

PEDAGOGICAL AND IDENTITY-DRIVEN MOTIVATIONS FOR CODE-SWITCHING: A GENDER-BASED STUDY OF PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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1. Abstract

This paper analyses the pedagogical and identity-based motivation for code-switching (CS) among Pakistani university students, with a specific focus on gender-based variation. Though it is true that CS has been recognised as a prevalent communicative approach across multiple language (multilingual) contexts, little research has been conducted on how pedagogical needs are derived to be integrated with identity performance in Pakistani tertiary education. It employs a mixed-methods design, with data collected through surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with 120 undergraduate students. The quantitative findings demonstrate that the primary reasons for CS, according to the pedagogical sources, of making the matter easier to comprehend and filling lexical blanks and conceptual cognition, are the driving forces of CS. Qualitative results also indicate that identity-based motivations play an important role, though in a secondary sense, as students use English to indicate academic competence and prestige, and Urdu to indicate solidarity and cultural belonging. Gender analysis shows that female students rely more on CS as an act of supportive academic support, whereas their male counterparts have more switching behaviour in identity-oriented aspects. The paper finds that CS has woven both the pedagogical and symbolic roles, which are the strategies of learning and its sociocultural positioning. The findings have importance in the area of applied linguistics by further expounding on the multifunctional character of the bilingual practices, and have implications for bilingual pedagogy and the development of an inclusive language policy in Pakistani universities.

Keywords: Code-switching; bilingualism; applied linguistics; gender and language; Pakistani higher education; identity construction; pedagogical motivations; sociolinguistics; English–Urdu switching.

2. Introduction

In general terms, alternative but two or more languages in a particular communication act, Code Switching (CS), is a widespread linguistic phenomenon in societies with more than one language (Rojas, 2025). In Pakistan, with English being linked with prestige and Urdu being used as a lingua franca at the national level, the use of CS has become part and parcel of communication, particularly in the sphere of higher education. The students of the university regularly switch between English and Urdu to allow them to manage the academic loads, their positions of identity, or to align with peers. Although the practice has become normalised, the inspirations behind the use cases remain multifaceted and case-specific, and they should be systematically explored from the viewpoint of an applied linguistic approach.

This paper is the analysis of the pedagogical and identity-related motivation towards CS among Pakistani university students, and specifically on the difference by gender. On the one hand, although there are researches, which have specifically outlined the set of what instruction can do in CS, i.e., facilitation of comprehension, scaffolding technology, and filling of lexical gaps (Gracia et al., 2025), there are fewer studies that considered how the factors of identity are overlapping with gendered social expectations in the context of bilingual behaviour. Language choice frequently becomes a symbolic asset in which people bargain a sense of identity, influence, or modernity in sociolinguistically stratified communities (Ibrahim et al., 2025). The contribution to understanding linguistic identity as achieved in college contexts is therefore the understanding of the different ways male and female students are differently patterned as regards CS.

2.1 Background of Code-Switching in Multilingual Contexts

Broadly understood as the switching of two or more communicative variants of a specific communicative episode, code-switching (CS) is a commonly reported occurrence in societies with more than one language (Sattar, 2025). CS is also commonly discovered in the educational context to be a dynamic resource, which enables the negotiator of meaning to be carried out by the speakers in order to enable understanding and create social relations. In Pakistan, where both the English and the Urdu language have significant institutional powers and the former is a lingua franca used in the country, CS is now an integral part of the academic and the most common language.

2.2 Code-Switching in Pakistani Higher Education

The development and propagation of English among Pakistani universities has enhanced the reliance of students on CS in varied levels of linguistic ability and disciplinary literacy. As various studies indicate, the usage of English-Urdu switching among university students is observed to serve the purposes of explaining confusing academic concepts, controlling and managing social relationships, as well as situating themselves within reference to their peers and professors (Abduvaxobov et al., 2025; Fatima, Mustafa and Amin, 2025). Although it is commonplace, this does not mean that the motivations behind the use of CS are simple, because they are influenced by pedagogical necessities and sociocultural processes.

2.3 Problem Statement

Although studies have accepted CS as a viable pedagogical instrument, little significance has been accorded to the cross-cuts of identity-based motive on gendered linguistic practices in Pakistani universities. Within the framework of sociolinguistic standards according to which people communicate depending on the gender they belong to, the information about the usage of CS by male and female students can shed some light on the specifics of identity formation and participation in the classroom setting.

