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Instances of Code Switching in Indian Television Serials

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Introduction

Any television viewer who watches Hindi language serials telecast on television will agree that much innovation has been introduced in the language used by the actors who portray different characters in TV serials, which are extremely popular with the young and the old alike in India. These dialogues used by the actors demonstrate creative ingenuity in the way they have blended Hindi and other local languages with English.

A keen observation reveals that in some serials, certain characters speak exclusively in English, Hindi or other local language while other characters code switch between these two or more languages.

This phenomenon in language use has been described in sociolinguistics as code switching. Although this sociolinguistic concept has been widely studied, its investigation has largely been restricted to speech or conversational situations, and mostly within formal settings.

Not much research has been carried out in the arena of Code Switching as a performance phenomenon as utilised by the actors to enhance their characters by adding depth and myriad shades to aid the transformation of the viewer.

The Goal of This Paper

The paper tries to look at the phenomenon of Code Switching in TV serials being telecast on Indian Television and tries to analyse the motivations for the use of Code Switching in the dialogues in serials being telecast in Hindi language in India in the framework of Butler's (1997) Performative Theory and Austin's (1962) Illocutionary Acts.

Code Switching in Serials

Code Switching in serials is a deliberate tool used by the script writer/actor to bring out the shades of the character by adding unexpected nuances and depth in addition to the gestures, costume, and make up used by the actor to portray the character effectively.

Method

The study considers three programs, namely, *Godh Bharai* being telecast on Sony TV, *Pratigya man ki awaz* on Star Plus, and *Geet hui Sabse Parayi* on Star One. It investigates the language behaviour of the actors while trying to describe the code switching and code mixing behaviour in different contexts and at different levels.

Twenty-five viewers' opinions about the serial regarding acting, costume, language use and dialogue were collected. The dialogues of the serials were recorded and orthographically transcribed. The sentences and the contexts where code switching, code mixing, or both were present were orthographically written and analyzed. In the present context, the term *code switching* is taken to include simultaneous use of English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, etc.

Table 1: Some examples of dialogues in the serial

1. Actor: Ja uske peeche ja , us pekad ke peeche ja" Go, go after him, go after that drunkard"
2. Actor- udhar usko jana hai, use Kuccho nahi pata hai" "He has to go there, he does not know anything." The word Kuccho is from a dialect of Hindi language.
3. Actor: Mein kehta hun na itla mate bikra tum vahan jao"

I am telling you, that is why child, you must go there” Here itla mate bikra are words from Gujarati in a Hindi sentence
4. Actor: Ata kay Zala, usne phone kiya na What happened, he called, did he not” Ata kay zala are words from Marathi in a Hindi sentence.
5. are kutra ja na Eh! Dog, go, here Kutra, dog is a noun inserted in the sentence, from Marathi language.
6. Actor: Babuji mein family ke ache ke liye to kehrahi hun Dad, I am telling this for the good of the family.
7. Actor: Dad, I am telling you, mein use maar dunga Dad I am telling you, I will kill him

Discussion

Butler (1997) notes that the ability of words to “do things” makes hate speech possible, but he also states that, at the same time, such speech is dependent on its specific embodied context.

Example 5. *kutra ja na*.

Dog go

In this example, code switching is between Marathi and Hindi. The actor brings out the hatred and anger in the dialogue as well as making the other person of the communicative dyad feel inadequate. Here, the Marathi word *kutra* in a dialogue that is completely delivered in standard Hindi signifies a variety of meanings including the (contemptuous) opinion of the speaker towards the hearer.

Example 2 : *thum yahan rasta rok ke kuyn kade ho, jab hum hamare bahuria ko ghar le jaa rahe hain?*

Why are you standing here blocking the way when we are taking out daughter-in-law home?

In this example, the actor shows that his daughter-in-law is closer (in that space) to him than the stranger by delivering the word *bahuria* in a softer voice and using the dialectal form of the word *bahu*. This is concurrent with what Austin’s (1962) illocutionary act concept where the word that varies with the context in which it is uttered implies that it is impossible to adequately define the performative meanings of words, including hate, abstractly.

If one keenly observes the Code Switching phenomenon in dialogues as

employed by the actors, the code switches are seen as striking examples that iterate Austin's(1962) "explicit" performative sentence that makes explicit what act one is performing while conveying an implicit message about the status, educational background, religion, caste and other sociolinguistic variables.

Table 2: Viewers Opinion

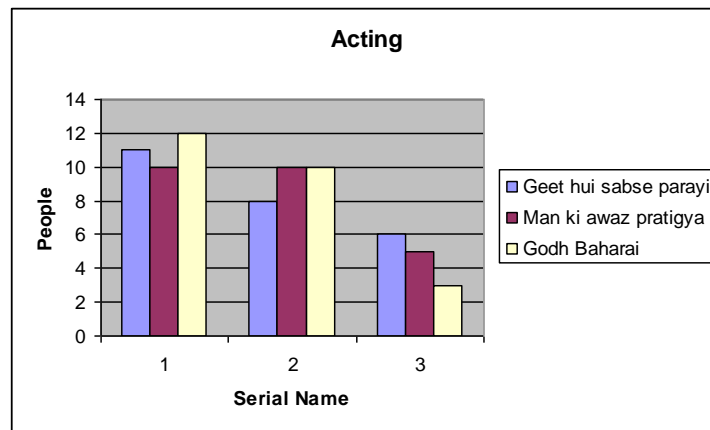
Program	Costume			Acting			Language			Dialogue		
	E	F	B	E	F	B	E	F	B	E	F	B
Geet hui sabse parayi	6	11	8	11	8	6	9	9	7	9	4	12
Man ki awaz pratigya	9	4	12	10	10	5	13	8	4	14	10	1
Godh Baharai	11	11	3	12	10	3	9	9	7	12	7	6

