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## CODE-SWITCHING IN CLASSROOMS: EXPLORING CODE-SWITCHING PURPOSES AND NEEDS FROM STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Language use in classrooms is a debatable issue among linguists and academicians as they carry different points of view regarding the use of language in the academy. Some linguists believe that code-switching is an essential part of academic discourse as it is an important communal mechanism which establishes specific social roles and boundaries of communication and controls social networking from a functionalist perspective, while others suggest that mutual intelligibility may not be possible if learners switch their language during communication. These contradicting approaches create a need to explore the use of language in Pakistani classrooms. Triangulation is deployed for data collection and data analysis. Although code-switching performs various functions in classrooms, this study has been delimited to six functions of code-switching in classrooms: elucidation, giving instruction, translation, changing/introducing the topic, asking questions and building argument. Pakistan is a multi-lingual country and has rich linguistic diversity; people use five indigenous languages and many regional languages and the medium of instruction in classrooms is a serious concern for academicians. This study portrays the present situation and describes future implications from students' perspective.

**Key words:** code-switching, regional language, mother language, modernization, nationalism

### INTRODUCTION

Discourse is not static (Hymes, cited in Connolly, 2007) as it is related to the social life of human beings; it represents their individual social identity. Academic discourse ascribes ways of perceiving and thinking, and so suggests that the use of language in the academy and code-switching is an integral part of academic discourse (Storch and Wigglesworth, 2003). Sometimes teachers motivate L1 use in classroom without any impact on the development of academic discourse as they believe that students who use L1 in classrooms can express themselves with confidence, which reduces anxiety and can build social solidarity with the other students (cited in Sert, 2005). Contrary to this, Eldridge (cited in Sert, 2005) suggested that code-switching is not an effective strategy as mutual intelligibility may not be possible if the learner switches language during communication with a native speaker of the target language. Sert (2005) added that the repetitive function of code-switching may lead to undesired behaviours on the part of students; they might feel bored or lose interest in listening to the previous instruction (in the target language). Myers-Scotten's markedness theory of code-switching (1988) considered language which a community use as a set of "rights and obligation" (RO sets); these RO sets depend upon a speaker's social realization of the use of language and social knowledge.

In four provinces of Pakistan, different languages are used for communication. Rahman (2004) claimed that the Census Report of Pakistan 1998 shows that the majority of the speakers used the Punjabi language as their mother tongue (44.15% of the whole population), followed by Pashto (15.42%), Sindhi (14.10%), and Balochi (3.57%). The geographical distribution of

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the speakers shows that majority of the Punjabi-speaking population live in urban areas of Punjab, Pakistan, while the proportion of other languages such as Urdu, Siraiki, and other regional languages is 26.33%. Grimes (2000) said that according to Ethnologue, Urdu is the second language of more than 105 million people. Each group has cultural differences which show the identity of that particular region. Haque (1983) described the regional distribution of languages in Pakistan and claimed that in Punjab, Punjabi, Siraiki, Potohari and Pahari are used. The population of rural Sindh uses Sindhi, while the population of urban Sindh uses Urdu; Gujarati is used by some influential minorities. Pashto is one of the influential languages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while Hindko is used in one district of Hazara. One interesting fact is that multiple languages are used in Balochistan such as Balochi, Brahvi, Pashto with some vocabulary items of Siraiki and Punjabi. English has been declared as a language of instruction in many public and private sector educational institutes of Pakistan so the contact of English with other languages has increased and supports the concept of bilingualism. As the national language of Pakistan, Urdu is considered a language of high prestige after English, so the use of Urdu with English in educational institutes in Pakistan to be expected. In different regions of Pakistan, people use three languages: regional languages are used in the specific region for business or domestic conversation, Urdu is the national language, and English is an official language of Pakistan, with the result that English is used in a trilingual setting in Pakistan (Talat, 2002).

