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Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper explores code-mixing as a communicative strategy among the students at the university level.

A sample of sixty students from four universities was selected for the purpose of collecting spoken data. The instrument used to collect spoken corpus was a short interview, seeking information about their life. A questionnaire comprising 20 items was also distributed among 150 students of these institutes in order to analyze their perception of code-mixing as a communicative strategy.

The transcription and analysis of the recorded data reveals that the university students employed code-mixing as an authentic communicative strategy. The results of the questionnaire also show that they conceived code-mixing as a strong communicative tool.

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11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana

Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in
Pakistan

There was not much difference in the perceptions of male and female with regard to code-mixing as a communicative strategy.

Thus, the research concludes that the university students perceive code-mixing as a communicative strategy as well as use code-mixing to facilitate communication.

Introduction

The world has entered such phase of globalization where the phenomenon of bilingualism/multilingualism has become a norm. Though languages have never ever been considered linguistically good or bad, the social attitudes have played an influential role in determining the future and lot of languages.

In the present scenario, the importance of English language cannot be undermined. It has become an international language and the language of science and technology. It is being used as a global *lingua franca* in many countries. It is among those five languages that claim maximum number of speakers in the world (Kachru, 1993) with Chinese at the top and Hindi-Urdu, Russian and Spanish following in the same order. In such circumstances, ‘the ideological, cultural and elitist power of English’ (Kachru, 1997) is evident.

Situation in Pakistan

For Pakistan, there is another major reason for the widespread use of English language. Pakistan is situated in that part of the world which remained a colony of the British. The British and their language ruled the subcontinent for over a century.

Colonization is an important factor responsible for the development of bilingualism (Kachru, 1986; Bolton 2002). The education policies of Lord Macaulay, especially his idea of ‘black men with white thinking’ played a significant role in the development of English language in the subcontinent.

According to Wei Li (2000), ‘Language is a human faculty: it coevolves with us,’ and unilingualism which even in normal circumstances is a rare phenomenon (Wardhaugh, 1998) is beyond imagination in such situation where English has coexisted with the indigenous languages over a long period. Also English still is the official language of the country and documentation at higher level takes place in this language. It is taught as secondary language in schools, colleges and universities and is used as a language of education, science, economics etc. There is English inside the classrooms at the university level, at the college level and even at the school level. In domestic setting, Urdu, Punjabi or any other local language may be preferred. So, in situations outside the classrooms in the universities or in different social settings, the mixture and switching of codes becomes inevitable.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana

Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in Pakistan

Code-mixing and Code-switching

Pakistan shares the same scenario with the world where, in various countries, English gets embedded in their local languages and leads to phenomena like code-mixing as well as code-switching which is a major area of research in sociolinguistics. So, English is used both at intra-sentential and inter-sentential levels. This trend is frequent among the educated people of the country, especially the young students. During the development of a student into a university going student, they see situations where code-mixing of English takes place in Urdu. Studying at the university level, they develop a deep sense of the opportunities and advantages of speaking English well. English is considered to be a key to many doors (Sichyova, 2005; Ho, 2000).

Awareness of the Advantages of Learning and Using English and Code-switching and Code-mixing

The university students are well aware of the advantages they have if they have command on the use of English. Since they learn various grammatical features of English style, they master English language. So, even when they converse in Urdu or any other local languages, code-mixing becomes inevitable (Sichyova, 2005).

Code-mixing serves as a ‘strategy of neutrality’ (Scotton, 1976) in order to neutralize the two impressions; one of showing off and the other of being anglicized. They develop the understanding that in order to meet complex communicative demands and to communicate fluently, effectively and successfully, they must use this characteristic of language. So, they don’t consider it harmful and start to exploit this feature as a communicative strategy. They rather consider it ‘a communicative resource’ (Adendorf, 1996).

The present study is aimed at examining the phenomena of Urdu-English code-mixing as a communicative strategy among the students at the university level in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Different researchers have tried to define the term ‘code’, ‘code-mixing’ and ‘code-switching’ (Ayeomoni, 2006; Belly, 1976; Hymes, 1974; Kachru, 1983; Yee H, 2000). Some of the definitions are:

1. Code will be taken as a verbal component that can be as small as a morpheme or as comprehensive and complex as the entire system of language (Ayeomoni, 2006).
2. Code-mixing refers to the transfer of linguistic units from one language into another and the units may be morphemes, words, phrases, clauses or sentences (Kachru, 1983).
3. Code-mixing is an admixture of linguistic elements of two or more languages system in the same utterances at various levels (Yee Ho, 2000).
4. Code-switching is the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction. (Scotton and Ury, 1977)
5. Code-switching is the alternate use of two languages in a single discourse . (Paplock)

Aspects of Code-mixing

For the present study, code mixing will be used as a general term to cover both aspects code-mixing as well as code-switching.

