Code-Switching and Social Prestige: A Study of English–Urdu Bilinguals

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative research paper looks into the correlation between code-switching and social prestige among English-Urdu bi-lingual learners at Women University of Bagh, Azad Kashmir. The multilingual the Pakistani context has popularly viewed English as the language of power, education and social mobility although the Urdu is the national language and an identity marker. The research has a goal to investigate the perception of English-Urdu code switching in students and whether it is related to increased social status, confidence, and academic competence. A questionnaire was designed based on a Likert-scale format to collect data on 300 undergraduate and postgraduate students using a structured questionnaire. Statistical analysis was used to investigate language use and perception of prestige with statistical analysis, both descriptive statistics and correlation statistics. It is believed that the findings will indicate that there is a positive relationship between code switching to English and perceived social prestige, especially within the academic and formal settings. The research also adds to the sociolinguistic literature because it offers empirical data on the prestige-related motive of the code-switching among female university students in Azad Kashmir.

Keywords: Code-switching, Social Prestige, Bilingualism, English-Urdu, Higher Education.

INTRODUCTION

The normal process involving the alteration of two or more languages in a particular communicative occurrence is known as code switching which is a common and systematic process in multilingual societies (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Early linguistic thought regarded code-switching as an indication of linguistic deficiency, but modern sociolinguistic studies have identified it as a complicated and regulated practice, which is influenced by social, cultural and ideological issues (Auer, 1998; Romaine, 1995). In multilingual situations, code-switching can be used to regulate interactions, identity and social meaning negotiating between the speakers and the listeners.

The case of Pakistan is particularly fascinating to analyze code switching because of the complicated ecology of languages that are used here where English, Urdu, and many local languages coexist. English, which was brought by the British colonialists, has not lost its hegemony in the high in life sectors like higher education, government, law, and professional communication (Rahman, 1996; Rahman, 2002). Even after the release of colonialism, English remains to be a powerful language that is linked with the issues of power, modernity, and socio-economic benefits. Even though Urdu, as the national language and the sign of similar cultural identity, has a relative lower status in institutional and academic hierarchies, it plays a significant role in the life of the state.

Disproportionate balance of power between the English and the Urdu language has led to a linguistic form of hierarchy where English has a higher symbolic and material worth. Language is said to work as a symbolic capital, according to Bourdieu (1991) and speakers with a good linguistic resource attain social recognition and institutional privilege. English is such capital in Pakistan providing access to educational opportunities, employment and social mobility (Mahboob, 2009). As a result, the choice of language can hardly be neutral: it is rooted in the relations of power, as well as in social stratification.

In this sociolinguistic paradigm, the concept of English-Urdu code-switching becomes a tactical communicative activity. Bilingual speakers usually move to English in order to label education, competence, and professional identity and use Urdu in order to show solidarity, closeness, and cultural affiliation (Holmes, 2013; Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015). Code-switching therefore enables speakers to strike a balancing act between the competing social meanings and identify themselves with social identities that are socially accepted. The Markedness Model by Myers-Scotton (1993) has been used to explain this behavior by proposing that speakers will choose linguistic code depending on social rewards they would receive in a particular interaction.

The issue of social prestige is at the centre of language attitude and bilingual behavior. Prestige in language is the social worth of some language or variety in a speech community (Trudgill, 2000). It has always been demonstrated that speakers of high-prestige languages are considered to be smarter and more confident and socially competent (Labov, 1972; Holmes, 2013). In Pakistan, education in English has been promoted with elite education and a high socio-economic background, contributing to the prestige of English even more (Shamim, 2011).

Universities can be considered as significant places where the connection between code-switching and social prestige can be studied. Being institutions where English, as a rule, is the language of instruction, universities establish the conditions where students are supposed to show their proficiency in English and at the same time in the everyday communication field, the students should speak Urdu. Such a bi-lingual environment promotes the frequent use of code-switching in classrooms, presentations and interactions with classmates (Canagararajah, 2011). Research indicates that students tend to use English to confer scholarly power and intellectual worth particularly when using it in official academic situations (Heller, 2007).

