

An Investigation of the Reasons of Code Switching (CS) in English Language Classrooms of BS in Context of Pakistan

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Abstract

The people living in Pakistan have tendency to switch from Urdu to English and from English to Urdu and they are continuously enjoying this amalgamation in language known as code switching. The main purpose of the paper was to examine the role and importance of code switching on the learning practices of the students of a public sector university in Lahore, Pakistan, by adopting qualitative and quantitative method of data collection. The main objectives of the study were to compare the views of the teachers and the students about the importance of code switching; to fetch out its reasons, to explore the attitudes, effects and impacts of CS on students' behaviours and learning practices in their classrooms. This research is substantial as it opens the way for the students and teachers both to understand the role of CS in Pakistan.

Keywords: code switching, CS, English as second language (ESL), L1 (First Language), English language classrooms.

Communication in any language takes place for several reasons, like, to develop relationships, to assemble knowledge and to seek wisdom about different things. Human interaction is incomplete without verbal communication and for such reason people use an extensive variety of languages. This expresses, quite evidently, that bilingualism is a pervasive phenomenon. Swapping between two or more languages during verbal communication is paired with the experience of bilingualism.

Pakistan has a multilingual community where people communicate in Urdu, Punjabi and English. It is a common characteristic of Pakistani educated bilinguals that they often use code switching and code mixing during their conversation. Many other local languages are also used at local level like Punjabi, Saraiki, Kashmiri, Balochi, Pashto, Sindhi etc. It is observed that bilinguals mix two languages while speaking with their family members, colleagues, friends etc. Francois Grosjean said “this situation of bilingualism is present in every country, in all classes of society and at all age levels” (01). A much-esteemed position is given to English in Pakistan. Its dominance and supremacy in Pakistan is mounting day by day.

There are a lot of definitions insinuated by researchers, for instance Gumperz defined “code switching” as “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems of subsystems” (is cited by Tariq in his “Functions of Code Switching in Bilingual Classrooms” 59). Poplack thus splits code switching into three categories that are Tag Switching, Inter-sentential Switching and Intra-sentential Switching. Tag switching is the substituting of either a word or a tag phrase, or both, from one language to the other. Tags can be

injected easily in a monolingual utterance at a number of points without disturbing syntactic rules. It may occur when we demand guarantee (e.g. I mean, you know, isn't it, right, aren't you etc.) (Poplack 613). For example:

- a) You are Saba, “Haina” “Sahi kaha na mene” (aren't you)?

Inter-sentential switching is a shift made on sentence edge or between speaker's turn and a clause. A perfect example is the title of Poplack's paper: “Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish *y termino en español*”, English translation: “Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish and finish in Spanish”. It happens when the speech of an individual is divided into sentences. One sentence will be in English, other in Urdu. Romaine describes that inter-sentential switching would be studied as requiring greater smoothness in both languages (Poplack 613). For example:

- a) I want to complete my assignment. Kyun k men beemar thi men kaam nahin kersaki and today is the last date to submit it.

Intra-sentential switching occurs within the sentence boundary or clause as a result of a word, insertion of a part of a word, a combination of a phrase or words. In it a speaker switches from one language to another within the same sentence, a sentence: made up of two or more languages. It is considered the most complex form of switching. For example:

- a) It is a spade “jo k khudai k kaam ata hai”.

The existence of code switching can be considered as a resource used by both teachers and students for interaction during the development of achieving a native like

ability in ESL (L2). Keeping in mind, the growing population emerging from a multi-cultural background, the teachers should know the importance of cultural awareness, the process of second language acquisition, being sensitive regarding students' learning process and knowledge about "how to address the behaviour in a way that enriches the students' cultural and educational process" (Algarin-Ruiz 22).

Research Question

1. What are the main reasons leading the students and teachers towards the use of code switching by comparing the responses of the teachers and students?

Reasons of Code Switching on Teachers' Part

Researchers got attracted towards code switching over the years. Humour, encouragement, praise and interpersonal purposes of communication can also be conveyed through the use of code switching. Numerous researchers (Lai, Cole, Critchley, Schweers, Burden, Tang, Greggio & Gil) have debated that during the assistance of teaching and learning English procedure CS can be a very advantageous tool.

Norrish demonstrated that the reason why teachers code switch is when the textbook have high level of English and it is beyond learners' competency level (37-51). It is quite right to highlight that students feel comfortable because of translation of a word, phrase or sentence in their native language. Sert affirms that, "the teachers' use of code switching is not always performed consciously; which means that the teacher is not always aware of the functions and outcomes of the code switching process" (09). Some more reasons of CS are when students don't know much about a specific topic. In most of the cases people don't know that they are actually practicing code switching, it can be a conscious or unconscious effort and practice.

