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Kashmiri-Urdu Code Switching: A Distinct Code or a Bilingual Strategy?

Sajad Hussain Wani

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Abstract

This paper deals with the phenomenon of code switching which is the most commonly observed language contact phenomenon now-a-days. The main point of discussion in this paper is regarding the nature of the phenomena of code switching. The nature of code switching is debated based on the existing literature and illustrations are made through the Kashmiri-Urdu Code Switching in Jammu and Kashmir. The conclusion is that the nature of code switching is not purely a linguistic matter but is also a matter concerning extra-linguistic realities which led to the variable nature of code switching.

Key words: Language contact, Code Switching, Kashmiri, Urdu, bilingual strategy, unmarked and marked code.

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Introduction

The phenomenon related to language contact or language interaction phenomenon is surrounded by the thorny issue of terminological confusion. There is hardly any consensus about the structural, semantic and social scope of the phenomena associated with language contact like code-mixing, borrowing, code switching, alternation, style shifting, etc. Furthermore, the domain of analysis also differs, some using the discourse context as the domain of analysis while others prefer the clause/sentence. One of the reasons for the ambiguity is the ‘inherent variability’ of different contact situations. Language contact situations are rarely stable as there is a change going on overtly and covertly at phonological, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic levels. These changes go unnoticed as they are integrated in the competence of bilingual speakers with the passage of time. The change in socio-political factors associated with a language pair in contact can change the nature of contact between the language pair.

This paper attempts to discuss the nature of one of the most important and most frequent phenomenon associated with bilingual behaviour. This phenomenon of language interaction is known as code switching and requires competence in both languages. It must be made clear that this paper understands language interaction phenomenon forming a continuum with the languages at the two ends and code switching occupying the middle position. Code switching is taken as a phenomenon whether there is a change in the base language within a sentence consisting of two or more clauses. Thus code switching occurs above the clausal level. Some definitions of code switching entail a functional necessity of this phenomenon with the involvement of a new topic, situation, interlocutor as well as a change in other contextual factors. For example, Weinreich (1953) holds the view that an ideal bilingual switches from one language to another in verbal communication. Switching depends upon the type of discourse or interaction, nature of interlocutors or communication and the situation. Hudson (1980) holds the view that code switching is a natural event in bilingual speech communities. Thus these two definitions, in early literature of code switching, put this phenomenon at two opposite poles, one

considering it as a natural event and the other relating it to contextual factors or as a functional necessity. Thus this phenomenon raises a question whether every instance of code switching can be related to a function in a given society.

Verma (1998) holds the view that code switching is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that is determined by the verbal strategies of interaction. Sometimes code switching can be used and sometimes not. Thus, according to Verma, it is the phenomenon which is determined by verbal strategies in a given interaction on the one hand and on the other hand Poplack (1979) writes of code switching as, 'Code switching is a verbal skill requiring a large degree of competence in more than one language, rather than a deficit arising from insufficient knowledge of one or the other. Thus, it entails that a bilingual who involves in code switching has a large degree of competence in both languages. Along the same lines, Verma's definition puts code switching as a verbal strategy of interaction. Here, it is essential to note that if a code switching bilingual is competent in both languages, then why does he resort to code switching? Why does interaction determine code switching as a verbal strategy? The definitions of code switching entail a large amount of information and portray code switching as a phenomenon which varies with interaction types, social types as well as with individual types. Thus code switching definitions vary ranging from interactional, social and individual necessity to those which consider it as a natural phenomenon. Thus we are faced with a number of questions regarding code switching as phenomenon such as

1. How is code switching motivated by external factors?
2. Is every instance of code switching associated with a special function?
3. Does code switching reflect the normal behaviour and whether code switching can be considered as a single language code?

Does Code Switching Always Reflect Bilingual Strategy?