1 = E-Excellent, 2 = F-Fair, 3=B-Bad

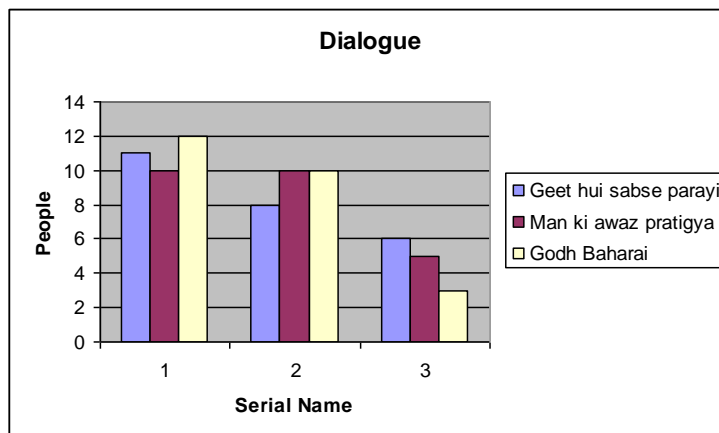
Graph 1: Graph of Viewers Opinion on Costume



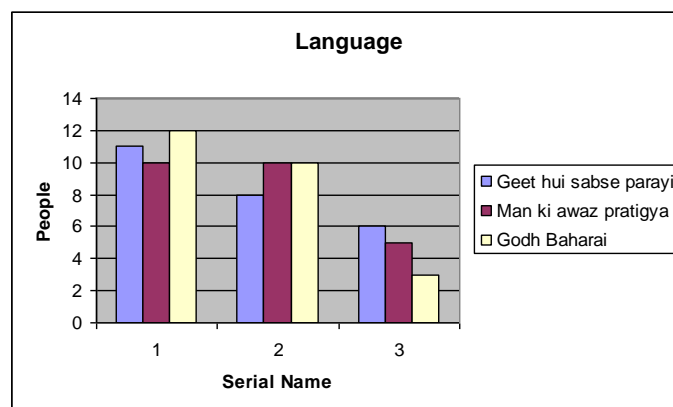
Graph 2: Graph of Viewers Opinion on Acting



Graph 3: Graph of Viewers Opinion on Dialogue



Graph 4: Graph of Viewers Opinion on Language



The audience of these serials largely are women between the ages of 25 to 50. The primary viewers of these programs were interviewed. Viewers generally identified themselves with the trials and tribulations of the character that is being portrayed. The audience felt that these serials were effective and sustained their interests due to the story. The actors' performance of characters was effective and realistic by their utilisation of effective language use (Code Switching). While the actor's costume and gestures reinforced the message, he or she was conveying.

As represented by the graphs shown above, the viewers were asked to rate the serial based on acting, costume, language and dialogue of the serials since, for any performance to be effective, the amalgamation of all these above mentioned factors must work in tandem. However, most of the viewers are of the opinion that dialogues and language used in the dialogues are very important to make the character realistic.

Reasons for Code Switching

Actors code-switched to English language, while hatching nefarious schemes! The episode writer used code switching to English when he or she wanted to show that the particular actor has returned from America or has had a western education.

Diglossic code switching is another common and widely prevalent feature in casual conversation in the data collected. It was obvious that the actors used the standard variety of the language in formal situation, and the low variety of the language in a non-formal situation. They also used the low variety while speaking in order to exhibit or reveal their rural background or the rough nature characteristics of the characters.

Context and social factors signal the importance of the actors for code switching events with consideration to literacy, status, solidarity, group membership, and audience. Emphasis of the character is achieved by (switching language) that is, the use of the guest language or the return to the host language to direct the viewer's attention to the words and their subtle collocations.

Summary

This paper looks at the phenomenon of code switching in TV serials through the framework of Butler's (1997) performative theory. The paper observes that the

actors code switch between a) one language to another, b) one dialect to another, c) one variety of register to another to effectively portray the character that the actor is playing, and this enables the character to become more real.

The dialogues also suggest that the actors' code switched at the Word level, Phrase level and Syntactic level.

This study also concentrates on the reasons for code switching, the context of code switching, various domains of code switching, etc. and elaborates them. Some of the types of code switching behaviour along with their setting were identified. It is evident from the study that the change of topic and the change of setting influence the language behaviour. The change in language behaviour is used by actors as a powerful tool to portray the character that is played out in depth. Code switching helps effectively communicate the shades of the characters and to find their home in the viewer's mind.

References

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