There is also the intersection of gender with the use of the language and prestige. Code-switching can also be used by female students, especially, when it comes to negotiating visibility, confidence, and legitimacy in academia (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013). In conservative or semi-urban situations, the language used may serve as an empowerment and social aspiration. The University of Bagh, Azar Kashmir, is a women institution that provides a special setting in which to examine these dynamics due to the fact that it attracts students with an assortment of rural and urban roots with different levels of exposure to English-media education.

Interactional sociolinguistics also describes how code-switching works as a cue of contextualization, which marks the change in formality, authority and social alignment (Gumperz, 1982). Introduction of English in the Urdu discourse can have some meaning other than linguistic content and this can include sophistication, modernity and educational status. Such symbolic connotations lead to the impression that code-switching is one of the indicators of social prestige in both academic and social interactions (Auer, 1998).

Although there is a lot of research on the topic of code-switching around the world, we can hardly find quantitative research on how this phenomenon is associated with social prestige in Pakistan, especially among female students of universities in Azad Kashmir. A lot of the literature available has been based on qualitative research where they analyze discourse functions but do not attempt to employ statistical analysis

to study language attitudes and perceptions of prestige (Romaine, 1995; Canagararajah, 2011). This is a gap in research due to the absence of empirical and large-scale quantitative data.

This gap is intended to be filled by the current research by quantitatively investigating English-Urdu code-switching and its relationship with social prestige among students of Women University of Bagh. The study will give empirical data on the perceptions of code-switching and its function as a socially esteemed linguistic process in higher education when analyzed based on the answers of a significant number of students. The dynamics will be very important in constructing inclusive language policies and pedagogical strategies that recognizes bilingualism as an asset and not a weakness.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate how and how often English-Urdu code -switching occurs in students in Women University of Bagh, Azad Kashmir.

2. To explore the interaction between English/Urdu code-switching and the perceived social prestige amongst university students.

Research Questions

1. What is the frequency of the English-Urdu code-switching between academic and social students at Women University of Bagh?

2. Does the English-Urdu code-switching have a significant association with the perceived social prestige among the students?

Research Hypotheses

H1: English-Urdu code-switching is significantly related with perceived social prestige among Women University of Bagh students in Azar Kashmir.

H2: More often students who practise more English-Urdu code-switching believe that they are more socially prestigious both academically and socially.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of code-switching has been a major subject matter of sociolinguistic studies over a number of decades, especially in multilingual and postcolonial communities. Initial research of the bilingualism process mainly regarded the occurrence of code-switching as an indicator of the deficient language proficiency, but this image has radically changed with the emergence of sociolinguistics as a science. One of the earliest researchers to conceptualize code-switching as an important conversational strategy as opposed to linguistic interference was Gumperz (1982). He claimed that code-switching is a contextualization cue used by speakers to indicate topic, participant roles or social relationships. This view became the basis of subsequent studies which placed more importance on social and interactional role of code-switching.

Romaine (1995) also elaborated on the concept of code-switching by putting it in context with larger trends of using two languages. She pointed out that code-switching is controlled and predetermined by social norms, but not by random mixes of languages. Romaine states that bilingual speakers alternate between codes to accomplish certain communicative intentions, including emphasis, clarification or emotion. These

initial theoretical interventions disputed the deficit-based approaches and put code-switching on the status of a valid field into linguistics.

The Markedness Model of Myers-Scotton (1993) is a powerful framework of explaining why speakers use certain languages in certain situations. According to the model, speakers make rational language choices depending on the expected social rewards. The unmarked choices, in this system, coincide with social norms whereas the marked choices are strategically employed to renegotiate the social relationships. Code-switching is thus made purposeful in terms of which speakers index the authority, distance, solidarity or prestige. The model is mostly applicable in societies where a particular language is more socially powerful than others.