This paper attempts to look at Kashmiri-Urdu code switching as a widespread phenomenon among Kashmiri-Urdu bilinguals throughout Kashmir and tries to

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incorporate the aforementioned questions regarding the nature of code switching to it. An attempt will also be made to see how much of the literature regarding nature of code switching can be fitted in with Kashmiri-Urdu Code switching as a wide spread phenomenon. It must be made clear at the outset that this paper is a theoretical discussion about the nature of code switching as a phenomenon and is least concerned with the quantitative analysis which may be an important part of certain research works.

Kashmiri-Urdu Language Contact and Its impact:

The contact between Kashmiri and Urdu is more than a century old officially beginning in the early twentieth century when the Dogra king Pratap Singh made Urdu the official language of the country of Jammu and Kashmir. Urdu replaced Persian with ease in all the domains previously occupied by Persian. The influence did not last there but Urdu seems to have come a long way, influencing domains which were previously untouched by Persian and previously Sanskrit, the most ancient recorded contact language of Kashmir. In the post-1947 scenario the state of Jammu and Kashmir became the only state where Urdu was given the official status. The use of Urdu in the educational sector is observed in its use as a subject and more importantly as the medium of instruction in all government schools up to class 10th till 2003. Urdu is presently the most commonly used language after Kashmiri in the verbal repertoire of an educated Kashmiri. Urdu has also emerged as the most important language in the mass media sector in Kashmir. Radio Kashmir is designated as an Urdu station and many newspapers are published in Urdu (Kak and Wani 2005). All these factors have in turn made Urdu a prestige language in Kashmir.

In terms of interaction from a structural perspective, the first language interaction stage between Kashmiri and Urdu mainly occurred in the form of code mixes. The frequency increased. This paper follows the scheme of language interaction phenomenon as a continuum starting from code mixing and ending with the birth of a new language or congruent lexicalization of one or both languages. Code mixing is taken to mean insertion

of words of one language into a base of another language which here is Kashmiri. Thus this concept of code mixing entails the level of analysis of code mixing at or below the clausal level. The passage of time paved the way for factors necessary for the growth and intrusion of Urdu in the linguistic scene of Kashmir. Urdu in Kashmir presently has a strong ethno-linguistic vitality and forms an integral part of an educated Kashmiri's linguistic competence.

