonstrating the communicative and social value of switching languages. The knowledge of language switching used in talk shows provides a more in-depth insight into the nature of bilingual communication, how individuals are manifesting their identity, and how the media are engaged with by audiences in Pakistan. It also demonstrates the significance of considering language as well as cultural differences in studying media and the tight connection between language, social and communication in the modern Pakistani television.

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