In the area of code-mixing, the researchers have worked on two major topics. One is the structural features of code-mixing (Bokamba, 1989; Chen, 2006; Joshi, 1983, Muysken, 2000). Two very important structural characteristics are highlighted by the researchers, i.e., the code-mixed data has noun phrases as major proportions (Chang, 2001; Chen, 2004; Hsu, 2000), and the content words are more code-mixed (Chan, 1998).

The other topic that has attracted maximum attention is to explore various functions of code-mixing. (Adendorff, 1996; Ayeomoni, 2006; Chen, 2006; Grosjean, 1982; Kachru, 1989; Kamwangmalu, 1989; Mustafa and Al-Khatib, 1994; Myers-Scotton, 1993).

Some of the functions explored so far are social advancement, globalization, self expression, personal intention and effective communication. The most important of these, according to the researchers, is the function of code-mixing to make communication effective. Researchers have tried to explore code-mixing from the point of view of communicative strategy (Adendorff, 1996; Ayeomoni, 2006; Chen, 2006; Chung, 2006; Crystal, 1987; Grosjean, 1982; Kachru, 1989; Kamwangmalu, 1989; Li, 2000; Mustafa and Al-Khatib, 1994; Myers-Scotton, 1995; Sert, 2005; Sichyova, 2005; Shih and Sung, 1995; Skiba, 1997; Tay, 1989; Yee Ho, 2000).

Code-mixing is considered a random and spontaneous process according to some researchers (Adendorff, 1996; Labov, 1971; Tay, 1989), while others believe that it is rule-governed (Aguirre, 1976; Choi, 1991; Crystal, 1987; Gumperz, 1976; McClure, 1977; Pfaff, 1978; Romaine, 1995).

The Focus of the Present Study

The present study tries to strike a balance by adopting a framework that says that though it is spontaneous yet it is governed by rules. So, it is a kind of skilled performance with communicative intent (Myers-Scotton, 1995). The present study views code-mixing as a catalyst of communication and tries to align the work in line with previous researchers who have considered the complex communicative needs which are fulfilled by code-mixing.

Methodology

The First Phase

The study was divided in two phases. For the first phase, i.e. interview, a sample of 60 students comprising university level students was selected from four institutes of Lahore. Their names are COMSAT, University of South Asia, Superior University and Kinnaird College. The sample had equal number of both genders, male and female. A short interview seeking information about their personal life like their introduction, their interests and pastime, their aim etc. etc. was done in order to collect spoken data. The respondents were allowed to use whatever language they may like to answer the questions. On the basis of this interview corpus, the structural properties were analyzed. The interviewed were carefully transcribed to discover the reality about the claim that students used code-mixing as a communicative strategy. Thus, the paper is expected to propose how communicative meaning is conveyed by use of code-mixing.

The Second Phase

In the second phase of the research, a questionnaire which consisted of twenty items was distributed among one hundred and fifty students of the above-mentioned four institutes. The quantitative data obtained through this questionnaire was processed through SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) to get mean and standard deviation on each item as well as on overall basis. The questionnaire was formed on 5-point Lickert scale ranging from 1 to 5. It was proposed that mean score of above than 3.5 would mean that the students perceived code-mixing as a communicative strategy.

Results and Discussion

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11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana

Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in Pakistan

The spoken corpus collected from the respondents belonging to four institutes was transcribed and analyzed. There were a large number of English codes embedded in the Urdu structures.

Before we proceed further, here is a table to see the structural composition of the data.

Table. 1. **Structural Composition of Code-mixed Data**

Constituent	Male	Female	Total	%
Single Lexical Item	337	297	634	85.33
Phrases	27	42	69	9.29
Clauses	17	9	26	3.50
Sentences	2	12	14	1.88
Total	383	360	743	100

The table 1 shows that single lexical items accounted for the maximum times of code-mixed data. The number of single lexical items was maximum, forming 85.33 percent of the code-mixed corpus and minimum at sentence level almost 2 % out of 100. The single lexical items seem to be incomparable with other constituents because of its highest percentage.

The table shows that phrases were approximately 10% percent of data and the most observed phrases in the data were the names used as Proper Nouns. For example ‘Superior University’, ‘University of South Asia’, ‘M.Sc Economics,’ ‘Applied Linguistics’, ‘Islamic Banking’ ‘National Geography,’ etc. Besides these noun phrases, the number of noun phrases was quite high in comparison with clauses and sentences. Examples include ‘internet use’, ‘favourite pastime’, ‘time to time change’, ‘spare time’, ‘teacher student relationship’, ‘playing videogames’, ‘household work’, ‘important role’, ‘famous celebrity’, ‘teaching skills’, ‘candle making,’ etc.