### **EDUCATIONAL POLICY OF PAKISTAN**

Gulzar (2009) said that Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural society; it is therefore difficult to specify one or two languages as a medium of communication. The medium of instruction in educational institutes has been a problematic issue since independence as political instability hinders the appropriate decision regarding the language of instruction in academia (Rahman, 2002). The situation is rightly described by Pattanayak (cited in Qadir, 1996): the use of two languages is problematic, while three languages are uneconomic and many languages are unreasonable. Language planning has been under the influence of two factors (Haque, 1983). The first factor was the selection of a national official language for the purpose of unification and operational efficiency. The Urdu language fulfils the criteria of nationalism while the criteria of official efficiency is fulfilled by English for the upper strata, i.e. the military and bureaucracy were instructed and trained in the English language. In response, English occupied the place of an official language; the reason may be its strong link with East Pakistan. The constitution (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973) of Pakistan clearly describes the motif of policy planners regarding the use of the Urdu language over national and provincial languages at provincial level. The three points of article 251 state that policy planners want to replace English with the Urdu language and prefer Urdu as the national and official language of Pakistan. Three points of article 251 of the Pakistani constitution 1973 are as follows:

- 1) The National language of Pakistan is Urdu and arguments shall be made for it being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years of the commencing day.
- 2) Subject to clause (1), the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.
- 3) Without prejudice to the status of the national language, a Provincial Assembly may by laws prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language.

Talat (2002) said that the declaration of English as an official language of Pakistan has greatly affected the medium of instruction in Pakistani educational institutes as the English-speaking upper strata promote the use of the English language in educational institutes in Pakistan. The extension period of the use of English as an official language has been stretched so long that

policy makers seemed to have forgotten the social and political realities. The choice of language in academic discourse is very important; it creates a sense of respecting the values, traditions and culture of participants and making them feel proud of their language, which is associated with their identity, culture and origin (Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins, 1976).

It is also undeniable that Urdu is the second language of most Pakistani citizens and serves as a lingua franca in Pakistan. This ambiguity has led to an unclear vision of the use of language in academia. This ambiguous situation is a result of the non-implementation of clause 251 of the 1973 constitution and a lack of awareness of the causes of the rapid spread of English language in private and government institutes. So, there is need to explore the goals of the use of English and Urdu in academic discourse.

## METHODOLOGY

Triangulation is deployed for data collection and data analysis. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section is related to demographic information (age, gender) and the use of language at different levels, such as school, college, university and home. In the second section, five likert scales have been used to explore the frequencies of agreement or disagreement to determine the attitudes of learners towards the use of language in classrooms. The reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha, was calculated at 71%. The third section carries open-ended questions to explore students' preferences regarding the use of language in classrooms. Questionnaires were completed by 200 students in three public universities in Pakistan. Thirty postgraduate classrooms were recorded; among them 15 had male instructors and 15 female instructors. The recorded data was transcribed and verified through questionnaires. For the classrooms with female instructors, almost 755 minutes were recorded and 61,507 words transcribed. For the classrooms with male instructors, 765 minutes were recorded and 64,834 words transcribed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Different participants use different languages in their home, such as Pushto, Punjabi, Sindhi, Arabic, Brushski and Urdu, while most of the students are taught in English and Urdu languages in their schools (79.3%) and colleges (72%). Languages used in educational settings are different from the languages used in home. In educational institutes, more than one language is used as a medium of instruction and statistical analysis shows that most of the participants (29% strongly agree and 5% agree) agree that learning the course in more than one language makes the course easier to understand.

**Table 1. The statistical results of the questionnaire**

No	Item description	SD	DA	DK	AG	SA	Mean Score
1	Learning the course in more than one language (English and Urdu) is beneficial for me.	8%	8%	5%	5%	29%	4.05
2	Learning the course in one language makes it easy for me to understand.	6%	27%	5%	32%	30%	3.53
3	It confuses me when the teacher switches from one language to another.	24%	44%	6%	12%	14%	2.48
4	Mixing English and any other language results in weak English.	13%	41%	5%	23%	18%	2.92
5	Mixing English and my mother tongue weakens my English.	14%	43%	14%	18%	11%	2.69

6	Learning the course in Urdu or any other regional language increases my chances of passing the exam.	9%	26%	11%	29%	25%	3.35
7	Learning the course in English increases my chances of passing the exam.	4%	21%	12%	37%	26%	3.6
8	Learning the course in English and Urdu increases my chances of passing the exam.	3%	9%	10%	46%	32%	3.95
9	The instructor provides adequate evidence (facts) when he/she switches from one language to another.	8%	11%	15%	34%	32%	3.71
10	The instructor provides sufficient information (explanations) when he/she switches from one language to another.	8%	15%	12%	33%	32%	3.66
11	The instructor remains relevant when he/she switches from one language to another.	5%	16%	14%	41%	24%	3.63
12	The instructor is quite clear when he/she delivers his/her ideas in Urdu.	4%	7%	8%	38%	43%	4.09
13	The instructor is quite clear when he/she delivers his/her ideas in both Urdu and English.	2%	9%	7%	36%	46%	4.15
14	The instructor remains brief and to the point when he switches between Urdu and English.	5%	14%	11%	39%	31%	3.77
15	The instructor remains orderly when he/she switches between Urdu and English.	5%	9%	15%	48%	23%	3.75

