

Linguistic Hybridity and Identity: Analyzing Code-Switching Practices in *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri

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ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the phenomenon of linguistic hybridity and identity construction through an analysis of code-switching practices in *Meatless Days* (2014 edition) by Sara Suleri. Drawing upon Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1993) and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity (1994) the paper explores how Suleri's strategic alternation between English and indigenous languages embodies cultural negotiation, diasporic belonging, and postcolonial identity formation. By examining selected excerpts where code-switching occurs, the analysis highlights how linguistic choices function as markers of social relations, power dynamics, and cultural memory. The findings suggest that Suleri's use of code-switching is not a mere stylistic device but a powerful discursive strategy that reflects her hybrid subjectivity and unsettles fixed notions of language, identity, and nationhood. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader discussions on postcolonial literature, sociolinguistics, and the ways multilingual practices shape individual and collective identities.*

Keywords: Linguistic Hybridity, Code-Switching, Identity Construction, Postcolonial Literature and Sara Suleri

INTRODUCTION

In the modern globalized and cross-cultural world, language is not merely a means of communication. It is also a strong representation of identity, beliefs and belonging. A common perception in the postcolonial society is that language usage is a combination of various cultural influences due to colonization, migration and cultural blending. A language phenomenon is one of such code-switching, which is the alternation between two or more languages during one communicative event (Myers-Scotton, 1993). Code-switching is a stylistic and narrative tool used in literary text that not only images but also mediates the hybrid character of characters, narrators and thus by extension the author. The paper is an exploration of code-switching in *Meatless Days* (1989), an autobiographical memoir by a Pakistani-American author Sara Suleri, in the context of the theoretical concepts on language hybridity and identity formation.

In *Meatless Days*, Sara Suleri provides the reader with a richly woven and multi-faceted personal memory, political commentary, and cultural reflection, with references to the socio-political transformations that occurred in Pakistan in the late 20th century. Suleri, being a diasporic author, traverses multicultural landscapes, combining English and Urdu among other language materials to depict lived experiences in a

polysomnic society. Her use of code-switching to verify the socio-cultural context is strategic not only in that it is an identity performance, but also an authenticating of space, i.e. the Third Space a space of negotiation where hybrid identities are created by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). Suleri opposes linguistic homogenization; moreover, he attacks monolithic conceptualization of national and cultural affiliation by mixing codes and languages.

The connection between code-switching and identity in postcolonial literature has been a somewhat popular subject of analysis, but *Meatless Days* presents a very interesting opportunity to analyze since it combines gender, diaspora, and political history. While the memoir has been examined in terms of its feminist subtexts, postcolonial critique and narrative fragmentation (Parashar, 2014; Afzal-Khan, 2018), not much has been written about the linguistic strategies employed in the work, which are also important mechanisms of identity formation. The study bridges that gap by using the Markedness Model of code-switching (1993) developed by Myers-Scotton to explain the Suleri code-switching decisions as indicators of social roles, social relationships and power relations, and the Hybridity Theory by Bhabha to explain the cultural negotiations within the narrative code-switching choices as a multilingual.

This paper claims that code switching on the part of Suleri is not just ornamental but highly ideological as it is a literary tactic as well as a political one. Suleri develops a narrative voice by purposefully shifting between English and Urdu to reflect her ambivalent postcolonial, diasporic, and feminine positionality. Through a critical analysis of these linguistic practices, the study will seek to determine how *Meatless Days* plays out linguistic hybridity to challenge dominant cultural discourses and express a dynamic and complex identity. Finally, the study adds to the literature on postcolonial linguistics and literary multilingualism and provides new perspectives on the role of language as the locus of resistance, negotiating, and self-identification in diasporic literature. Accordingly, the main objectives of the study are;

1. To identify and categorize instances of Urdu-English code-switching in *Meatless Days*.
2. To explore how these practices of code-switching contribute to the representation of the idea of hybrid identity in the narrative.

