

# Sociolinguistic Factors behind Code-Switching at Micro Level in a Bilingual Society: Urdu-English-Punjabi Coexistence

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim of the Study:** This study aimed to investigate and explore the factors behind code-switching in a bilingual society at the micro level.

**Methodology:** The sample frame for this study was students of BS classes studying in different colleges in the city of Sialkot. The participants were 20 local bilingual students, male or female, randomly selected who were studying at the BS level in various semesters and disciplines. The data were collected from the participating students through a semi-structured interview.

**Findings:** The thematic analysis and the final results enabled us to identify various factors behind code-switching, viz., lack of competence in L2, to avoid misunderstanding, proficiency in the rules of L1, CS (code-switching) as a gap filler, lack of vocabulary knowledge in one language, to maintain privacy, to avoid taboo impact, to emphasize a point, to boast higher knowledge of English and due to market value of English.

**Conclusion:** The results are quite revealing as they prove that code-switching is an efficient strategy used by bilingual speakers to interact with each other and transmit knowledge effectively to bilingual listeners in classroom interactions. This study also hints at more areas to be researched, such as conducting social class and gender-based studies to explore other factors. It provides some implications for the English language teaching (ELT) community, including language learners, teachers, and curriculum developers.

**Keywords:** Code-switching, Bilingual, Interaction, ELT, Curriculum.

## Introduction

### *Background of the Study*

Code-switching can be alternatively known as code-mixing, code-changing, or code-shifting. Code-switching occurs when a bilingual introduces a completely unassimilated word from another language into his speech (Haugen, 1956). Code-switching is frequently used to explain the phenomenon where two

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or more languages are combined to convey a message. It does not matter whether lexical items are combined or a complete set of rules are adapted from other languages to convey messages through the duration of speaking or writing (Al-Qaysi, 2019). In this phenomenon, a language or dialect is considered a "code" and switched to another code. This is recurrent between individuals who share those specific codes (Basabrin, 2019).

Weinreich's (1986) definition is considered the more appropriate and breaking point for defining CS, and he defines CS as the practice of alternately using two languages. This definition can further be assisted by the words of another scholar named Marasigan (1983), who indicates that CS is the phenomenon that occurs when two or more languages are used within the syntactic boundaries of a single sentence. One or more words can be employed from two different languages to express one message. Bokomba (1989), in another study, expressed his stance on CS and said that CS is the blending of words, phrases and sentences from two distinct grammatical (sub) systems across sentence boundaries within a speech event. This definition is more technical than the previous elaborations, which were more descriptive. This discussion can be moved forward in the words of Myers-Scotton (2002), who directs this debate to another dimension and proposes that either of two language varieties occur within the identical place where one of the languages functions because of the morpho-syntactic structure of the code-switching. CS happening cannot be limited to any syntactic position within the boundary of a sentence, and it splits into inter-sentential and intra-sentential switching (Myers-Scotton, 2012).

Inter-sentential code-switching is dealt with by competent bilingual users who switch codes at the sentence borders. The users are fully adept in grammatical rules and lexical items from two different languages. In intra-sentential code-switching, the switch is within the syntactic boundary of a sentence with no interruptions, hesitations, or pauses to point a shift (Lipski, 1985). In this switching user only uses words from foreign languages and does not use morphological or syntactic rules of that language. This shift is helpful to compensate for new terms or phrases that do not have a proper counterpart in the mother tongue, and it is a conscious and intentional phenomenon predisposed by situational and stylistic factors (Lipski, 1985).

CS is a regular phenomenon in the conversation of speakers who have knowledge of two or more languages. They consciously prefer code-switching in classrooms, business dealings, trades and other regular day-to-day matters, where the speaker and listener unconsciously share the same education status, where the listener lacks knowledge of another language with little shift of codes. Individuals adept in two or more languages easily shift codes without breaking the flow of their exchanges (Cahyani et al., 2018). This is a frequent phenomenon in societies with diverse languages and cultures (Fachriyah, 2017; Paramesravan & Lim, 2018). This is a common phenomenon in countries where bilingual speakers learn an additional foreign language to cope with the international need; Asian countries like China, India, Malaysia, and Pakistan are prime examples. They learn English as their second language besides their regional and national language as a result, and they are more open to switching a code, which is a normal phenomenon for such bilingual societies. Subsequently, CS emerges as a communal process where English and other languages (codes) are intermingled in phrases is incredibly common in these societies (Xiaofang 2017 et al.). The above discussion sets the direction of this study. It directs the researchers to investigate CS at the micro level in the context of Pakistan, where code-changing is extremely prevalent since Pakistan is a bilingual or multilingual society depending on the areas, e.g., Sialkot from Punjab is a society where Punjabi is a regional language. People prefer Urdu with their children who are also exposed to English learnt at school levels.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