### Functions of Code-switching in Classrooms

Although code-switching performs various functions, this study has been delimited to six functions of code-switching in classrooms at post-graduate level: elucidation, giving instructions, translations, changing/introducing the topic, asking questions and building arguments. There are many instances where the presence of these functions are obvious; the study extracted one example of each function. In the transcribed data, the words spoken in Urdu are shown in bold, while the translation of the Urdu is given in italics.

#### *Elucidation*

In the following example, the instructor is delivering a lecture on vaporization (chemistry). To elucidate the concept, the instructor switches her code from English to Urdu.

T: “But A – this is less volatile and it will start condensing here and this will fall back and the other liquid will pass away. This is more volatile and this process continuous and the liquid in which this distillation flask it become richer in and the less volatile. **A ki concentration yaha increase hoti jaye gi aur gradually ye process continue hoga** /*the concentration of A will increase at this point and it will continue*/ and B would be –. So, this is the suctionating flask suctional distillation flask.”

#### *Giving Instructions*

Before commencing the lecture, the instructor asked the students to mark their attendance on an attendance sheet. She then formally started her lecture. The instruction was given in Urdu while the formal lecture started in English.

“**Attendance sheet pay ap log is page pay sign kar lo.** /*Sign the attendance sheet*/ OK. Do you have any idea about speaking?”

### **Translation**

One word can carry different meanings in the same language. To communicate a specific meaning of a word, an instructor may switch code from one language to another.

“That the same verb and the same concept ‘go’ in English has its three different kinds of manifestations or different meanings in terms of its sense. Right? Number one, it can be positional. Positional means it can be used in the sense of the position, **jagah ka./to change the place./**”

### **Changing/Introducing the Topic**

Sometimes the instructor wants to shift from one topic to another, and then he/she switches from one code to another. For example, at the beginning, the instructor was discussing attitudes and motivation. After giving basic ideas with examples, she moved to another topic, “attention”, and said: “**Aur koi cheez. Ap ke jo habits hoti hen, jis cheez se ap familiar hen jis se ap familiar nhe hen, wo b affect kr skta ha. Acha ab jo hum topic start kren gay, wo ha, ‘Attention’.**”/Another thing is your habit, you may or may not be familiar with your habits and it affect your learning. So we are going to start another topic “Attention”./

### **Asking Questions**

There are many instances found in the transcribed data where instructors ask the students a question and they use Urdu language. Sometimes, the students were unable to reply to the question when the instructor asked them in English. In the following example, the instructor is delivering the idea of “proximity and understanding” and the classroom is very interactive.

T: “**Aur proximity me kia hota ha?**”/What is the significance of proximity?/

S: “**Ziada achi understanding ho gi**”/Less distance leads to good understanding./

T: “**Acha distance kitna hona chahyay?**”/What is the ideal distance between listener and speaker?/

S1: “**Ma’am moderate distance hona chahyay.**” /The distance should be moderate./

T: “**Na itna close ho k ap us ko achay tariqay se perceive na kr sken or na he itna ziada distance hona chahyay k ap ko bilkul b us cheez k features na nazr ayen. Is k ilawa koi cheez.**”/If you are close to the things, you cannot get the clear idea and if you will be far from the things, its features will not be clear to you./

### **Building an Argument**

In the following example, the students and teacher exchanged their ideas in interactive classrooms. The instructor is teaching punctuation. She read from the book and asked the students to punctuate what she had said; the students punctuated it and then a discussion started as to whether the answer was wrong or right.

T: “For instance, “My sister wants food again the day when California becomes an island” (reading from book)

T: “**Mam comma (,) “day” sa pahly ay ga! day k bad ay ga mam** /Where can we use comma? Can we use that after ‘day’?/

T: When California becomes an island, is that an independent clause?

S: Yes!