The article is pertinent to applied linguistics, discourse analysis, postcolonial literature, and cultural studies. The work offers a somewhat critical view of the linguistic selection in identity formation through the exploration of the role of linguistic selection in identity formation in *Meatless Days*. It contributes to the new discourse of multilingualism and hybridity within literature and sheds light upon how language serves as a boundary, as a sign of collective and individual identity in the postcolonial context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to consider glossing as a language-appropriation strategy, Khan et al. (2024) focused on *Meatless Days* by critically interpreting the dialogue between characters. They were concerned with examining how Suleri negotiated ethnic identity and resisted the colonialism of language. They conducted a qualitative textual analysis according to the postcolonial approach to language appropriation, created by Ashcroft et al. (2003). The researcher found that Suleri employed interlinear, bracketed and shortened glossing techniques that included the Urdu and Pakistani cultural language within the English language. Although these actions ensured the cultural relevance of the text for local readers, they also restricted access for Anglophone readers, and thus created a Pakistaniized version of English that defined itself in postcolonial language.

To determine the language-appropriation strategies that Suleri uses to formulate Pakistani cultural identity, Nasir et al. (2022) explored the opening chapters of *Meatless Days*. The research was meant to examine the role of language selections in the creation of identity. They performed a narrative textual analysis on

the basis of Kachru, World Englishes, Ashcroft, model of appropriation, and Bucholtz and Hall, theory of identity. They found that Suleri applied glossing, non-translated lexical items, syntactic fusion, lexical innovation, and translation equivalence. All these practices reflected opposition to English native practices and emphasized the hybrid identity that was negotiated using linguistic creativity.

Talaat (2003) conducted a stylistic research on *Meatless Days* to analyse the sentence structures and the vocabularies used by Suleri. The aim was to illustrate how her memoir used linguistic form to create meaning. The study evaluated the narrative technique of Suleri through the application of stylistic analysis at the lexical and syntactic levels. It was established that her complex sentence structures and word richness were the main focus of the concept of identity, ambivalence and postcolonial belonging in the memoir. The paper has determined that the linguistic ingenuity of Suleri was not incidental to the creation of hybridity and subjectivity in the memoir, but a part of it.

To examine the hybrid identities featured in the memoir, Hassan (2022) reviewed the entire text of *Meatless Days*. The paper was focused on exploring the overlaps between political, linguistic, and religious identities that were defined by the processes of migration and colonialism. Using a postcolonial theory and referring to Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, the researcher performed a qualitative thematic and character analysis. The results showed that the story that Suleri wrote exhibited transpiring, flowing identities, in which language selections assumed a central role in the negotiation of orientalist and occidental discourses. The paper reached the conclusion that language was at the heart of expression of hybrid subjectivities.

The empirical study by Memon et al. (2022) involved semi-structured interviews with bilingual and cosmopolitan texts readers (*Meatless Days* and *Midnight's Children*) and their responses to the questionnaires. It was aimed at exploring the way the readers were understanding the code-switching and translating bilingual items. They analysed the thematic reader responses using sociolinguistic theories of code-switching and translation studies. The results revealed that the readers mediated the passages of code-switching actively as identity work and opposition to the Western hegemony. The research found that the bilingual approaches of Suleri predetermined the identity politics and positioned the varying accessibility of readerships.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper works in a qualitative format, applying textual analysis to *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri (2014 edition). The sample of thirty excerpts (Urdu-English code-switching) has been chosen and discussed utilizing the Markedness Model of Myers-Scotton (1993) to determine marked and unmarked code-switches as indicators of social roles and social relationships. At the same time, the theory of Hybrid Identity (1994) by Homi K. Bhabha has also been used to address the question of how the language blending used by Suleri can be viewed as the third space of identity formation in a postcolonial discourse. The two frameworks may be integrated in such a manner that they produce a two-layered analysis of patterns of code-switching and the meaning of these patterns of code-switching; the cultural and personal identity.