Different investigators got involved and took interest in CS on the part of teachers. The major data collector in this field was Mahadhir, who in 2007, assessed Nine (9) pre service teachers in Malaysia that why teachers Code Switch in their classrooms. Personalization and seeking attention were the main features being observed. Furthermore, the practice of code switching was being applied in order to let the students understand the vocabulary and content in a better way which was the main concern of teachers. Sert uncovers that “this (code switching) is mostly observed in grammar instruction, that the teacher shifts his language to the mother tongue of his students in dealing with particular grammar points, which are taught at the moment” (10).

Reasons of Code Switching on Students' Part

Gumperz' Model is found beneficial in classroom environment for the study of code switching. Different studies were conducted on the topic of students' code switching and the reasons behind. Choi and Kuipers reviewed a dialogue between two (2) Hispanic students when they were discussing about the procedure of a problem. They switched between Hispanic to English and from English to Hispanic in order to clear the problem or procedure of the problem. They switched many times, as they wanted to give stress to their idea. The involvement of code switching provides students with the opportunity to involve and occupy in the activities that are meaning focused in order to produce and understand coherent utterances. Consequently, code switching has been praised as the foundation for syllabus organization and is a device that empowers teachers and learners to regulate classroom communications systematically and efficiently.

Further investigations of researchers advised that CS can be used in order to

bridge gaps in conversation or comprehension due to students' lack of proficiency in language classes. "In students' speech it is not uncommon; code switching is one of the most frequent communication strategies used by foreign language students" (Flyman 57).

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the main reasons and academic motivation leading the students and teachers towards the use of code switching. Eventually, the outcomes were determined as how it is possible for the students to learn English, in their English language classrooms, with or without the use of code switching. The reasons were examined through the use of feedback forms and the semi-structured interviews.

Sample

Forty students of BS (Hons.) were selected as a convenience sample for this study. The students' age group was around 18-22 years. The sample was acquired from a public sector university of Lahore. Conversely, no consideration towards their major subject was given and no distinction or preference would be made on their socio-economic backgrounds or the grades they got in their academics, which was the main rationale of this study.

Tools of Data Collection

The instruments used for the data collection in this study were divided into two stages. Stage one represented the responses of the teachers gathered through semi-structured interviews. Four teachers of English department and four teachers of TESOL department were selected for qualitative data collection.

Stage two comprised of feedback forms that were filled by the participants of this research. The feedback form comprised of 40 questions, which were a mixture of close ended and open-ended questions.

Procedure

The teachers and the students were briefed about the purpose of the semi-structured interviews and the feedback forms. Graphs and tables were used to present the data collected from the questionnaires and interviews. Further information provided was about ethical considerations that the facts gathered would only be used for the purpose of the research and their identities would be kept secret. All the students belonged to different backgrounds and the whole corpus consisted of mixed ability students. The entire practice took place in their English language classrooms.

Results

This study was administered to raise awareness among the ESL teachers and learners about this substantial area of discourse practiced in Pakistani classrooms. The nature of this research basically revolved around the phenomena of code switching in English language classrooms. The results of some of the questions from feedback forms and semi-structured interviews are presented below in order to display the aftermaths of the students and teachers in the form of graphs and tables.

Thoughts and Perceptions of the Students

Question No. 1: *What language(s) did you use to interact with your English teacher in your classroom?*

Medium to Interact	Frequency	Percent
English	1	2.5
Urdu	5	12.5

Mixture of both	34	85
Total	40	100

It can be seen that the 85% of the students of the total data, believed that they conversed with their teacher with the amalgamation of both languages, 12.5% conversed in Urdu only and only 2.5% students talked in English.

Question No. 2: *What language do you use to communicate with your friends in your classroom?*

Medium to Interact	Frequency	Percent
English	2	5
Urdu	17	42.5
Mixture of both	21	52.5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that about 5% of the students used English, 42.5% used Urdu and 52.5% used the mixture of both languages while communicating with their friends in their classrooms.

Question No. 3: *Do you feel comfortable when your teacher doesn't translate the lecture in Urdu?*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	3	7.5
Agree	5	12.5
Neutral	21	52.5
Disagree	11	27.5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 7.5% students strongly agreed, 12.5% students agreed, 27.5% students disagreed and 52.5% students felt neutral with this statement that they feel comfortable when their teacher doesn't translate the lecture in Urdu.

Question No. 4: *I am able to understand my teacher's instructions more easily.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	20	50
Agree	13	32.5
Neutral	5	12.5
Disagree	2	5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 50% students strongly agreed, 32.5% students agreed, 5% students disagreed and 12.5% students felt neutral with the above statement.