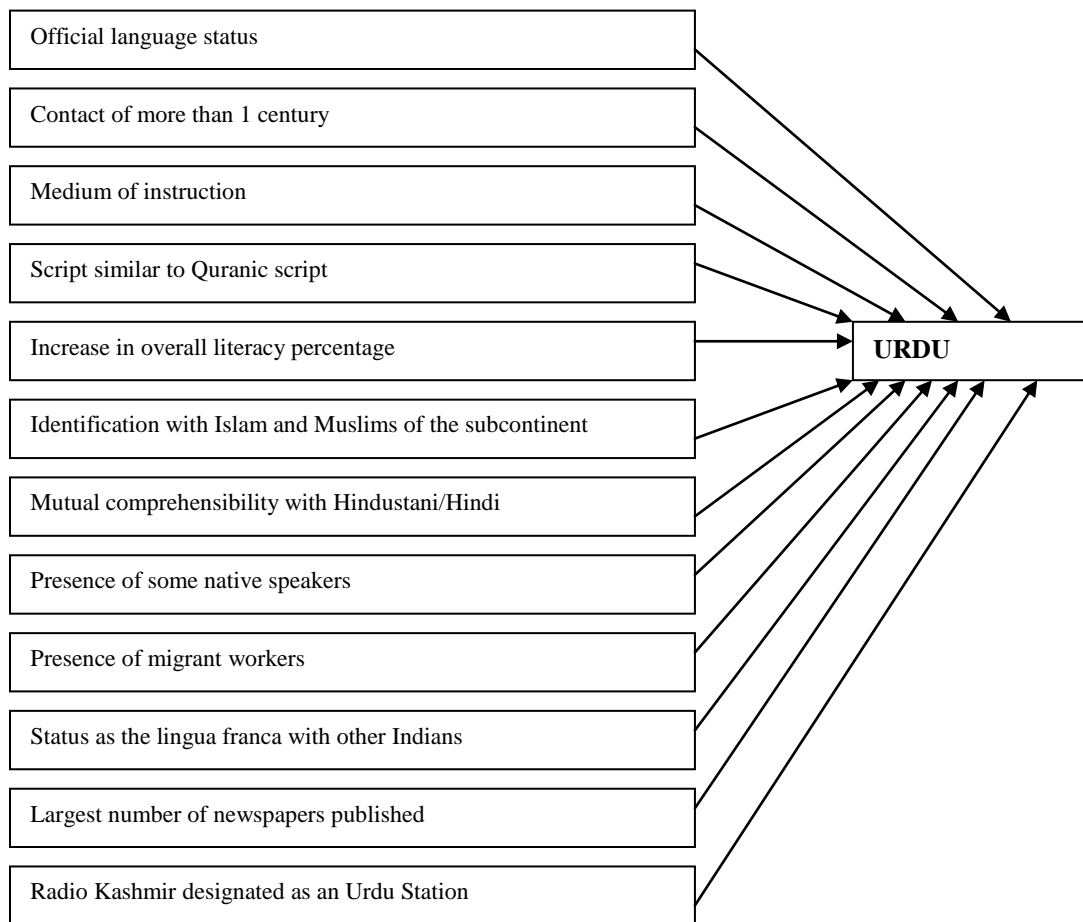


Fig. 1 Figure showing various factors responsible for stable and regular contact of Urdu with Kashmiri

As shown in Fig 1, a plethora of factors have made a strong bias for regular and stable usage of Urdu in day to day life of a Kashmiri. With the passage of time, knowledge as well as use of Urdu increased in the valley and code mixes started acquiring the position of borrowings in the valley. Urdu forms the primary choice of code switching among most educated Kashmiri speakers (Kak and Wani 2006). Although there are signs of interference on Urdu spoken by Kashmiri-Urdu bilinguals in the monolingual mode but these are not as frequent and as pervasive as the effect of Urdu on Kashmiri monolingual mode. Kashmiri is already observed to be on its way to congruent lexicalisation with Urdu. The main reasons for congruent lexicalisation of Kashmiri with Urdu found to be due to heavy borrowings of both the open class as well as the closed class elements (Kak and Wani 2006).

Kashmiri-Urdu Code Switching as a Bilingual Strategy

As explained earlier, Kashmiri-Urdu code switching is widespread throughout the valley but it must not be ignored that code switching is not a uniform phenomenon but is a variable in itself. Looking at the Kashmiri-Urdu bilingual from an individualistic perspective, it is observed that the bilingual indulges in Kashmiri-Urdu code switching but it depends on the social settings and on personal choice. The amount of code switching towards Urdu can increase or decrease considerably according to the interlocutor and tends to increase when the later prefer to speak Urdu. For the other speakers the pattern may be reversed and in this case shift precedes from Urdu to Kashmiri in network interlocutor. Thus code switching as a matter of personal choice is a bilingual strategy used by Kashmiri-Urdu bilingual speakers in tune with Gile's (1984) speech accommodation theory.

Thus, Kashmiri-Urdu code switching in such cases where it is consciously used by the speakers as per interlocutor can be regarded as a bilingual strategy. Looking at the question of social settings we can take an example of a village in Kashmir where most of the adult speakers are uneducated. The normal mode of verbal communication is

Kashmiri. Younger members of the village have knowledge of Urdu (via education). But they do not use Urdu as a variety to switch over in particular with and in the presence of their elders. Although there might be exceptions, this is the unmarked linguistic behaviour in most of the rural settings in Kashmir. In such a setting where Kashmiri is the un-marked form of speech, if someone switches to Urdu, he will do it consciously and his behaviour will be marked in such a setting. Same is the case with most of the informal settings particularly in villages where a switch to Urdu will be considered as a marked code. Thus Kashmiri-Urdu code switching used consciously in a marked way by a bilingual speaker can well be regarded as a bilingual strategy. Thus in this perspective when code switching is used consciously in a marked way it is always related to some function or has some motive. Thus, code switching as a bilingual strategy can always be related to a certain function or effect. For example:

Adult: dadii kati chui (Kashmiri)
 daddy where is
 ‘Where is your father?’