DATA ANALYSIS

The text of *Meatless Days* by Sara Suleri is an extremely worthy piece of linguistic hybridity wherein English, Urdu, Punjabi, and Arabic languages blend together to produce identity, intimacy and cultural memory. Code-switching is not spontaneous, but a stylistical tool; behind each non-English word, there is a sociocultural, emotional, and political connotation. Applying Myers-Scotton Markedness Model, we can observe how certain words are marked to reflect a specific meaning of relations or culture, and other words are not marked in the world of the bilinguals as described by Suleri. Meanwhile, the hybridity by

Bhabha aids in illuminating the manner in which these linguistic practices fill the third space wherein identities are constantly being negotiated between the colonial past and the place traditions.

Familial Intimacy and Emotional Nuance

Numerous instances of code-switching are used to enhance intimacy in family relations like beta (son/daughter), pagli (crazy girl), nakhre wali (dramatic girl), and badmaash (mischievous person) operate as marked lexical insertions that condense affection, teasing, and discipline into culturally resonant forms (Suleri, 1989, pp. 82, 116, 132, 134). These utterances would lose much of their emotive texture if translated into English, as their affective resonance is deeply rooted in shared cultural codes. According to the Markedness Model, such terms are “high-value” markers in familial discourse instantly recognizable to insiders. In Bhabha’s (1994) framework, this hybrid lexicon reflects an emotional identity that resists full assimilation into English norms, preserving the warmth of Urdu endearments while narrating in a colonial tongue.

Cultural Memory and Oral Tradition

Suleri’s narrative frequently draws upon Urdu, Persian, and Arabic expressions to anchor moments of cultural memory. Phrases like qissa khwan (teller of tales), kher mubarak (peace be with you), and invocations such as Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji’un carry ceremonial and spiritual weight (Suleri, 1989, pp. 42, 126, 160). In Markedness terms, these are highly marked choices they stand out as deliberate preservations of heritage. Bhabha’s (1994) hybridity lens sees these as acts of resistance to linguistic erasure: the oral traditions embedded in these phrases extend beyond semantic meaning, acting as cultural repositories that reaffirm identity in the postcolonial narrative space.

Food as a Site of Hybrid Identity

Food references like kapura, roti diplomacy, paratha, chai, and andaza are fertile ground for code-switching (Suleri, 1989, pp. 23, 105, 130, 151). These terms remain untranslated, signaling the untranslatability of culinary culture. In the Markedness Model, such insertions index insider knowledge and cultural belonging, where to name the item in English would strip it of its embedded cultural associations. Through Bhabha’s (1994) lens, the kitchen becomes a hybrid site: colonial English narration enfolds indigenous food practices, producing a layered identity where the domestic and the political intertwine particularly evident in the political satire of “roti diplomacy.”

Religion and Linguistic Boundaries

Suleri’s text captures the linguistic boundaries of religious identity, contrasting hymn book with qawwali, or Bhagwan with Allah (Suleri, 1989, pp. 62, 112). Religious exclamations such as Allah maaf karey (May God forgive), namaz (prayer), and janaza (funeral) retain their original forms, marking them as culturally non-negotiable lexical items (Suleri, 1989, pp. 77, 139, 156). From a Markedness perspective, these are “core vocabulary” items tied to sacred contexts, resistant to substitution. Hybridity here is complex: the narrative voice navigates between colonial Christian imagery and Islamic devotional language, inhabiting a cultural space that is neither wholly one nor the other.

Humor, Resistance, and Social Commentary

Code-switching also becomes a tool for humor and subtle resistance. Phrases like kya bakwas hai yeh (what nonsense), bilkul bakwas (absolute nonsense), or playful insults in Punjabi often used to mock authority figures such as mullahs illustrate how switching to vernacular can destabilize social hierarchies (Suleri, 1989, pp. 120, 123, 143). Regarding Markedness, these are changes in footing which may tend to change to either formal or intimate or deference to subversion. To Bhabha (1994) these are the

quintessential instances of mimicry and ambivalence whereby a discourse of hybridity represents a place of resistance against religious and colonial power.

