

CODE-SWITCHING AS A TOOL OF POWER AND EMPATHY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND NATIVE LANGUAGE USE IN PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY CLASSROOMS

Akash Lakhani¹

English Lecturer at County Cambridge Girls College, Hyderabad, Pakistan

Suneeta Ramesh²

Lecturer, Department of Basic Sciences and Humanities Dawood University of Engineering and Technology Karachi

Abdul Samad³

MS Scholar, Applied Linguistics Department of English Sindh Madressatul Islam University (SMIU) Karachi, Pakistan

Abdul Sattar⁴

MPhil Applied Linguistics Scholar, Department of English, Hamdard University, Karachi, Pakistan

Corresponding Author's Email alakhani820@gmail.com

Abstract

In multilingual educational contexts like Pakistan, the language use in classroom talk significantly influence authority, emotional involvement and learning. This qualitative study explores the role of code-switching between English and L1 as a power/empowerment tool that is used in Pakistani ESL tertiary classrooms. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with twelve undergraduate students studying in 6th semester and 8th semester the BS English discipline at Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science, and Technology (Karachi), Abdul Haq Campus. Participants were selected by purposive sampling to meet specific linguistic and academic criteria. The interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed using NVivo software. The findings of the study suggest that English is used to construct academic authority, administer and maintain institutional order while native languages are employed for demonstrating empathy, comfort expression and promoting understanding. The paper demonstrates how teachers work with and against these roles strategically using code-switching, as a practice which enables them to maintain their professionalism whilst fostering shared and supportive relationships between school members. By focusing on the dual sociolinguistic functions of code-switching, this analysis provides a nuanced insight into language-power-emotions relationships in university classrooms.

Keyword: Code-switching; Power and empathy; Classroom discourse; Multilingual education; Pakistani university classrooms; Sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Language is not merely about communication, language constitutes our identities, it does power and relationships. In a multilingual country like Pakistan where Urdu/Sindhi/Punjabi/Pashto/Balochi and English are present; the classrooms are abundant with use of language. On the one hand, English (as an historical and institutional power), has been forged as a language of power and social (academics) promotion, with all their implication of capital dominance, while L1(s)'s have at times been linked to love action/feeling for the other, solidarity, empathy and cultural proximity (Goebel 2010; Friedrich & Diniz De Figueiredo 2016). In such multi-lingual educational environments, teachers may more frequently switch from English to L1 (both as a feature of all bi/multilingual education or code-switching) in order to teach or socialize and/or solve emotional problems for decision making (Pakiragnan 1994: 92)

Code-switching is a well-accepted sociolinguistic and pragmatic phenomenon that provides speakers with devices to navigate the intricacies of communicative situations, and

express subtle and nuanced meanings (Lanvers & Auer, 2000; Lim & Ansaldo, 2015). This is particularly significant within the classroom as it does not only reveal teachers' pedagogic intentions, but also their intergroup sensitivity and awareness of students language backgrounds. English is used as a tool to wield power over or with students, that which is sanctioned by school norms and rules; L1 use is employed to reach out and connect from their lives toward the world of schooling (Merritt et al., 1992; Moschkovich, 2006). This kind of double sidedness that...comes with native authority and love in English is one more example of the entwining of emotion and social status with a choice of language.

In Pakistani Higher education, the choice of medium of instruction is in English and that it is also regarded as a status symbol too (Goebel, 2010; Benzehaf, 2021). But linguistic dominance could form a social and emotional divide between teachers and students, even ones who were less fluent in English. On the other hand, if a teacher focus on or simplify challenging topics in learners' L1, teachers are described as being informal and unprofessional (Cahyani et al., 2016). This conflict between control and authority of language, on the one hand, and affective.