Child: MUJHE PATA NAHIN (Urdu)
 I know not
 ‘I don’t know’.

The above instance can be regarded as a marked choice on the part of the child who is showing a formality or formal relation by switching to Urdu and a regulatory function can be related to this type of code switching. Thus, as a marked choice code switching is a bilingual strategy related to an identifiable function.

Kashmiri-Urdu Code Switching as an Unmarked Code

Frequency of code switching increases correspondingly, when speakers proceed from informal to formal domains at the societal level and from uneducated interlocutors at the

individual level in present day Kashmir, Although no sharp boundaries can be drawn between rural Vs Urban and formal Vs informal settings, the general tendency is that more code switching between Kashmiri and Urdu occurs in urban and formal settings as compared to rural and informal settings; in the former Kashmiri-Urdu code switching can even attain the level of unmarked mode of speech. This variation can be accounted for by the fact that Kashmiri and Urdu have intruded in each other's domains (generally, formal domains use Urdu and informal domains use Kashmiri). The regular Kashmiri-Urdu contact has led to a pervasive phenomenon of Kashmiri-Urdu code switching.

Regarding certain small social settings in Srinagar city, Kashmiri-Urdu code switching, particularly in public places like markets, libraries, educational institutions, has started becoming the normal mode of speech. This is observed more so among the youth where Kashmiri-Urdu code switching occurs unconsciously forming an unmarked mode of speech in such settings without seemingly associating an effect and function with it. Thus Kashmiri-Urdu code switching when used unconsciously, as an unmarked code can not be associated with a specific function or motivation as this type of switching essentially forms their language or code. This unmarkedness of Kashmiri-Urdu code switching can well account for congruent lexicalisation of Kashmiri under the influence of Urdu. Thus for such social settings Kashmiri-Urdu code switching can simply be regarded as a linguistic code without essentially finding a motivation or function associated with it. For example:

A: bI kh'emI nI daal KYUN KI MUJHE PASAND NAHI HAI
I eat not pulses because I like not is
'I wont eat pulses because I don't like it'.

B: MAT KHAO BHAI badal kenh trav
Don't eat brother something something put
'Don't eat it brother, take something else'

The above conversation occurred in a restaurant between two friends with Kashmiri-Urdu Code switching occurring normally in an unmarked way unconsciously. No specific function can be ascribed to this type of code switching and there seems to be no motivation for such code switching.

Are the Above Facts Paradoxical?

From the above discussion about Kashmiri-Urdu code switching we have seen that Kashmiri-Urdu code switching in present day Kashmir forms a continuum where at the one end Kashmiri-Urdu Code switching is seen as a marked language behaviour serving some effect or function. At the other end it is an unmarked behaviour occurring unconsciously. This goes on to indicate that on the one hand Kashmiri-Urdu code mixing acts as a bilingual strategy (with a particular function) and on the other hand acting as a distinct code (occurring unconsciously bereft of effect).

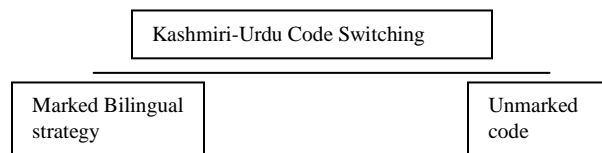


Fig. 2 Kashmiri-Urdu Code Switching continuum

Here, it has to be kept in mind that when two languages come in contact any phenomenon can occur as a result depending on the linguistic, sociolinguistic and political factors involved. Language interaction phenomenon shows a spatial as well as a temporal variation, along with individual variation and the nature of interaction and interlocutors. Taking all these factors into consideration the results of this study point to a continuum, instead of treating it as a paradox, varying along multiple axis of various contextual factors with different intermediate results between multiple and unmarked codes.