T: This is not an independent clause! Come on, there is ‘when’! So whenever there is ‘when’ after these subordinating conjunctions coming, they are dependent clauses not independent clauses.

S: **mam ya ghalat b tu ho sakta ha, ya likha uno na lika hua hana k errors and...** /Mam, that can be wrong as well.../

T: So, you have to eliminate that.

S: **mam ya ghalat...**/So it’s wrong.../

T: I don’t think so, for me this could be a right sentence or if we are put the semicolon aware so that must be for instance **sa pahlay ho ga!**/You can use semicolon before ‘for instance’/

The quantitative rating of the students in favour of the use of two languages is very high and through the recorded (audio/video) data, it is clear that most of the instructors and students use English and Urdu in their classrooms. The frequent use of these two languages in classrooms shows that most of the instructors believe that the use of these two languages in an educational setting makes the topic comprehensible to the students; this is clearly evident from the statistical results as well.

The questionnaire highlights students' perceptions of the use of language in classrooms and their chances of passing the exams. The statistical data shows that 46% students agreed that the combination of Urdu and English is best as a medium of instruction because the use of these two languages will increase their chances of passing the exams; 37% students agreed with the use of English language as a medium of instruction, while 29% agreed with using Urdu or any other regional language as a medium of instruction. The statistical results of the questionnaire show strong agreement among the students that instructors remain relevant (to the topic), provide clear idea (about the topic), give adequate evidence (to support their ideas), and remain orderly and brief (to describe their point of view) when they switch code from one language to another (English to Urdu/Urdu to English).

### **Students Attitudes and Preferences towards Language Use in Classrooms**

Section C comprised two open-ended questions that are significant in exploring preferences and attitudes of students towards the use of language in classrooms; 79.1% students favour the use of English and Urdu in classrooms.

**Table 2. Use of language in classrooms from students' perspective**

<b>Languages</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
English	28	15.4
Urdu	10	5.5
English and Urdu	144	79.1

Beside this, some students have been given the option of Pashto, Panjabi and Sindhi.

**Table 3. Regional languages selected by the students for the medium of instruction in classrooms**

<b>Regional Languages</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Pashto	8	4 %
Punjabi	8	4%
Sindhi	2	1%

### ***Mother Language***

Multilingualism is one of the important aspects of Pakistani culture. In Pakistan, people use provincial languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi, the national language (Urdu) and regional languages like Shina, Balti, Pahari and Brushski depending upon their region and cultural background. I observed that instructors are not able to converse in all regional or provincial languages; this is why they use English and Urdu in classrooms as a medium of instruction. Some students though suggest the use of regional/provincial languages in classrooms. An example is Junaid, who came from rural Sindh where Sindhi is taught as a compulsory subject, who said that:

“My mother tongue is Sindhi and it is easy for me to understand in Sindhi.”

### ***Nationalism and Modernisation***

For the last three decades, language policy is one of the core concerns of the medium of instruction policy and it has had a substantial impact on students' learning and attainment of learning objectives (Tellefson and Tsui, 2003). In educational institutes, most of the work is done through verbal interaction, so the medium of instruction is most of the time verbal interaction among students or between students or instructor. It was found that some students feel privileged when they use the national language to converse in classrooms. As one participant said that: "Urdu is our national language and we should feel proud of using Urdu language in classrooms."

Pakistan is still an underdeveloped country and English is used as a marker of power and membership of a high social class; it plays a vital role in maintaining social status and power. Rahman (1999) discussed his point of view from a post-partition perspective where the British were in power and the English-educated elite were British supporters; they agreed to select the English language as a medium of instruction in educational institutes and the Urdu language was considered the vernacular. In modern upper class society, the use of English is considered a status symbol and in most of the private schools in Pakistan, teachers and students are not allowed to speak Urdu. On the contrary, Urdu is used in most of the government schools in Pakistan, and Sindhi is used in different areas of Sindh, while the other regional languages are neglected. The difference in language use in various institutes of Pakistan has established the attitude of students towards the use of language in classrooms (Rahman, 1999). As Sara said: "Both languages are important – English is an international language and Urdu is a national language – so students should understand both languages."

Students viewed the English language as a need of the modern age and at the same time they are also inclined towards a love of the mother language and the national language. Twelve participants said that English was an international language and Urdu was our national language so we should use these two languages in classrooms. Wajiha said: "Both languages are important because English is needed of modern times and Urdu is my mother language and national language, so I can understand well in both languages."