2.4 Research Objectives

1. To identify the pedagogical and identity-driven motivations that impact Pakistani university students in engaging in code-switching (CS) within academic settings.
2. To assess gender-based differences in the pedagogical and identity-oriented functions of code-switching.
3. To provide implications for language policy and bilingual pedagogy in Pakistani universities on the basis of the research findings.

Research Questions

1. What pedagogical motivations lead Pakistani university students to code-switch in academic settings?

2. What identity-driven motivations influence students' decisions to switch between Urdu and English during peer and academic interactions?
3. How do pedagogical and identity-driven motivations for code-switching differ between female and male university students?

2.5 Significance of the Study

This research is a contribution to applied linguistics that analyzes the switches between the instructional and the identity-based perspectives of CS. The results of this research will likely influence bilingual pedagogical practices, contribute to the sociolinguistic research on the gender topic, and enhance more inclusive language policies within Pakistani HE.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Studies on CS have been informed by diverse theory orientations. Interactional sociolinguistics by Gumperz (1982) centres around the characteristics of CS as a contextual activity that captures the intent of the speaker as well as social meaning. The Markedness Model postulated by Myers-Scotton (1993) is another conceptualisation of CS as a strategic action informed by the perceptions of the speakers of normative language forms and by the intention to index this or that identity. Also, Communication Accommodation Theory explains CS as being a form of convergence or divergence such that speakers modify their speeches to get closer or farther away from the interlocutor. These frameworks make CS of total position pedagogically helpful as well as symbolically conveying to a social context.

3.2 Code-Switching in Educational Contexts

The trend of CS in applied linguistics has been on the shift of the shortcomings into a pedagogic advantage. A study indicates that it is significant in aiding in the tasks of understanding, structuring complications, simplifying the process of change between the aspects of abstraction and concreteness, and the development of vocabulary. In situations where English is used as a second or foreign language, CS facilitates both teachers and students in negotiating the meaning by overcoming linguistic gaps to accomplish effective meaning negotiation. It has been discovered that bilingual students resort to CS to seek clarification in instructions, negotiate a task, and ensure proper academic understanding (Jofita & Haryanto, 2026). This instructional role is also especially relevant in light of Pakistani higher education, wherein the use of English in instruction is commonplace, and where the level of English language proficiency among student populations can vary.

3.3 Code-Switching as Identity Performance

CS has other significant functions in that of creating and negotiating identities by people beyond its teaching value. Depending on the social affiliation, generational inclination, or gendered identities, language choices can be observed (Khany & Barzan, 2025). In most parts of South Asia, English is associated with modernity, good, and social advancement, so CS serves as a means of executing aspirational identities (Alasgarova, n.d.). Conversely, speaking Urdu could reflect an element of unity, cultural sincerity, or informality. The issue of gender plays a major role in such dynamics; some studies have shown that both men and women can employ various linguistic strategies due to societal reinforcement regarding social constructs like politeness, assertiveness, and positioning in society (Misbah, 2025). Therefore, through a cross-gendered pattern of CS, one can observe the role of identity and social demands in bilingual discourse.

3.4 Code-Switching in the Pakistani Sociolinguistic Landscape

In Pakistan, language shift has been experienced, with the diglossia phenomenon, bilingualism, and intricate stratification of languages and English having taken the top-most prestige position (Babayigit, n.d.). The CS in English and Urdu among the students and teachers is present everywhere in the universities. It has been reported that it was used as a communicative and cognitive tool to go between a formal academic language and vernacular familiar repertoires (Chifaa et al., 2025). Nevertheless, many of the current studies are centred on the classroom talk or teacher-student communication, leaving this gap as regards what the personal driving forces of the student are, particularly within the gendered perspective. Considering sociocultural requirements that underlie the perception of gender in Pakistan, exploring whether or not the male and female students differ in their CS practices, and can, through realisation of gender manifestations, help comprehend the process of linguistic identity formation.