Some Facts and Their Implications for Kashmiri-English Code Switching

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Talking about motivations of code switching in bilingual communities, not concrete boundaries have been laid till the present time. In this context Gumperz and Hernandez-Chavez (1975) state that switches can not always be motivated through reference to external factors, rather there is much more indirect relation between switches and speaker's motivation. Code selection, in other words, is meaningful in much the same way that lexical choice is meaningful. From the work of Pfaff (1979), Poplack (1980) and Treffers-Daller (1991) among others, it becomes clear that such non-individually motivated switches constitute the rule rather than the exception and it is rather the frequency and positioning of the switches that carry social meaning and external motivation. The above facts can be related to Kashmiri-Urdu code switching only at one end of the continuum, where it was found to be an unmarked code without an identifiable function or motivation.

This facet of Kashmiri-Urdu code switching as an unmarked code conforms itself to what Poplack (1980) postulated, ' It is the overall patterns of switching that is significant In the communities observed, but it is not necessary to view each switch as fulfilling a specific function'. Trumper (1984) also remarks that his corpus does not support the idea that each switch is socially meaningful on its own. Code switching can be interpreted both as an individual ability to re-interpret conventional patterns of language use and as a social activity involving multiple intergroup relations. As a part of normal behaviour code switching is simply an unmarked code.

Looking at the other end of the continuum, code switching essentially reflects a conscious bilingual strategy used by bilinguals for certain effect or function and is somehow marked in a given context. Since in such a context (for example, uneducated males in a rural setting), Kashmiri is best viewed as the unmarked code. In such settings switches to Urdu are somehow marked. The general motivation for such behaviour is divergence from the interlocutors with the effect of distancing oneself from the interlocutors and inhibition in communication at the interpersonal level. Such behaviour will be regarded as a less conversational cooperation. Appel and Muysken (1987) describes various

functions which were related to code switching which include referential function, directive function, regulatory function and metalingual function.

Thus, as a marked code or as a bilingual strategy, Kashmiri-Urdu code switching can be related to various functions as described above. The change in topic, beginning and exit from a topic, the introduction of side sequence etc all can be related to marked end of Kashmiri-Urdu code switching continuum.

So, Kashmiri-Urdu code switching as a phenomenon appears to conform with code switching literature discussed with reference with motivations for code switching ranging from conscious bilingual strategy to unmarked natural bilingual behaviour. In addition to it the notion of preferred code partially overlaps with the marked/unmarked distinction which depends upon the community norms holding for any specific communicative situation, but is based on a different dimension of individual characteristics. Here it must be remembered that Agnihotri (2006)'s statement, 'we must accept multi-linguality as a reality' applies to the unmarked end of Kashmiri-Urdu code switching where it is used simply like a language whereas functional model of Gumperz (1982) as put by Appel and Muysken (1989) applies to the marked end of Kashmiri-Urdu switching continuum.

Conclusion

Pandit (1969, 1972) and Khubchandani (1983, 1988), among others, have shown how variability in linguistic behaviour acts as a facilitator rather than as a barrier in communication, facilitating communication and languages effortlessly flowing into each other (Pandit 1972). Agnihotri (2002) stresses the need to redefine the concept of 'a language' in such a way that it captures the fluidity inherent in multilingual situations, furthermore viewing human linguistic competence as essentially multilingual rather than monolingual. Agnihotri (2002) further goes on to opine, 'In fact what characterizes India is not differentiation but continuity, synchronic and diachronic. As in the case of Canada (Friesen, 1994) one is not faced here (India) to establish an isomorphism between

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language, religion and geographical area. There is no sudden break with the past and there is no geographical past where one can say that there is a breakdown of communication'. All this is relevant to Kashmiri-Urdu code switching which is also a facilitator rather than a barrier for communication. The competence of a Kashmiri-Urdu bilingual is not essentially monolingual but multilingual. At last but not the least, there is a continuum of Kashmiri-Urdu code switching and one cannot exactly determine whether the markedness or unmarkedness of Kashmiri-Urdu code switching begins and ends both in spatial and temporal dimensions.

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