CS is a regular phenomenon in universities and colleges of Punjab because the medium of study is in English, and there is no translation or paraphrasing available of modern disciplines into local or regional languages; as a result, students have to adopt the original terms, expressions and phrases in their true letter and spirit and they are intermingled with local languages to cause code-switching which occurs in

both teacher's and student's interactions and discourse (Sert, 2016). There are various reasons to switch codes based on the interest and priorities of the bilingual speaker. Scholars have investigated CS in numerous studies with their required interest. Sameen et.al. (2021) opine, "Code-switching is a popular tool of choice when it comes to teaching Pakistan. It is because most of the education in Pakistan is delivered in English, which is a foreign language to all. Modern-day learners are not very comfortable with the language and lack the confidence to adapt to it. This is because the language has become a stigma in the average modern-day Pakistani society. The continuous reinforcement of this language in academia, coupled with the stigma that the language has become, leads to a lack of confidence in students, so much so that they get demotivated in learning" (p-111). However, factors that encourage this phenomenon are not investigated at the regional level though they might be investigated at the national or broader level. Sialkot, a small city in the province of Punjab, is an educationally rich city. People are well off, which is an ideal situation for CS, thanks to the fact that due to the bilingual education system and patterns utilized in multilingual communication in the Punjabi community, speakers are very likely to understand and speak Punjabi, Urdu and English. This being so, CS is more likely to be employed by speakers having various social backgrounds to urge their message to be communicated successfully.

### ***Significance of the Study***

The current study is significant in the following ways, which have paved the way to articulate the objectives of the study in a systematic and structured fashion:

- Studying sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching can help us understand how language use is influenced by social factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It can shed light on how individuals use language to construct and perform their social identities.
- Code-switching provides insights into language variation and change, particularly in multilingual and multicultural communities. Researchers can better understand how languages interact and evolve in these contexts by studying the sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching.
- Code-switching is a complex linguistic phenomenon that requires a deep understanding of all the languages involved and the social context in which the switch occurs. By studying sociolinguistic factors, researchers can better understand the communicative competence of bilingual and multilingual speakers.
- Code-switching can be a marker of power dynamics within social groups. Studying sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching can reveal how power relations, social hierarchies, and linguistic prejudice influence language choices.
- Sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching can inform language planning and language policy initiatives. Policymakers can develop more inclusive and effective language policies by understanding why and how people code-switch.
- Studying sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching can help in developing effective strategies for second language instruction. By understanding the role of code-switching in language learning, educators can better tailor their teaching methods to meet the needs of bilingual and multilingual learners.
- Code-switching is often associated with cultural practices and expressions. Researchers can deepen their understanding of cultural norms, values, and practices in different communities by studying sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching.
- Sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching can provide insights into language contact situations and the dynamics of multilingualism. This can help researchers better understand how languages interact and influence each other in diverse linguistic communities.

- Code-switching is a key area of study in conversation analysis and discourse analysis. By studying sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching, researchers can analyze the functions and meanings of code-switching in social interactions and discourse.
- Studying sociolinguistic factors behind code-switching can help refine and develop linguistic theories, particularly in areas such as language variation, language change, sociolinguistics, and bilingualism. It can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of language use in diverse social contexts.

### ***Research Objectives***

This study primarily focuses on identifying factors that encourage code-switching in students who speak Punjabi and Urdu and study English as an international language. It focused on finding factors in the following areas:

- To understand social identity construction and negotiation while living in Punjabi-Urdu-English communicative paradigm.
- To examine language variation and change in Punjabi-Urdu-English interplay.
- To explore communicative competence in Punjabi-Urdu-English due to an intense multilingual context.
- To analyze power and language factors in Punjabi-Urdu-English use.
- To provide food for thought to language planning and policy so that they may make informed decisions in this regard.
- To explore Punjabi-Urdu's impact on second/target language acquisition (English).
- To trace out how the Punjabi-Urdu-English multilingual context promotes cultural understanding.
- To study language contact and multilingualism.
- To analyze discourse and conversation styles in Punjabi-Urdu-English simultaneous use in society.
- To enhance linguistic theory for a better language teaching/learning process.

### ***Research Question***

The research objectives mentioned above were brought under the umbrella of the following research question:

What factors influence code-switching using Punjabi-Urdu-English among bilingual students in the colleges or universities (classroom or routine environment) in Sialkot (Punjab, Pakistan)?