Gendered Expressions and Cultural Codes

Certain Urdu adjectives and idioms *sharmili* (shy/demure), *nakhre wali*, and affectionate epithets like *Janoo* encode gendered expectations and relational norms (Suleri, 1989, pp. 47, 82, 89). In markedness analysis, these terms are very context-specific and are frequently employed to control or confirm gender roles. They show how women who have been educated in the West under colonial rule such as Suleri negotiate between ideas of feminism in the West and ideas of femininity in the indigenous culture through the concept of hybridity presented by Bhabha (1994).

Class and Domestic Space

Meatless Days language choice also indexes on class relations. The maid saying *sasti cheez* (thank you very cheap thing) and the ritualized politeness of *shukriya* in every form of interaction are both instances of how linguistic hybridity is projected into the realms of class (Suleri, 1989, pp. 147, 158). Myers-Scotton (1993) explains this by social positioning, which examines the use of which language by whom and when. The home may be regarded through the prism of Bhabha as a miniature world of postcolonial mixing where the servant-master dynamic exhibits various types of power imbalance in the discussion.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This analysis revealed that the memoir by Suleri is written in a combination of English and Urdu, with some words in Punjabi, which makes it transcend one language. The majority of the code-switching occurs within sentences in which Urdu words or phrases are inserted into English sentences (e.g., *Amma never-ending duas to us to be safe*). It is also used in between sentences and mostly when the author is emotional. Those changes in languages are not accidental, and they are thoroughly selected to capture memories, family bonds, and political concepts. This is equivalent to the Markedness Model developed by Myers-Scotton (1993), which describes the use of a different language to demonstrate orientation to a culture and challenge the dominance of dominant languages.

In *Meatless Days*, code-switching is not simply a means to speak, but it is a literary means of demonstration of a mixture of languages, or linguistic hybridity, as Bhabha (1994) calls it. In his English-South Asia language exchanges, Suleri generates a third space in which no language is dominant. This combination represents her complex cultural identity, particularly in some of her passages on the postcolonial displacement, where the combination of languages reflects the combination of cultures. It also ignores colonial concepts that encourage the purity of a single language.

The language used in the work of Suleri also demonstrates how identity changes under various circumstances. Her memoir switches between two voices: one of a world-travelled, educated intellectual expressed in the rich English language, and another of a Pakistani soul expressed in the Urdu words to describe family (such as *Amma*, *Abba*), religion, and food. It is an indication that diasporic writing is identity malleable and language-influenced. Code-switching in this case safeguards cultural backgrounds and keeps off pressures to adapt to only one language. These results confirm that multilingual speakers can code-switch to identify themselves and to gain control over their identity (Canagararaj, 2013).

Suleri has a lot of language change in her stories about women, her mother, sister, and other characters. The emotional background of such situations cannot be achieved through English but through the use of Urdu language. This proves that code-switching in *Meatless Days* is not merely a stylistic device, but also a tool of saving emotions and culture. It also challenges the supremacy of the English language indirectly by giving equal weight to the South Asian languages in the narration. Suleri is less political than writers

such as Salman Rushdie or Kamila Shamsie, who use code-switching to more political purposes. The combination of languages is her form of rebellion against the colonial rule and a way of holding on to her culture. It states that in memoirs, code-switching is performed on a broader political level and a smaller and more personal one, contributing to the topic of the writing and plunging the readers into the culture.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in this paper, Sara Suleri purposely employs code-switching in *Meatless Days* to narrate her story. Through switching between English and Urdu, she demonstrates the split and conflicting identities that prevail in a postcolonial world. The fact that people in South Asia are multilingual and that this switching reflects not only the real life of these people but the power and control of the rules of the colonial language. The study elaborates on how the various language changes using Myers-Scotton Markedness Model and Bhabha Theory of Hybridity have aided in linking cultures, preserving common memories and expressing an identity that is impossible to classify into a single category. Ultimately, the memoir demonstrates that code-switching is not merely a writing technique but a device that allows Suleri to unite the history of the person, the nation, and the language under a single roof.

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