### **Students' Suggestions Regarding the Use of Language in Classrooms**

Students put forward various suggestions regarding language use in classrooms and syllabus design.

1. Language use should be according to the subject or topic. As Ahtasham said: "The subjects of Islamiyat, Urdu and Social Studies should be taught in Urdu."
2. Language use in classrooms should be contextual. Saira said "Exact definitions should be provided in the English language while the concept should be explained in Urdu language." The difficulty level of the topic and the understanding of the students indicate the language use in classrooms. Alia said: "In our education system, books are written in the English language, so the instructor should use the English language. If learners feel difficulty in understanding the meaning and concept, instructors should use the Urdu language."
3. For the last ten years, students have been studying the same course of English at primary, secondary and college level. The main focus of the course is reading and writing; no attention is paid to listening and speaking. Naila said: "Our educationists should redesign the course of English for primary, secondary and college level. The same syllabus of grammar is taught from class five to college level and no work is done on speaking and reading skills, which is the main reason for a student's failure in university examination. High schools should not only include exercise of grammar like narration, tenses or active and passive voice, but they should include some productive exercises on speaking and reading skills."

4. The language use in classrooms is a controversial issue as some other students emphasized the use of the national language (Urdu) and regional languages in classrooms. One student said: "All the languages of the world are useful but one should not leave one's roots and the national language." Other students said that a regional language should be used with the English language in classrooms. Amir said: "The combination of Punjabi and English is wonderful. The idea will be clear if the instructor uses these two languages."
5. One other participant suggested the use of Urdu language in classrooms. She said: "As far as the language learning process is concerned, both languages are important and the use of the Urdu language will not hamper our studies as well as our cognitive process. Some concepts are easy to understand in Urdu and Urdu is a more flexible language. Chinese and Germans make progress by using their own languages, why can't we? We should also design our syllabus accordingly."

## CONCLUSION

The analysis in this paper shows that the use of language in the academy is an inconclusive debate among educationists and learners. In the struggle for survival and international visibility, Pakistani students are swinging between nationalism and international needs. There is a great need to design rules and regulations to govern the use of language in the academy. The statistical results show that the majority of the students agree with the use of English and Urdu in classrooms and this is supported by the transcribed data as well by instructors switching code from one language to another (from English to Urdu/Urdu to English) for the convenience and need of the students.

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### Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Gender: Male  Female
4. In what language(s) have you been mostly taught in your school, college and university?

Languages	School	College	University
English			
Urdu			
English and Urdu			
Others			

5. What language(s) do you commonly use for communicating with your classmates, teachers, and staff at the University?

Languages	Classmates	Teachers	Staff	Family
English				
Urdu				
English and Urdu				
Others				

### Section B: Learner's views about teaching language of instruction

Tick the answer which best describes your degree of agreement or disagreement.

SA – Strongly Agree; AG – Agree; DK – Don't know; DA – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree

No	Item description	SD	DA	DK	AG	SA
1	Learning the course in more than one language (English and Urdu) is beneficial for me.					
2	Learning the course in one language makes it easy for me to understand.					
3	It confuses me when the teacher switches from one language to another.					
4	Mixing English and any other language results in weak English.					

5	Mixing of English and my mother tongue weakens my English.					
6	Mixing my mother language and the English language strengthens my English.					
7	Learning the course in Urdu or any other regional language increases my chances of passing the exam.					
8	Learning the course in English and Urdu increases my chances of passing the exam.					
9	The instructor provides adequate evidence (facts) when he/she switches from one language to another.					
10	The instructor provides sufficient information (explanations) when he/she switches from one language to another.					
11	The instructor remains relevant when he/she switches from one language to another.					
12	The instructor is quite clear when he/she delivers his/her ideas in Urdu.					
13	The instructor is quite clear when he/she delivers his/her ideas in both Urdu and English.					
14	The instructor remains brief and to the point when he switches between Urdu and English.					
15	The instructor remains orderly when he/she switches between Urdu and English.					

**Section C: Please answer the following questions**

1. Would you prefer the course to be taught in (choose one answer):

- a) English only b) Urdu only c) Both English and Urdu d) Any other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Please, explain the reason for your selection?

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 .....  
 .....

2. Any additional comments?

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 .....  
 .....