Bourdieu (1991) has developed a significant theory of language and power by introducing the notion of language capital. According to Bourdieu, language is not just a communication tool, it is a type of symbolic power that provides entry into social and institutional resources. Languages which are connected with the prevailing social groups are given more value and the rest are sidelined. Multilingual societies also have those who have command of the prestigious languages, and they become more educated and authoritative. This theoretical perspective comes in particularly handy when looking at English-Urdu code-switching in Pakistan, where English is a high-vie status language.

Investigations on language prestige always indicate that not every language is social equal. Trudgill (2000) describes the construction of prestige as having a social factor and mostly associated with the speakers of a certain language other than the linguistic characteristics. The research on social stratification of language by Labov (1972) unveiled the fact that speakers tend to adjust their speech to fit prestigious varieties when addressing formal situations. These results confirm the idea that code-switching to a high-prestige language like English can boost the social standing of a speaker.

In the postcolonial world, English is usually accorded a privileged situation since it has been identified with mobility and economic opportunity across the globe. According to Phillipson (1992), the overpowering of English languages is what he refers to as linguistic imperialism since this domination contributes to societal inequalities. English remains a gate keeping language in South Asia and it is used to access education and employment opportunities. Due to this, bilingual speakers can code-switch to identify themselves with elite identities and aspirations.

Rahman (1996, 2002) is one of the sociolinguistic theorists who have examined the sociolinguistic role of English in Pakistan and the large gap in English-medium and Urdu-medium education. Rahman says that English is intertwined with elite groups of people and serves as a sign of prestige and authority. Even symbolically significant as the national language, Urdu does not have the identical socio-economic advantage. This asymmetrical linguistic situation promotes the use of English-Urdu code-switching especially in schools.

Mahboob (2009) also explores the ideological stance of English in Pakistan and states that English is frequently produced as both a language of modernity and competence. His studies indicate that when speakers use the English language or code-switching, they are often viewed as smarter and confident. These images support the status of English and shape the attitude of students and teachers towards languages.

The educational settings were also studied in terms of code switching. Canagarajah (2011) postulates that code-switching in classrooms is better viewed as an educational tool and not as an issue. His work shows that, the bilingual students employ code-switching in order to negotiate the academic content and in building knowledge in a collaborative way. Equally, researches within the ESL and EFL settings indicate that comprehension and engagement through strategic code-switching is possible (Lin, 2013).

Universities, specifically, are a good place where the connection between code-switching and social prestige can be studied. According to Heller (2007), academic institutions tend to strengthen the hierarchies within the language by attaching a particular language to intellectual authority. Students can thus engage in the code-switching process in order to exhibit academic competence and identify with the institutional standards. It is particularly pertinent to situations where English is taught, but it is not the native language of the majority of students.

Another variable that has been highly relevant in the sociolinguistic research is gender. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013), the use of language is inextricably connected to the gendered identities and social requirements. Women speakers can use the use of prestinguous forms of language to demonstrate their competence and ensure legitimacy in academic settings. The context of code-switching to English in conservative or semi-urban settings may serve as empowerment and social mobility of women.

Research dedicated to South Asian societies indicates that there are positive tendencies of female students towards English and code-switching as it is associated with confidence and independence (Shamim, 2011). The results show that code-switching is not merely a linguistic process but also a means of negotiating gendered power relationships in the educational environment.

Although there is an increasing number of studies on code-switching, most of the studies in Pakistan depend on qualitative research like discourse analysis and ethnographic studies. Although the approaches are useful in revealing a lot about communicative functions, they do not, in most cases, offer empirical measurements of language attitudes and perceptions of prestige. There are few quantitative studies to statistically determine the correlation of code-switching and social prestige especially in countries like Azad Kashmir.