Question No. 5: *I am able to understand grammar rules more easily.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	11	27.5
Agree	19	47.5
Neutral	7	17.5
Disagree	3	7.5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 27.5% students strongly agreed, 47.5% students agreed, 7.5% students disagreed and 17.5% students felt neutral with this statement that the students were able to learn grammar rules more easily due to CS.

Question No. 6: *I feel more comfortable to learn.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	20	50
Agree	18	45
Neutral	2	5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 50% students strongly agreed, 45% students agreed and 5% students felt neutral with this statement that the students felt more comfortable to learn due to CS.

Question No. 7: *I feel more confident in scoring good marks for this subject.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	16	40
Agree	19	47.5
Neutral	5	12.5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 40% students strongly agreed, 47.5% students agreed and 12.5% students felt neutral with this statement that the students felt confident in scoring good marks in English because of CS.

Question No. 8: *I feel more engaged to the whole class and understand what is going on inside the class.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	13	32.5
Agree	23	57.5
Neutral	3	7.5
Disagree	1	2.5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 32.5% students strongly agreed, 57.5% students agreed, 2.5% students disagreed and 7.5% students felt neutral with the above statement.

Question No. 9: *Mixing of Urdu and English strengthens my English.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	7	17.5
Agree	22	55
Neutral	7	17.5
Strongly disagree	4	10
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 17.5% students strongly agreed, 55% students agreed,

10% students strongly disagreed and 17.5% students felt neutral with this statement that mixing of English strengthened the English of students.

Question No. 10: *Teachers who switch codes from English to Urdu affectively engage students' attention.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	10	25
Agree	23	57.5
Neutral	6	15
Strongly disagree	1	2.5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 25% students strongly agreed, 57.5% students agreed, 2.5% students strongly disagreed and 15% students felt neutral with the above statement.

Question No. 11: *Teachers who switch codes from English to Urdu clarify instructions.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	18	45
Agree	19	47.5
Neutral	3	7.5
Total	40	100

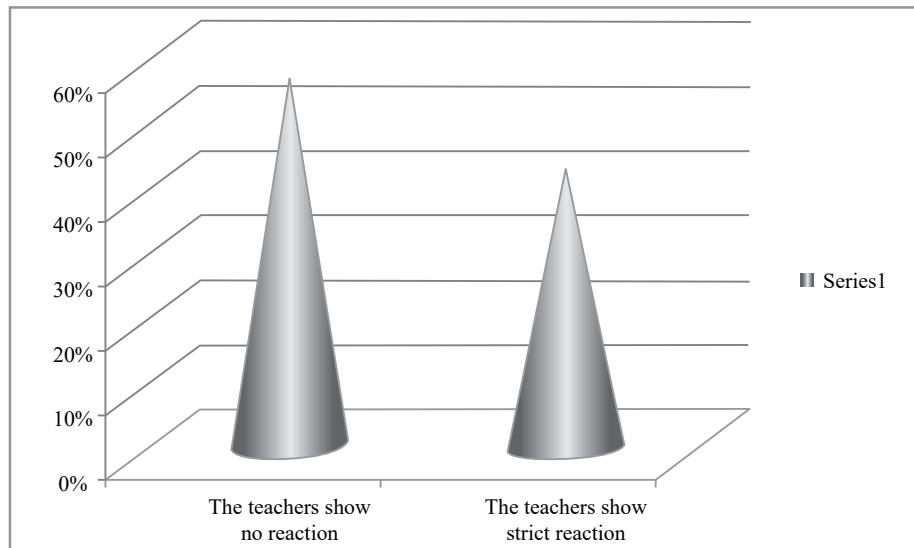
The above table showed that 45% students strongly agreed, 47.5% students agreed and 7.5% students felt neutral with the above statement.

Question No. 12: *Teachers who switch codes from English to Urdu or from Urdu to English can express themselves clearly in both languages.*

Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	19	47.5
Agree	16	40
Neutral	5	12.5
Total	40	100

The above table showed that 47.5% students strongly agreed, 40% students agreed and 12.5% students felt neutral with the above statement.