While the pedagogic value of code-switching is currently under-appreciated, A little is known about how it functions as both a tool of power and empathy in Pakistani university settings. While there is some study carried out about use of code-switching as a pedagogical or translational tool (Merritt et al., 1992; Cahyani et al., 2016), the issue of teachers using an alternation between languages to mediate authority and build emotional bridges has received less attention. That is why this study looks into how English and first languages are deployed strategically by university teachers for the exercise of power relations as well as empathetic purposes—which could replicate broader linguistic hierarchies and cultures impacting educational discourses in Pakistan.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine how English is used by university teachers as a means of asserting authority and maintaining academic control.
2. To explore how native languages are employed to express empathy, solidarity, and emotional support toward students.
3. To analyze how code-switching reflects broader sociolinguistic hierarchies and cultural attitudes toward English in Pakistani university classrooms.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do teachers use English to construct power relations in classroom discourse?
2. In what ways do teachers use native languages to convey empathy and interpersonal connection?
3. What sociolinguistic meanings and cultural ideologies are reflected through teachers' patterns of code-switching in Pakistani university classrooms?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Code-Switching

Code-switching is fundamental to sociolinguistic studies and refers to the alternating use of two languages during a communicative situation. As Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (2005) refer code switching is a bilingual communicative practice that permits speakers to construct meanings, convey attitudes, negotiate social relationships. In contrast, Lanvers and Auer (2000) consider it as a membership categorization and alignment feature in multilingual conversation. It demonstrates how English inhabits the same multilingual spaces such as those we witness in a country like Pakistan, where it does so not only based on relation to indexical social status and/or affective proximity but also in terms of institutional hierarchy

most visibly. Lim and Ansaldo (2015) make a distinction between code-switching, borrowing and code-mixing, where the switch is affected at a supra-sentential level and depends on communicants' linguistic competence. These changes are socially motivated, and strongly determined by norms, context and the speaker's perception of what will be an accepted form.

Within classrooms, code-switching serves as a pedagogical and relational tool for comprehension and inclusion. Cahyani, De Courcy, and Barnett (2016) note that teachers code-switch deliberately in order to make meaning clearer translation into L1 preserving rapport and maintaining class attention. Moschkovich (2006) observed that students also use language alternation to mediate meaning and to relate mathematical generalities to known instances. These are things we see in Pakistani universities and illustrate the multilingual nature of the classroom, as English implies authority and native language empathy. Thus, code-switching is seen as an important communication strategy for sharing/exchanging information or ideas and forming a relationship between teachers and students.

2.2 Types and Functions of Code-Switching

There have been three predominant types of code-switching identified: intersentential, intrasentential and tag-switching. Inter-sentential switching refers to trading between sentential (or clausal) structures, whereas intra-sentential switching in a single sentence as presented here would take a strong bilingual pattern of proficiency (Lim and Ansaldo, 2015). In contrast, tag-switching is a process in which the short phrase or discourse marker of language A is embedded in language B as an indicator of emphasis or marked solidarity. Merritt et al. (1992) discovered that through code-switching teachers were managing discourses in the classroom by regulating taking a turn and displaying their authority. Cahyani et al., (2016) point out that switching functions to achieve pedagogical and sociocultural purposes— promoting understanding of the instructional message as well as socializing both teachers and students.

Code-switching, apart from its structural limitations serves such communicational and affective functions. Moschkovich (2006) asserted that bilingual students use code-switching to enable them to reason and communicate their ideas about mathematics more easily, thereby evidencing that switching is a cognitive tool rather than a linguistic barrier. Similarly, Song (2016) argues that CS (code-switching) can serve as an avenue for emotional expression and sense of belonging, and Fisher et al. (2018) found that it facilitates identity work in multilingual and inclusive classrooms. Bilinguals by not Bilinguale: Switching as a rhetorical resource in disputes." (2008) We use switching as a rhetorical resource to convey alignment and resistance. Taken together, these studies indicate code-switching is not phenomenon that just happens haphazardly, but it is a purposeful discursive strategy used to achieve academic, social and emotional goals.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks on Code-Switching and Power

There are three broad traditions in theoretical scholarship concerning code-switching: sociolinguistic, pragmatic and critical. Gumperz (1982, in: Gumperz Gumperz 2005) Interactional Sociolinguistics analyses code-switching as a contextualisation cue the is use to signal change of meaning and the relationship between interlocutors. Closely related in spirit to Hymes' *Ethnography of Communication*, this emphasis on language choice maps onto community norms and communicative competence (knowing how rather than what) as well. These models imply that switching is a socially controlled process which can be influenced by social norms and circumstances. These theories make sense of educational talk as a site at which authority is negotiated, respect constructed, and familiarity resisted or promulgated through classroom language.