What is more, the literature is more inclined to mixed-gender or urban populations, and female-only institutions are under-researched. The Women University of Bagh provides a unique setting in which the language practices can be studied in terms of the absence of the mixed-gender interactions. Since there is a gap in the knowledge about the intersection of prestige, identity, and language in the English-Urdu code-switching among female university students, the study of English-Urdu language code-switching in this context can be useful.

Overall, as shown by the literature available, code-switching is an activity that is socially significant, affected by power, prestige, and identity. Linguistic capital and markedness, and interactional sociolinguistics theories are theoretical bases that provide solid conceptual explanations of why people can switch languages when bilingual. Nevertheless, quantitative studies that address the connection between code-switching and social prestige in Pakistani tertiary education are, by all appearances, inexistent in Azar Kashmir. The current research aims to fill this gap with empirical data on the role of the English-Urdu code-switching as the sign of social prestige in female university students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used in this study is quantitative research design to test the two variables that include the relationship between English-Urdu code-switching and the perceived social prestige among the students in Women University of Bagh, Azad Kashmir. The quantitative method suits well since it enables the researcher to draw quantifiable data in a large sample and make statistical inferences to establish correlations among variables.

Population and Sample

The study population included all undergraduate and postgraduate students of Women University of Bagh. Convenience sampling was used to pick a sample of 300 students. The sample covered students of different departments and academic years in order to have diversity in language proficiency, socio-economic status, and experience of English-mediated instruction.

Instrumentation

The data was collected through a structured questionnaire that was designed in the course of this study. The questionnaire was in three parts. The demographic data were gathered in the first part which included such items as age, academic program and year of study. The second part found out the frequency of English-Urdu code-switching in both academic and social life using a five-point Likert scale that ranged between 1 (never) and 5 (always). The third one measured the perceptions of students towards social prestige connected to the code-switching in a five-point Likert-scale with the values of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Two linguistics experts reviewed the questionnaire to determine its content validity and comprehensiveness.

Reliability of Instrument

The questionnaire reliability was tested by administering the questionnaire on 30 students in a similar university as the pilot study. The alpha coefficient of Cronbach was determined on the code-switching frequency scale and the social prestige perception scale. The scores indicated high reliability since the Cronbach alpha of code-switching frequency and social prestige perception were 0.84 and 0.87, respectively, meaning that the instrument is both consistent and valid to be incorporated in the main research.

Data Collection Procedure

The administration of Women University of Bagh gave permission to administer the questionnaire to the students. The data collection exercise was done in the classroom and common environments with the help of research assistants. The responses of students were promised confidentiality and participation was voluntary. The responses were obtained as soon as the questionnaires were completed in order to reduce the cases of missing data.

Data Analysis

Data were typed into Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) so as to analyze them. The demographic profile of the participants and trends of code-switching were described using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. To explore the relationship between the frequency of the English- Urdu code switching and the perceived social prestige, Pearson correlation analysis was adopted. The significant level of results was considered in 0.05.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted following the standards of ethical research. All the participants gave an informed consent and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The participation was voluntary and the students could opt out in case they wished. No kind of coercion or pressure was applied in the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current research found out the correlation between English-Urdu code-switching and perceived social prestige in female students of Women University of Bagh, Azad Kashmir. The number of students involved amounted to 300, and the data was analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis to answer the research questions and objectives.

Demographic Characteristics of the participants

The age of the participants was between 18 years and 26 years. The majority of the participants (60% of them) were aged between 18 and 21 years, and 40% were aged between 22 and 26 years. In terms of academic programs, 35% were pursuing social sciences and 30% pursued natural sciences and 20 pursued arts and humanities and 15 pursued professional programs like business and education. Distribution in terms of academic year indicated that 40 percent were either in first or second year of study, 35 percent in third year and 25 percent in postgraduate. The majority of students (72% stated English was their second language and 28% said that they were often exposed to English in their own homes or in school. This language and academic background diversity will make sure that the sample is representative enough to cover the bilingual students in the university setting.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the participants (n = 300).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group	18–21	180	60%
	22–26	120	40%
Academic Program	Social Sciences	105	35%
	Natural Sciences	90	30%
	Arts & Humanities	60	20%
	Professional Programs	45	15%