Both clauses and sentences were 5 % of the total data. The most common phrases were ‘...then I switched to . . . and there is nothing else’, ‘. . . and I like to listen music’ etc. A very interesting fact was that out of these 14 sentences, 9 were used by two female students of Kinnaird College. So, the rest of 58 students used only 3 sentences which is a very low ratio.

Table 2. **Distribution of Single Lexical items**

Constituent	Occurrences	%
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Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana

Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in Pakistan

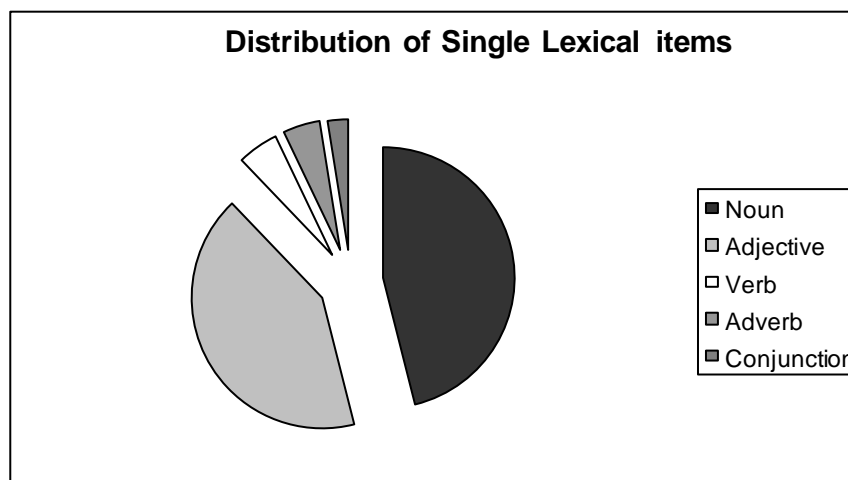
Noun	292	46.06
Adjective	265	41.80
Verb	32	5.05
Adverb	29	4.57
Conjunction	16	2.52
Total	634	100

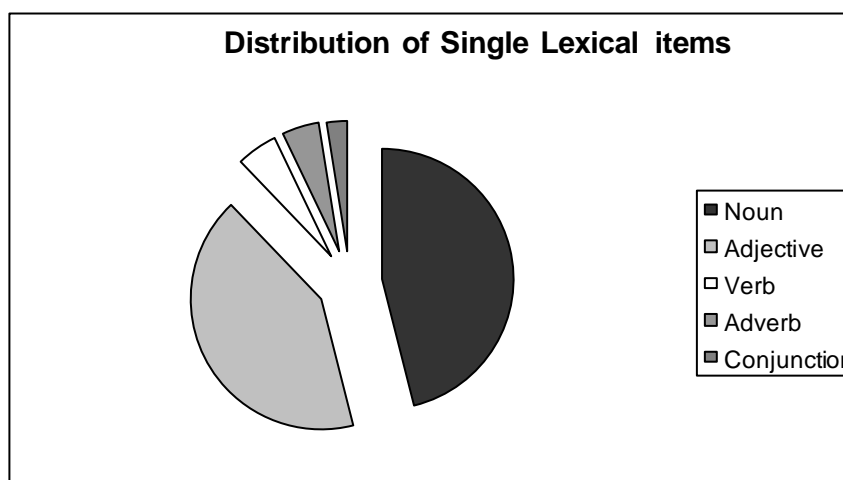
The table 2 shows that in distribution of single lexical items. Students used code mixing maximum in noun and minimum in conjunction. The most common nouns used by most of the students were: Television, personality, family, profession, importance, goal, hospital, hesitation, cartoon, confidence, aim, manners, simple, life, profession, method, research, behavior, specialization, qualifications, cricket, football, successful, and facilities.

The use of adjectives was almost 5% less than the use of nouns. Adjectives of quality, namely, Co-operative, Carefree, Caring, Special, Straightforward, trust-worthy, and trust were mostly used. 90% out of 100 single lexical items were nouns and adjectives, while the rest 10% were verbs, adverbs and conjunctions. The percent of verb usage was 1% more than that of adverb. Students used adverbs like unfortunately, *privately basically, now, frankly, normally, therefore, mostly, in fact* and, *obviously*. The least mixed items were conjunctions. However, students commonly used following conjunctions: *sometimes, and, because, but* and *then*.