3.5 Research Gap

Although there exists substantial literature on CS in Pakistan on the use of this strategy in the form of a pedagogical approach, there has been little to no emphasis on how CS is motivational in terms of one personality, and little or no emphasis on whether or not CS can vary by gender. The available research seldom involves an integrated elucidation of the pedagogical with identity-based clarification in a unified setting, and it does not explain the effects of the interaction of the two motivations on gender in university settings. This research addresses these gaps by providing a twin perspective research into the motivation towards CS as well as the revelation of the mediating position of gender within the bilingual behaviour of the Pakistani university students.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The present study has been informed by a mixed-method approach in providing a holistic picture when it comes to the pedagogical and identity-related motivation of code switching (CS) by the students of the Pakistani university using an amalgamation of a quantitative and a qualitative research approach, respectively. Quantitative survey was used to identify patterns and frequencies of CS practices, whereas qualitative interviews and classroom observations led to a deeper understanding of the social meaning of the patterns and contextual motives behind such behaviours. The present design aligns with applied linguistics studies in which the triangulation is conducted to increase the validity of the results and allow a more sophisticated interpretation of the discourse practices of bilingualism in the educational context.

4.2 Participants

The sample of varied linguistic backgrounds and education was acquired by recruiting participants in three Pakistani public and private universities. The sample size during the quantitative part consisted of 120 students (60 males and 60 females). In the case of the qualitative element, 20 students (10 men and 10 women) purposely came up due to details given in the survey responses, with an exhibited regularity of CS. The students were all aged between 18 and 24 years and belonged to various fields like business, social sciences, engineering, and linguistics. The rules of ethics were taken seriously, and the process was voluntary.

4.3 Data Collection Tools

Three complementary tools were used to collect the data. Self-reported CS motivations of students were assessed on the basis of a structured questionnaire, i.e., in the form of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The items were categorised as either having a pedagogical motivation (i.e.,

clarification, vocabulary gaps, support of comprehension) or a related identity-related motivation (i.e., group alignment, social prestige). Second, the observation of classroom sessions was conducted in six classes, which were in English medium, on naturally occurring CS occurrence during peer interaction and student-teacher interaction. Thirdly, semi-structured interviews were used to query the students about their opinion regarding their language shifting process within academic institutions and their beliefs regarding their gender norms in language choice.

4.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, and frequencies and percentages were relied on in determining the most prevalent motivational categories. Comparisons were done by gender to demonstrate the variations in male and female CS patterns. Thematic analysis of qualitative data that consisted of interviews and observations was performed. The coding was inductive as the themes were discovered through the data, but not a priori. The conceptual framework of the study was then mapped on themes to enable a division between pedagogical versus identity-driven motivation so that it would accommodate consistency with research questions.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, Ethical permission was acquired. Participants were informed why the study was taking place, they were assured of confidentiality, and were allowed to withdraw at any time. All the participants received pseudonyms, and the data were stored in a secure manner to guarantee privacy. Due to the possibility that classroom observation could involve other students, instructors were made aware of the situation to prevent a lack of transparency.

5. Results

5.1 Quantitative Findings

The data collected during the survey were analysed, and it was revealed that pedagogical motivations were more frequently reported than identity-related ones in the whole sample. Among them, the most common causes of CS were clarification of complex material, bridging gaps in the lexicon, and consolidation of knowledge. On gender comparisons, it was found that the female students had a higher CS use regarding comprehension-related capabilities, whereas male students had a higher probability of using CS regarding informal peer interaction.

Table 1. Frequency of Code-Switching Motivations Across Gender

Motivation Type	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Clarification of complex concepts	68%	82%	75%
Filling vocabulary or lexical gaps	72%	79%	76%
Reinforcing comprehension	65%	84%	74%
Managing classroom interaction	58%	63%	60%
Expressing solidarity/peer bonding	70%	66%	68%
Projecting confidence or prestige	77%	61%	69%
Humour and informality	73%	69%	71%
Aligning with social group identity	69%	62%	66%

5.2 Pedagogical Motivations

All learners were obsessed with CS as an academic learning aid. The results of the survey were supported by classroom observations, which also showed that the students tended to switch to Urdu when they attempted to comprehend unknown terms, instructions, and other jargon of their

discipline. The female students who viewed CS as an insurance of being able to get things are the ones who revealed in interviews that they felt that, in such a learning environment, CS was the reason that they could rely on and could be assured that they did comprehend the material, particularly in communicating in odd language classes. Conversely, male students mentioned CS as one of the mechanisms that enabled them to maintain a conversation in a group, and this can be considered as modifying the slight gender difference in pedagogical motivation.