### ***Methodology***

#### ***Research Design***

The mixed-method design is categorized into explanatory, exploratory, and triangulation. The current study uses a mixed-method design, an exploratory design during which the information is first transcribed, collected, and analyzed qualitatively and assessed quantitatively by calculating the frequency of occurrences.

#### ***The Population of the Study***

The population is local students enrolled on various programs of BS classes in different colleges in Sialkot. All the students are Punjabi by birth, and their education level is intermediate, at least as they

have exposure to English because it is offered as a compulsory discipline in the education system of Pakistan. Their medium of instruction is Urdu in classroom teaching, which puts them in this repertoire to be the population of a bilingual society.

### ***Participants of the Study***

A random sample size of 20 volunteer students is taken out of local students enrolled for various programs of BS classes in different colleges and universities of Sialkot. The participants are based on mixed gender and various age levels, as their education level is prioritized for participation.

### ***Data Collection***

Data were recorded through semi-structured interviews, participants were informed about their participation in the research, and their names were kept confidential; they were given ample time to answer the designated questions. Students voluntarily choose to participate in the research.

### ***Data Analysis and Interpretation***

The data analysis was carried out based on a qualitative and quantitative methodology. The analysis was based on Braun and Clark's (2006) analytical procedure. Following this procedure, the transcribed interviews were read several times to identify the gathered data and then identified data were placed into meaningful titles or sub-titles; after that, the codes were analyzed and mixed to form related categories, which were reviewed and refined in the fourth phase to form a satisfactory thematic map for use in the study. The process continued in the next phase, and the categories were redefined and refined to ensure each identified category could capture and analyze the data efficiently.

Neuman (2014) suggested that quantitative analysis involves using numerical data to extract meanings. After performing the quantitative analysis of the data collected in this study, the findings were calculated manually and presented as frequencies and percentages in a table. Furthermore, the geographical dispersion of the data was displayed graphically.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results show that the participants stated various reasons for why they resorted to code-switching in their interactions, and the factors affecting code-switching extracted from the interviews and another research instrument with the participants are as follows:

- a) Lack of competence in L2
- b) To Avoid Misunderstanding
- c) Proficiency in the rules L1
- d) CS a gap filler
- e) Lack of Vocabulary Knowledge in one language
- f) To Maintain Privacy
- g) To avoid taboo impact
- h) To Emphasize a Point
- i) To boast higher knowledge of English and
- j) Market value of English.

The table below shows different social factors accounting for the use of code-switching identified in the dataset under analysis.

Table 1: *Factors for Code-Switching Among Bilingual Punjabi or Urdu Students*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Lack of Competence in L2	18	90%
Market Value of English	17	85%
Proficiency in the Rules of L1	17	85%
To Avoid Taboo Impact	16	80%
Lack of Vocabulary Knowledge in one language	14	70%
To Maintain Privacy	14	70%
CS a Gap Filler	10	50%
To Boast Higher Knowledge of English	09	45%

To Avoid Misunderstanding	08	40%
To Emphasize a Point	07	35%
<b>Total Value</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

The above table highlights the results finalized from this research; the participants preferred code-switching over a single language. The frequency of different linguistic factors mentioned by participants in their interviews is displayed in the table, and the results emphasize the factors behind code-switching are many which are elaborated on below:

### ***Lack of Competence in L2***

The lack of L2 competence accounts for 90% of the cases where the participants in different contexts used code-switching. The participants were enquired about their priority to switch codes, and most responses showed that they lacked linguistic competence in L2. The lack of linguistic competence is the most dominant factor in CS. Participants have vocabulary knowledge but need to gain morphological and syntactic competence.

### ***Market Value of English***

This is another factor that prompts the participants to switch codes which show results of 85%. The market value of English is limitless, and it has become a lingua franca for a global village; every business aspirant has to understand this language which has become a prerequisite for every business or international job; thus, using words from English has pragmatic reasons behind it.

### ***Proficiency in Rules of Mother Tongue***

The third social factor behind the use of CS in the present study is proficiency in the rules of L1, which encourage speakers to use foreign words with the morphology of L1, which accounts for 85% of the data. The data collected show that proficiency in the mother tongue's phonological, morphological and syntactic rules is the third factor that prompts CS. The participants were not at home in the rules of L2, but the available vocabulary of L2 helped them to select words and apply the rules of their mother tongue in which they are more at home. This is one of the most dominant factors of CS because it provides flexibility in rules and vocabulary with the liberty to use their native accent.