Frequency of English–Urdu Code-Switching

The frequency of English-Urdu code-switching was rated in terms of five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always). The average score was 3.78 (SD = 0.64) which means that students alternate between English and Urdu on a regular basis. Approximately 55 percent of respondents said that they would also make the shift to English in class discussions, presentations and group projects, which were often or always. About one out of five (20) indicated sometimes, ten percent (10) rarely, and fifteen percent (15) never.

Table 2: Frequency English-Urdu Code-Switching (n = 300)

Frequency Category	Frequency	Percentage
Never	45	15%
Rarely	30	10%
Sometimes	60	20%
Often	100	33%
Always	65	22%

The results show that code-switching is a common and planned aspect of the communication of students. Students said that they mostly use English in their academic activities to express technical or formal concepts with Urdu prevailing in informal communication with peers. This is in line with the framework

by Gumperz (1982) which describes code-switching as a mode of contextualization that indicates social meaning beyond the language content.

Perceived Social Prestige

The perceptions of the students on the social prestige linked with code-switching were also measured on a five-point Likert scale. The average mark was 4.05 (SD = 0.59), and it is possible to assume that participants view the English-Urdu code-switching as the positive phenomenon in social recognition and in the status aspect. Approximately sixty percent of students affirmed or highly affirmed that code-switching sends the message of intelligence, confidence and professionalism.

Table 3: Figured Social Prestige in connection with Code-Switching (n = 300)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	15	5%
Disagree	30	10%
Neutral	75	25%
Agree	120	40%
Strongly Agree	60	20%

These findings also confirm the previous studies that show that English is a high-prestige language in Pakistan and that code switching to English increases social recognition (Rahman, 1996; Mahboob, 2009).

Existence of a Relationship between Code-Switching and Social Prestige

Pearson correlation analysis was done to investigate the association between the frequency of code-switching and the perceived social prestige. The findings showed a positive correlation, $r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$, and this means that students who do not switch between English and Urdu languages often have a perception of greater social prestige. This result confirms the hypothesis that was developed first and corresponds to the theory of linguistic capital as presented by Bourdieu (1991), which postulates that the English language serves as a tool of establishing social identity (recognition) and academic validity (legitimacy).

Table 4: Pearson Correlation of Code- Switching and Social Prestige

Variable 1	Variable 2	Pearson r	p-value
Code-Switching Frequency	Perceived Social Prestige	0.61	<0.01

Context-Variations of Code-Switching

Sub-analysis was done to compare the code-switching in academic and social environments. The academic interactions frequency of presentation and group discussion was 4.12 (SD = 0.52) in the mean, and in case of informal social interaction with peers, it was 3.45 (SD = 0.68). This proves that English is tactically employed in the formal academic context to indicate prowess, and Urdu is predominantly spoken in informal circles. These trends are in line with the views of sociolinguistics interaction, which claim that code-switching is an indicator of changes in the levels of formality and social orientation (Holmes, 2013).

Qualitative Feedback by the Students

The quantitative results were supported by the results of open-ended questionnaires. Most students mentioned that the code-switching of English language leads to peer acceptance and teacher acceptance.

Students also reported that it helps increase confidence in academic presentations and in discussions in groups. These outcomes are similar to those of Heller (2007) and Canagarajah (2011) who believe that code-switching does not only have functional roles in learning institutions, but symbolic ones as well.

Language Background Influence

The more the individuals were exposed to English, either in school or home, the greater the rates of code-switching and the sense of prestige. Students who were less exposed to English changed less and felt that they had low social status. This brings out the importance of access and competence in the process of defining bilingual language practices and social judgments.