5.3 Identity-Driven Motivations

Motivations that are related to identity were made a secondary, though critical group. A significant number of students would switch to English in instances where they were seeking to portray some form of confidence, competence, or academic prestige. On the other hand, moving to Urdu was associated with loyalty, humour, and cultural originality. Women students said that CS helped them cope with social norms concerning being agreeable and accommodating than their male counterparts related to CS and English insertion in specific contexts, to social assertiveness and status-marking. These results agree with sociolinguistic approaches according to which a choice of language can be linked to the performance of one's identity.

5.4 Gender-Based Differences

The relative comparison came out as gender based subtle differences. Whereas both parties employed CS in academic clarity, female and male students employed more pedagogically motivated CS and CS in more identity-signaling practices in their peer networks, respectively. The connection between pedagogic need and the positioning of identity also appeared to be stronger among males who reported using English to designate modernity or authority. Women, in contrast, rely on CS to balance the state of relationship equilibrium and prevent communicative failure.

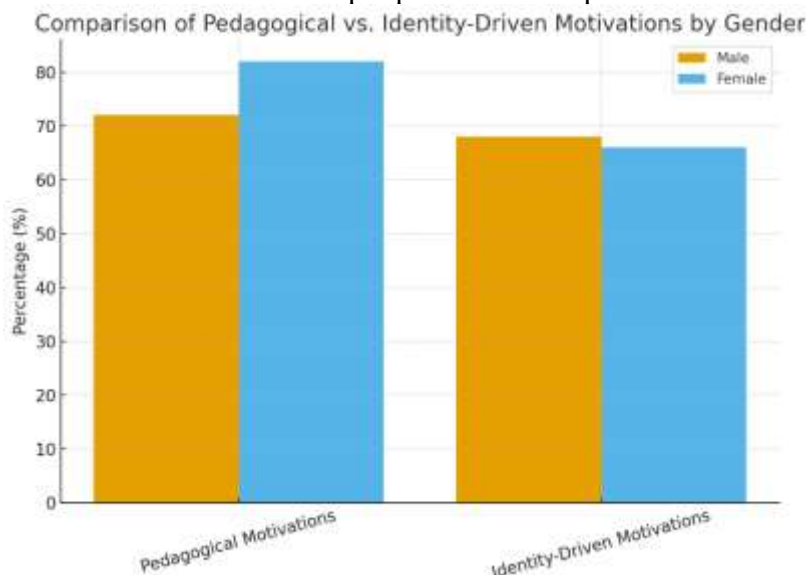


Figure 1. Comparison of Pedagogical vs. Identity-Driven Motivations by Gender

6. Discussion

6.1 Interpretation of Pedagogical Drivers

The findings of the current study can substantiate the idea that the most rewarding motivation for code-switching (CS) is pedagogical in the case of Pakistani university students. The participants continuously participated in the use of CS to simplify complicated terms, as a tool for explaining

comprehension in group functioning, and as a measure to strengthen comprehension of discipline-related matters. These findings hold in comparison to the literature, which introduces CS as a cognitive and communicative scaffold in the multilingual classes (Nozima, 2025). Most importantly, the degree of dependence on CS by the female students was more likely to be associated with better academic clarity, which could point to a more sensitive level of accuracy in comprehension or a higher level of linguistic self-regulation. It is a gendered focus on academic facilitation that draws our attention to the fact that CS is, in a real sense, an academic learning resource, besides being a sign of linguistic incompetence.

6.2 Interpretation of Identity Drivers

The motivation of identity came to play a significant secondary category, which demonstrates how students can employ language imaginatively in establishing themselves in social hierarchies and peer groups. The inclination of students to use English but sound confident or authoritative, or capable of pursuing their studies, gets reinforced by the fact that English happens to be prestigious in Pakistan. Sweet et al. (2025) state that English is a symbolic prestige in Pakistan. On the contrary, Urdu reforms were associated rather with humour and cultural and informal solidarity. The increased reliance by male students on using English to signify identity may be influenced by a congruence between the general norms of gauged gender characteristics, including an association between masculinity and assertiveness and modernity, in society. On the other hand, the female students were using CS as a means of maintaining relational harmony and advancing sociolinguistic inferences that discourse norms and politeness strategies are affected by gender.