### ***To Avoid Taboo Impact***

Another factor behind CS is the connotation of a few words in their mother tongue. Some of the words socially, culturally and historically have taboo implications in our societies; thus, using these words causes hesitation among the participants. As a result, they switch codes to avoid taboo impact, which accounts for 80% of the result.

### ***Lack of Vocabulary Knowledge in one Language***

The fifth most prominent factor prompting CS is the lack of vocabulary knowledge in one language, which accounts for 70% of the data. Participants have shown signs of using vocabulary, but this use is due to a shortage of vocabulary in one particular language, which forces them to shift from one language to another. Thus, CS provides the flexibility to convey their message with an expanded vocabulary reservoir based on two or three languages.

### ***To Maintain Privacy***

The next factor found in this study in CS is that participants prefer to switch codes because they want to maintain privacy from other listeners, with a figure of 70%. They switch codes while travelling, in social places, and group discussions. They opt for foreign words or words they are sure the other will need to be made aware of to prevent others from understanding their discussion.

### ***CS as Gap Filler***

CS is also used as a gap filler for the speakers; wherever they find themselves lost for words in one language, they employ words from another language; this factor is found in 50% of the data. Punjabi and Urdu, the mother tongue of most participants, only possess some vocabulary to meet the new requirements of the modern era. While using their mother tongue to discuss some latest inventions or trends which have international connection causes issues for them as their mother tongue do not have enough resources to meet the new demands; thus, they use words from the English language to fill gaps which were caused due to lack of proper words in their mother tongue.

### ***To Boast Higher Knowledge of English***

The higher the participants' knowledge of English, the more they prefer CS. This has become an education symbol for the educated youth to use more words from English to boost their proficiency which provides them confidence and ensures them the skill to use two or more languages at once. This factor reaches 45% of the data collected.

### ***To Avoid Misunderstanding***

The ninth factor identified was to avoid misunderstanding foreign terms, phrases, and expressions, showing 40% of the CS elements identified in the data. Participants also stressed the use of words from English to avoid misunderstanding while discussing their classroom lectures. The topic of discussion is science or literature, which cannot be translated into their mother tongue because the words used to describe things have an approximate alternate in their mother tongue, which will cause misunderstanding. Hence, they prefer the same words to discuss the topics.

### ***To Emphasize a Point***

Another factor that prompts participants to switch codes is to make a word prominent to emphasize a certain point or phrase in the conversation. Participants were asked about their preference for CS and responded by accepting that they prefer English words and phrases to emphasize, which is not possible in their mother language; this factor is tabulated in 35% of the responses.