"From a perspectival point of view, defined by other positions that tend to be more ideological and power-based, code-switching is 'power speak'." The Power and Solidarity

Theory of Brown and Gilman illustrates how choice of the language form mirrors verticality, closeness in speakers' choice. This is in accordance with the study of Cahyani et al. s (2016) findings about how teachers code switch between professional and emotional registers. Fair clough (as cited in Friedrich & Diniz De Figueiredo, 2016)'s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspectives treat language use as a form of social control for examination in terms of how it reflects its reproduction among English and institutional power. Switching 'organizes discourse and signals participants' relational alignment' (Lanvers & Auer, 2000) according to Auer's Conversation Analytic Approach. Combined, this set of lenses show how code-switching is a practice of authorship and a channel for multilingual connections in educational tasks.

3. Research Methodology

The current research being fundamentally qualitative one aimed to unveil the sociolinguistic functions of code-switching as power and empathy gesture in Pakistani university classrooms. The present study's data was collected through semi-structured group interviews that enabled participants to express their linguistic experience and perceptions. Through purposive sampling 12 participants were selected for data collection from English department of Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology. Later after the group completion both of the teams were split into 2 further teams, one consisting of six students from 8th semester while other consisting of 6th semester. The sample selection provided cross-sectional images from students at different levels in the same linguistic community. All interviews were conducted in a relaxed and private setting to encourage open responses. Transcripts of interviews were produced and the qualitative data was analyzed using NVivo software by means of thematic analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1: English as a Marker of Authority and Academic Control

Participant	Statement	Theme
P1 (8th Sem)	<i>"Whenever the teacher wants to be serious or discuss exams, they immediately switch to English."</i>	Authority
P3 (6th Sem)	<i>"Instructions given in English feel more official and final."</i>	Institutional Power
P5 (8th Sem)	<i>"Teachers use English to maintain discipline in class."</i>	Control
P2 (6th Sem)	<i>"I feel English creates distance but also shows professionalism."</i>	Hierarchy

The findings unequivocally suggest that English is a powerful language source in which teachers exercise power and authority in classrooms in the university context. English was, in this latter sense, uniformly linked to the expectations of seriousness and formality as an index of institutional legitimacy due to the fact that its use marked a shift towards disciplinary/evaluative talk. The suggestion that English "creates distance" by looking professional suggests that it is a support in hierarchy relations between teacher and students. This reflects broader sociolinguistic ideologies in the Pakistani tertiary education context with respect to English as a domain of academic advantage and power. Consequently, strategic use of English by teachers not only controls classroom behaviour – it reproduces the institution's accepted hierarchies and power relations.

4.2: Native Language as a Tool of Empathy and Emotional Support

Participant	Statement	Theme
-------------	-----------	-------

Participant	Statement	Theme
P4 (8th Sem)	<i>"When teachers explain in Urdu, it feels like they care about our understanding."</i>	Empathy
P1 (6th Sem)	<i>"Switching to our language makes the class friendly."</i>	Solidarity
P6 (8th Sem)	<i>"Teachers comfort students in Urdu when someone is confused."</i>	Emotional Support
P3 (6th Sem)	<i>"I feel relaxed when the teacher switches to Urdu."</i>	Emotional Ease

Responses of participants reveal that the L1 is a highly effective tool for affect and emotionality as it pertains to interaction in the classroom. The moment teachers revert to the use of Urdu or regional languages, students perceive it as evidence of some real care and feeling for them. This hedging mitigates the anxiety, and hence enhance expertise on psychological well-being, participation. The emotional "warmth" of speaking in one's home language makes it less daunting to make space for academic debate, and takes off the sharper edge of power relations too often policed by English. Accordingly, the native languages function as relational assets contributing to solidarity and trust that support teachers in dealing not only with academic but also affective aspects of students' learning.