All the findings, in general, show that entering into English-Urdu code-switching is a common, intentional, and a socially significant behavior amongst female students of universities. The fact that there is a positive relationship between the frequency of code-switching and perceived social prestige proves that students indeed use English as a strategic means of attaining social and academic recognition. This helps in validating the notion of linguistic capital as proposed by Bourdieu (1991) as well as the Markedness Model by Myers-Scotton (1993) which indicate that bilingual speakers choose languages according to the anticipated social payoffs.

Gendered means of language use are also highlighted in the study because female students are using code-switching as the means of navigating social levels and proving their competence in the educational environment (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Shamim, 2011). Accordingly, code-switching is not just a linguistic resource, but a social and symbolic one, which conveys education, authority, and prestige.

Finally, the results may be considered as a solid empirical support that the code-switching between English and Urdu is closely related with social prestige that is perceived by the female students. The paper shows that bilingual competency is significant in schools and contributes to social identities, which supports the sociolinguistic theories on the topic and fills the gap in quantitative studies in Azad Kashmir.

DISCUSSION

The research results are clear indications that English-Urdu code-switching is a common intentional and socially significant behavior amongst female students at Women University of Bagh. This analysis showed that students that use code-switching more often feel like they are seen as more prestigious socially, which confirms the assumption that code-switching competence is a kind of symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

The positive value ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) proves that code-switching is not accidental but a strategically used tool to demonstrate intelligence, competence, and professionalism in academic and social settings. This is in line with the Markedness Model proposed by Myers-Scotton (1993), which proposes that speakers use languages to maximize social rewards, and with the interactional sociolinguistics theory by Gumperz (1982), which points at code-switching as a situationalizing cue indicating social meaning.

Students further testified that they use English more in formal academic contexts, i.e. in presentations and group discussions but in informal social life Urdu was still predominant. It means that code-switching has both functional and symbolic functions: it is functional to convey the complex or technical concepts with the help of English and symbolic to represent status and social prestige among peers and teachers (Holmes, 2013; Heller, 2007).

The gendered relations are also present. The students in the research who were female used code-switching as a means of demonstrating confidence and social presence in the academic environment. This observation is consistent with the prior studies that emphasize the use of language as a means of negotiating gendered social hierarchies (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Shamim, 2011).

On the whole, the findings indicate that English-Urdu code-switching contributes to the increased level of perceived social prestige and is a strategic tool that can help female students to cope with academic and social demands.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Statement	Test Used	Result	Decision
H1	There is a significant relationship between English–Urdu code-switching and perceived social prestige.	Pearson Correlation	r = 0.61, p < 0.01	Accepted
H2	Students who engage more frequently in English–Urdu code-switching perceive higher social prestige.	Pearson Correlation	r = 0.61, p < 0.01	Accepted

CONCLUSION

The authors concur that code-switching in English-Urdu is a common, strategic and socially significant phenomenon among female students of Women University of Bagh, Azad Kashmir. The results indicate a strong positive correlation between the rate of code-switching and perceived social prestige, which proves that bilingual competence is a type of symbolic capital both in the academic and social practice. English is used by the students in formal academic contexts to sound intelligent, competent and professional, whereas Urdu is predominant in informal context. The findings indicate that code-switching does not only constitute a linguistic process, but also a means of social positioning and identity negotiation, as well as confidence-building, especially among female students who are expected to negotiate between gendered and academic attributes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results, it may be suggested that schools and colleges should not dislike code-switching but should be aware that this strategy is helpful and should be promoted. The curriculum designers and teachers need to integrate bilingual pedagogical approaches that might utilize the linguistic resources that the students possess in order to promote learning and engagement. Training sessions and workshops might be conducted to enable students to make good use of the code-switching in academic presentation, group discussions and professional communication. Moreover, the next worlds of research must be efforts to investigate the patterns of code switching in various colleges, fields, and gender groups to give a more detailed response to the importance of code switching in improving social prestige and academic performance.

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