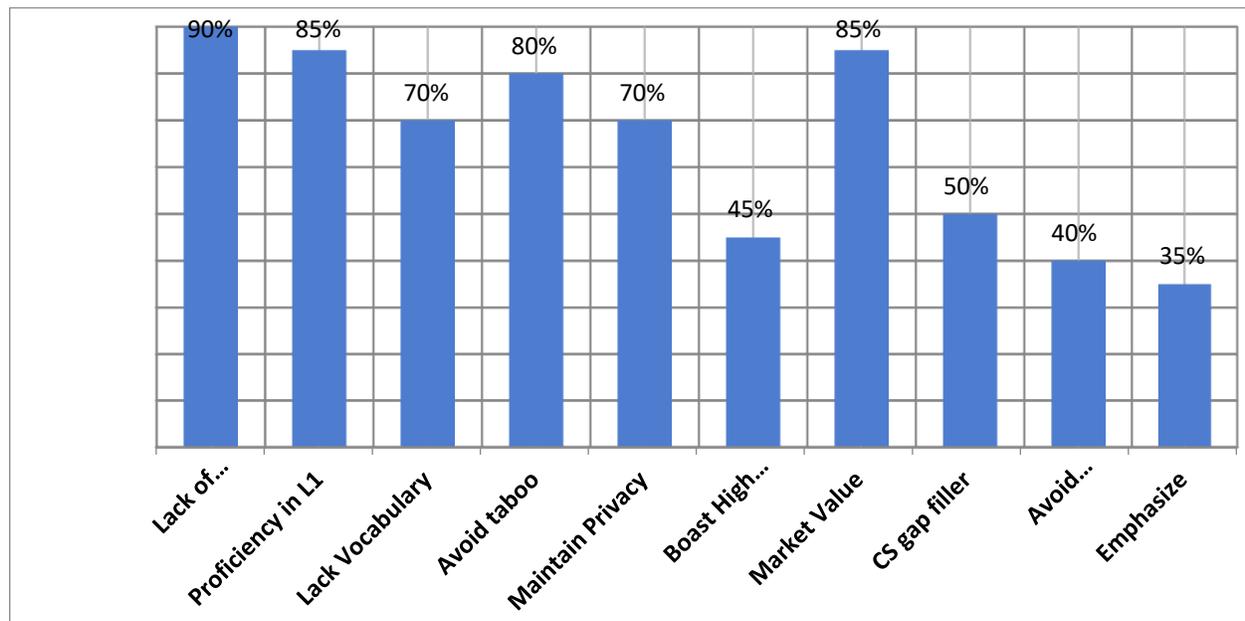


Figure 1. Factors for Code-Switching Among Bilingual Punjabi or Urdu Students

## **Conclusions and Implications**

This study found various factors that trigger CS in the participants, which are enlisted here; a) lack of competence in L2, b) to avoid misunderstanding, c) proficiency in the rules L1, d) CS a gap filler e) lack of vocabulary knowledge in one language f) to maintain privacy g) to avoid taboo impact h) to emphasize a point i) to boast higher knowledge of English and j) market value of English. The participants were asked various questions based on different factors, and their responses highlighted their priority to switch codes.

The reasons to switch codes can be various, which forces participants to switch codes. CS was stimulated based on participants' location, setting, intentions, purposes and needs. The participants favoured switching codes when their location was not ideal for them because, in this way, they could maintain privacy and restrain others from hearing whatever they were discussing. Their setting was also a reason for them to switch codes, i.e. if they were in a classrooms environment, they were more contented with variation in language because they had to convey a real sense of the topic as the terminology of science and literature would lose its true sense with translation, so they intended to maintain the real sense. Their purposes and needs were other prompters for CS, i.e., in the modern age. Social media is a common platform for everyone to express themselves or be in contact with a person from various cultures, which is one of the major reasons for CS. Skiba (2012) found that the factors accounting for CS were the inability of language users to express themselves precisely and to main continuity and flow of the communication the language users switch codes. The above discussion thus highlights that CS is more or often a supporting component in communication that contributes to interaction in a social setting, according to the intention, purpose and need of the language used; as a result, CS is a tool that improves communication flow.

The current study has some implications for the learning environment. CS has emerged as a strong tool for learning and interacting targeting. Teachers from various disciplines should focus on adopting CS as a medium to deliver lectures in classrooms which can be a very strong tool for them with improved results. In many situations, an educator may ask students to modify codes as an efficient strategy for mastering the target language (Köylü, 2018). On the other hand, CS has shown signs of meeting the modern requirement, and languages are borrowing at a large scale rather be dying, which is a good omen to save languages from losing their hold on the world. However, CS in some situations may have unharmonious connotations between the speakers in particular and the language community in general, as the words used in CS may not have the same value, status, and functions in speakers' cultures (Grant & Nguyen, 2017). The development and evolution of local languages may also be hampered by the adaptation of new words in CS exchanges because languages are also considered high or low associated with education level and may also be evaluated based on languages of rich and poor (Onga & Zhang, 2018).

CS is utilized extensively in English immersion societies. This type of CS is more welcomed in the classroom environment where the specific terms are used in their true sense, not to devalue the real meaning. Besides, if the language teacher has some familiarity with students' maternal language, he/she may handle the teachings more effectively (García et al., 2018). On the other hand, it may have required a detailed explanation of English phrases and terms used in a normal environment.

The discussion can be summed up now that CS is a great tool to interact and communicate; it has some drawbacks, but still, it has various benefits to compensate for the novel requirement of the speakers to interact vastly on different topics which cannot be discussed in local languages only.

## ***Suggestions for Future Research***

This study was conducted to find different factors affecting CS in the local environment involving English, Urdu, and Punjabi, which can be expanded, focusing on other reasons, and involving other languages. The other studies can analyze the utilization of CS in other environments, i.e., business, local trades, and hospitals, to expand the results of this study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the

reasons behind code-switching in a bilingual community. The study focused on students who were enrolled in BS classes. The sample included 20 local bilingual students, both male and female, who were randomly selected from different semesters and fields of study. The participants were interviewed using a semi-structured approach to collect data. Thematic analysis of the data revealed various reasons for code-switching, including lack of proficiency in L2, desire to avoid confusion, mastery of L1 rules, use of code-switching as a filler, limited vocabulary in one language, desire for privacy, avoidance of taboos, emphasis on a point, desire to display knowledge of English, and market value of English. The results of this study indicate that code-switching is a useful strategy for bilingual speakers to interact and share knowledge effectively in classroom settings. The study also suggests that further research is needed, particularly in investigating social class and gender-based factors. This study has implications for English language teaching, including language learners, teachers, and curriculum developers.

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