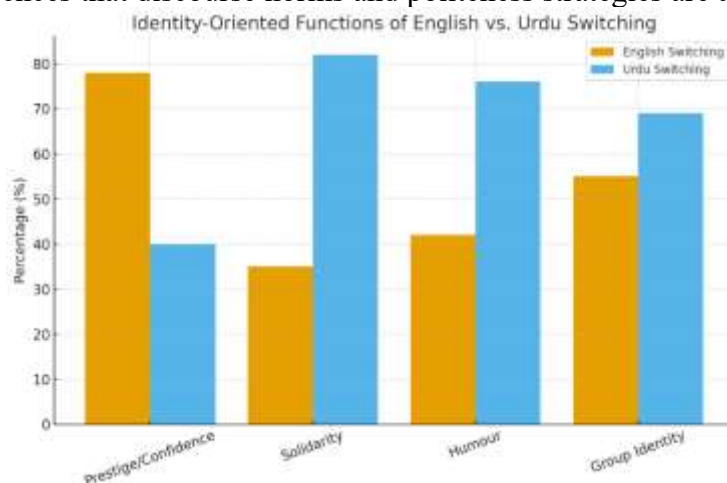


Figure 2. Identity-Oriented Functions of English vs. Urdu Switching

6.3 Discussion Through Theoretical Lens

When these findings are interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks approach of Myers-Scotton (1993) and Gillespie (2023), they provide more information on student motivations. The Markedness Model explains how the strategic use of English by students is a marked choice to encode academic prestige/confidence, and Urdu as an unmarked choice to solidarity. In the meantime, the Communication Accommodation Theory describes how the students shift towards or away from their groupmates during group discussion or by adding English words to bring about social distance or competence. In this type of structure, the gender-based difference becomes of special interest since, under the concept of divergence-oriented identity marking, CS was employed with males, whereas convergence or social cohesion was carried out by females.

6.4 Relationship Between Pedagogy and Identity in Code-Switching

Although it appears that there are differences between paediatric and identity-driven motivations, this paper demonstrates their connection to one another. There were also pedagogical switches, which had a social connotation; switching to Urdu as a means of understanding would also imply informality and belongingness to a group. Likewise, the impetus of identity towards switching English at times supported the authority of academic or leadership in a group activity. This overlapping suggests that the responsibilities of CS are now twice, and can not be separated in a clean way to separate into distinguishable categories. The multifaceted interaction between learning strategies, peers, and cultural expectations, therefore, is reflected through the linguistic choices of the students.

6.5 Implications for Pedagogy, Policy, and Future Research

The implications of the study for educational practice are several. To begin with, it is important to note that a positive value of CS as a pedagogical tool that is productive can aid instructors in coming up with more inclusive bilingual teaching methods. The discouragement of CS may result in a negative restriction of the ability of students to think flexibly in order to participate. Second, the gendered nature of CS leads to the consideration of the value of a gender-sensitive methodology of pedagogy where social expectations and patterns of participation are addressed. Lastly, future research ought to explore the non-binary and marginalised linguistic identity and examine the influence of digital communication media on CS practices.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

This paper has talked about pedagogical and identity-based motivation of code-switching as applied to Pakistani university students, as far as gender-based comparisons are concerned. Findings revealed that the major driving force of CS was pedagogical motivations, particularly clarification motivation, vocabulary assistance motivation, and comprehension reinforcement motivation. Other important identity-related processes included signalling of confidence, showing of solidarity, and enacting cultural affiliation. There was a gender difference whereby female students established a higher number of CS usage through academic facilitation, but male students established a higher number of CS usage through identity projection.

7.2 Contribution to Applied Linguistics

With the integration of pedagogical and identity perspectives, the research will refer to the contribution to the applied lingual research in the context of bilingualism in higher education. It places importance on CS as the perfect communication tool that is multifunctional and is determined by linguistic competence, gender expectations, and sociocultural expectations in Pakistan.

7.3 Limitations and Future Recommendations

The sample of the research study was also restricted to three universities, thus stipulating a limited scope for generalizing it. Also, the study failed to explore non-binary gender identities, as well as the topic of discipline and the differences in CS tools. To increase the knowledge on contemporary bilingual behaviour, future studies must employ larger and more heterogeneous samples and take into account the context of digital communication.

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