4.3: Code-Switching as a Pedagogical Strategy

Participant	Statement	Theme
P2 (8th Sem)	<i>"Teachers explain difficult concepts in English and then clarify in Urdu."</i>	Conceptual Clarity
P5 (6th Sem)	<i>"Switching helps us understand literature better."</i>	Comprehension
P4 (6th Sem)	<i>"It saves time when teachers switch languages."</i>	Efficiency
P6 (8th Sem)	<i>"Both languages together make learning easier."</i>	Pedagogical Support

The results emphasise code-switching as a systematic pedagogical device and not a spontaneous or unsystematised activity. What the teachers were making reference to was how they use English as a mediating language through which difficult concepts are introduced and then translated into the parents' native languages. This blended instructional model further increases cognitive access to and reduces misinterpretation in literature and theoretical topics. Second, students considered switching between languages to be a time-efficient, learner-centred way of communicating that fills linguistic voids without detracting from demanding content. These results confirm that code-switching can help in knowledge construction and affective learning meaning making in multilingual university classrooms.

4.4: Balancing Power and Empathy Through Language Choice

Participant	Statement	Theme
P3 (8th Sem)	<i>"English shows authority, Urdu shows kindness."</i>	Power–Empathy Balance
P1 (6th Sem)	<i>"Teachers balance strictness and friendliness by switching languages."</i>	Strategic Switching

Participant	Statement	Theme
P5 (8th Sem)	<i>"Language choice depends on mood and situation."</i>	Context Sensitivity
P2 (6th Sem)	<i>"Switching makes teachers feel human."</i>	Relational Connection

The findings of the present study shows the subtlety and strategizing involved in teachers' language selections when orchestrating classroom relations. Participants mentioned the English and indigenous language serve them, in two dimensions – "English carries authority" (P1) and "indigenous languages make you very humble" (P4). "switching" between these codes enable teachers to attune themselves into the institutional without emotional detachment from students. It is a balance of linguistic sensitivity on the one hand and sociopragmatic concern on the other, that can help teachers exercise control without leading learners to emotional withdrawal. Code-switching therefore appears as a performant communicative strategy, where on one hand teachers are balancing authority and sympathy and ultimately crafted an inclusive but firm classroom.

4.5: Students' Perceptions of Linguistic Hierarchy

Participant	Statement	Theme
P4 (8th Sem)	<i>"English feels superior in university."</i>	Linguistic Hierarchy
P6 (6th Sem)	<i>"Using Urdu feels informal but helpful."</i>	Language Ideology
P3 (6th Sem)	<i>"English is expected at university level."</i>	Institutional Norm
P1 (8th Sem)	<i>"Native language connects us culturally."</i>	Cultural Identity

The findings show that students are actually very conscious of the relative ranking of languages in an institution. Their legitimate, normal academic language of legitimacy, intellectuality and professionalism is English. The first is that native language is perceived to be a form of the Home language which appears less formal more directly emotional and higher up the scale from L2s, so as an identity and community maker. This bilingual vantage point reflects internalised linguistic ideologies carved out by colonial history and institutional problems. English primacy may serve to buttress academic authority, but in fact first languages are the vessel of a people's relationship with past, present and future. The conflict between these language roles shows that Pakistan universities are a multi-layered linguistic institution.

Discussion

The current investigation has shown that teachers' code switching in Pakistani university classrooms can be considered as strategic socio linguistic performance, whereby they express an attempt to negotiate their authority, friendliness and pedagogic effectiveness. English was implemented as a hegemonic language of academic power, seriousness and institutionality. This perception of participants that English language takes on professional as well as authorial values is backed up by some previous research which has already described the power enjoyed by the dominant languages in disciplinary practices and hierarchical relations (Merritt et al., 1992; Friedrich & Diniz De Figueiredo, 2016).

Use of the native language, however, was associated with empathy, emotional support and inclusion. When the teacher switched into Urdu or other local language, respondents felt that somebody care for them, which is also in line with those reported by Cahyani et al. (2016) and Song (2016) that CS is importantly an affective function. First, we used the native language of students to make them feel more relaxed and belonged in class, as

well as the human factor was brought back in the classroom and English's hard ruling was refuted.