The results of the analysis of single lexical items are given in Fig.1.

Fig. 1.





Results Obtained by the Questionnaire

In order to analyze the attitude of university students towards code-mixing as a communicative strategy, a questionnaire, which consisted of twenty items, was distributed among one hundred and fifty students of the above-mentioned four institutes. One hundred and twenty two filled questionnaire (81% of the total distributed) came back for analysis. The obtained data was processed through SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) to get mean and standard deviation on each item as well as on overall basis.

As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire was formed on 5-point Lickert scale ranging from 1 to 5. It was proposed that mean score of above than 3.5 would mean that the students perceived code-mixing as a communicative strategy.

Before analyzing the results obtained, here is a table that shows the gender based distribution of the sample that filled the questionnaire.

Table. 3. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	N	%
Male	68	55.74
Female	54	44.26
Total	122	100

Table 3. shows that the total number of valid questionnaires were 122. Out of these 122, 55.74 percent of the respondents which amounted to 68 were males while 54 were females, making it 44.26 percent of the respondents. The overall analysis of the data obtained by the questionnaire shows that the university students conceive code-mixing as

a useful communication strategy as is suggested by their overall mean score which is equal to 3.80. The results are given in detail in table 4.

Table.4. **Results of the Questionnaire**

S #	Content	Mean Scores			Overall Std. Dev
		Male	Female	Overall	
1	CM makes the listeners more attentive.	4.73	3.77	4.32	4.411
2	CM facilitates communication.	4.29	4.17	4.25	.941
3	CM makes the language easy to understand.	4.20	4.19	4.20	.893
4	CM clarifies a point speaker want to make.	4.13	4.23	4.17	.836
5	CM is a strong communicative tool.	4.13	4.01	4.59	1.017
6	CM adds to the variety of expression.	3.93	3.97	3.94	1.025
7	CM adds to the flow of expression.	3.89	3.97	3.93	1.037
8	CM helps to memorize the point.	3.89	3.94	3.91	1.114
9	CM makes the expression colourful.	3.62	4.14	3.86	1.002
10	CM attracts the listeners easily.	3.73	3.77	3.74	1.037
11	CM makes language interesting.	3.64	3.83	3.71	1.173
12	CM creates special effects.	3.69	3.57	3.65	1.215
13	When, unable to communicate in Urdu, CM is adopted.	3.60	3.74	3.65	1.304
14	CM makes language persuasive.	3.67	3.49	3.60	1.008
15	CM gives a person an educated expression.	3.60	3.56	3.58	1.190
16	CM adds to the style.	3.53	3.58	3.55	1.177
17	CM creates strong impression on the mind.	3.53	3.51	3.52	1.245
18	CM is a sign of globalization.	3.29	3.77	3.52	1.200
19	CM is used keeping in view economy of expression.	3.31	3.80	3.52	1.056
20	CM emphasizes a particular idea.	3.36	3.23	3.31	1.061
Overall Analysis		3.79	3.81	3.80	

CM in the questionnaire stands for code-mixing.

The results have been ordered in terms of their high to low overall mean score.

The analysis of the results shows that views of males and females on code mixing were very much similar and the mean score is more or less same. The results reveal that it is a strong communicative tool because the overall mean score is 3.80. The proposition that the score of above 3.5 would mean that the university students conceive code-mixing as a communicative strategy is very strongly supported by the results.

The analysis of the individual items shows that their score is above 3.5 on all the items except the one that code-switching emphasizes a particular idea. The students have

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11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana

Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in Pakistan

strongly held up the views that code-mixing facilitates language, makes language easy to understand, clear and attracts the listeners. Mean score of these questions is above 4. It can be well proved from the analysis of questionnaire that students used codes switching as a communicative strategy.

Conclusion

Code-mixing is used widely as a communicative strategy among the university level students of Pakistan. While speaking Urdu language, they mix linguistics items of English at all linguistic level though it is most evident at single lexeme level. The research supports that point that code-mixing is not interference rather it serves for continuity and fluency. Thus, it has become a very useful communicative strategy and although the students use it spontaneously but being aware of the communicative advantages they gain by using it.

Future Direction

This paper focused on just one source of spoken data. In future, the researchers propose to exploit other sources of data to gain better understand the different dimensions of code-mixing. The questionnaire can be distributed among more students to analyze their perceptions to understand the phenomenon in a better way.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana

Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in Pakistan

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com
 11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana
 Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in
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Language in India www.languageinindia.com

11 : 1 January 2011

Furrakh Abbas, Ph.D. Scholar, Sahar Aslam, and Abdul Majid Khan Rana
Code-Mixing as a Communicative Strategy among the University Level Students in
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