Findings also raise code-switching as an important pedagogic resource for understanding and learning. This finding is in line with Moschkovich's (2006) claim for the use of plurilingualism to foster the cognitive development and the mathematics understanding. Instead of dumbing down educational requirements, this two-language model demands serious teaching in classrooms with kids of widely divergent language levels.

The key contribution by this study is that it shows how power and empathy are performed through teachers' use of language. English/a printed word is the twin-source (Grabe, 2010) for first language (L1) teachers who might depend on being able to create academic legitimacy with emotional proximity. This dual role is also accounted for by Brown and Gilman's (1960) power-solidarity framework of interaction, as well as interactional sociolinguistic attitudes (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 2005). In sum, the study tells us that 'code' and code-switching in HE is a calculated device driven by social patterning; representative of higher linguistic rankings and typified by an ethic to develop inclusive, empathetic learning spaces.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated code-switching as a sociological event in the Pakistani university classroom between power and empathy. The findings indicate that teachers are not using language randomly (or simply as a teaching matter) but as systematic strategic communicative behaviour which marries institutional pressure, pedagogical hope and personal difficulty. Home languages were thus constructed as the bearers of empathy, warmth and cultural authenticity whilst English continued to represent the language of instruction that was associated with power, professionalisation and cerebral authority. The layers combined form language lives in multilingual tertiary contexts.

The results also imply that code-switching serves the primary classroom process of promoting comprehension and meaning construction. One of the most effective ways to achieve that is by smartly using students' home languages alongside English in the classroom — and it can be done without sacrificing academic rigor, teachers say. The portrayal of how teachers' positional authority and relational proximity are reshaped in classrooms, and the importance of creating inclusive zones for caring, is especially significant. By exploring the double nature of code-switching as tool for both sanction and identity, this article also has relevancy for sociolinguistics research, as well to language-policy at educational faculties that consider bilingual skills not obligatory obstacles but things you can build on in higher education.

References

- Ansaldi, U., & Lim, L. (2020). Language contact in the Asian region. *The Routledge Handbook of Language Contact*, 434-461.
- Auer, P. (Ed.). (2013). *Code-switching in conversation: Language, interaction and identity*. Routledge.
- Auer, P. (Ed.). (2013). *Code-switching in conversation: Language, interaction and identity*. Routledge.
- Benzehaf, B. (2023). Multilingualism and its role in identity construction: a study of English students' perceptions. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 20(3), 1145-1163.
- Cahyani, H., de Courcy, M., & Barnett, J. (2018). Teachers' code-switching in bilingual classrooms: exploring pedagogical and sociocultural functions. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(4), 465-479.

- Cromdal, J. (2004). Building bilingual oppositions: Code-Switching in children's disputes. *Language in society*, 33(1), 33-58.
- Fisher, L., Evans, M., Forbes, K., Gayton, A., & Liu, Y. (2020). Participative multilingual identity construction in the languages classroom: A multi-theoretical conceptualisation. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 17(4), 448-466.
- Friedrich, P., & de Figueiredo, E. D. (2016). *The sociolinguistics of digital Englishes*. Routledge.
- Goebel, Z. (2018). Superdiversity. In *Handbook of Pragmatics: 21st Annual Installment* (pp. 221-238). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Gumperz, J. J., & Cook-Gumperz, J. (2005). Making space for bilingual communicative practice. *Intercultural pragmatics*, 2(1), 1-23.
- Merritt, M., Cleghorn, A., Abagi, J. O., & Bunyi, G. (1992). Socialising multilingualism: Determinants of codeswitching in Kenyan primary classrooms. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, 13(1-2), 103-121.
- Moschkovich, J. (2007). Using two languages when learning mathematics. *Educational studies in Mathematics*, 64(2), 121-144.
- Song, J. (2019). Language socialization and code-switching: A case study of a Korean–English bilingual child in a Korean transnational family. *International journal of bilingual education and bilingualism*, 22(2), 91-106.