Question No. 13: *How does your English teacher react if you speak in Urdu in your classroom?*

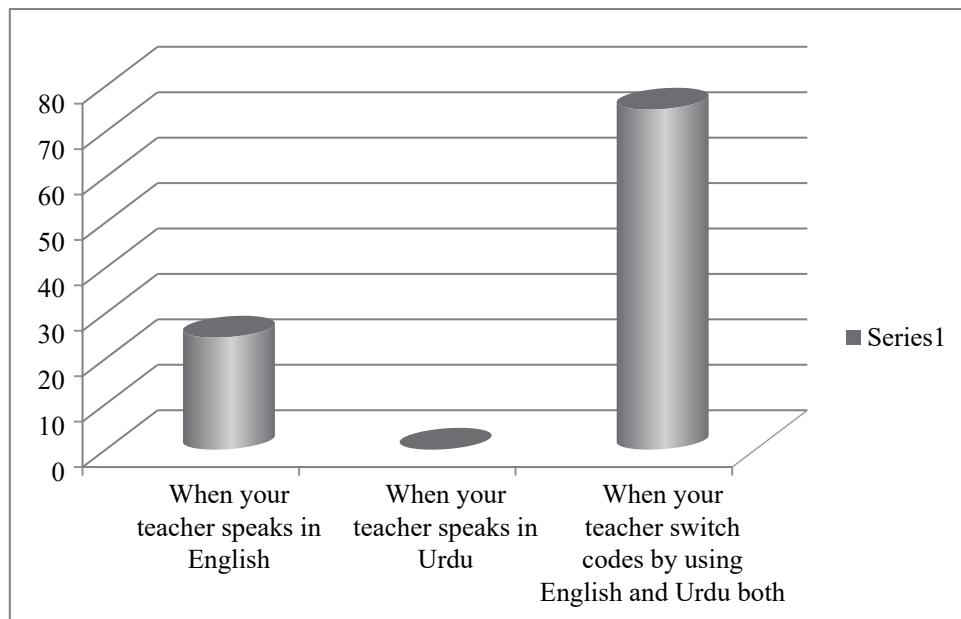


Reaction of The English Teacher

If the students practice CS in English language classrooms, 57% students believed that teachers showed no reaction and 43% believed that teachers showed strict reaction.

Question No. 14: *How do you think you learn English best?*

The below graph showed that about 25% of the students felt comfortable when their teacher speaks in English but the majority of the students that is 75% believed that they felt comfortable when their teachers switch codes and deliver the lecture with the amalgamation of English and Urdu both.

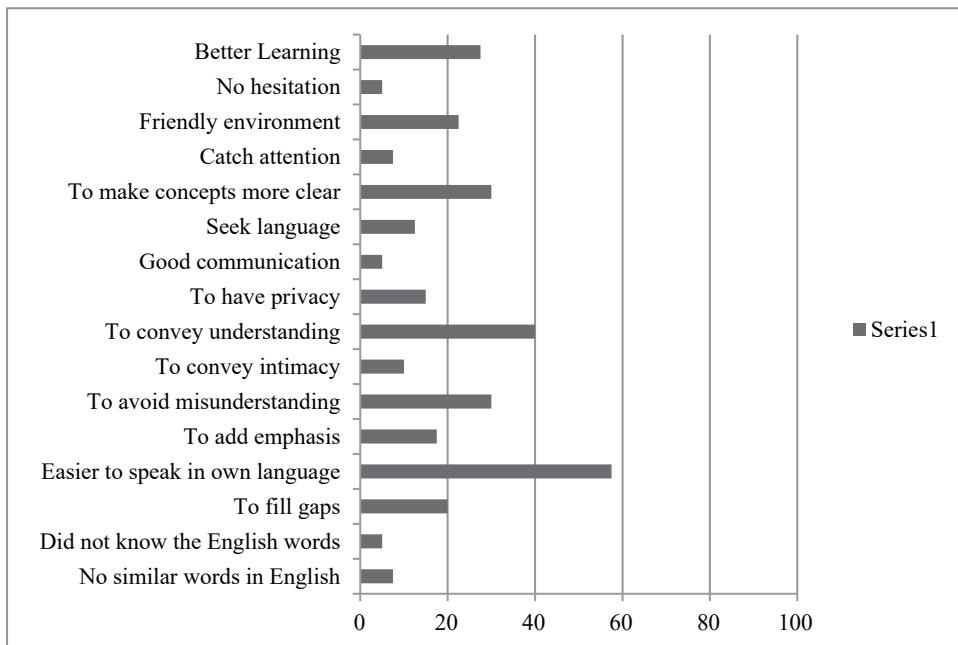


How do Students Learn English Best

Question No. 15: *Why do you use words of Urdu while speaking English and what are the reasons of code switching?*

The reasons of switching codes and their percentages showed that about 57.5% of the students said that they switch codes because it is easier to speak in their own language, 40% agreed that it could convey understanding, 30% believed that the use of CS cleared their concepts and there were less chance of misunderstanding, 27.5% students said that CS helped them in better understanding of a certain concept, 20% believed that CS helped them to fill gaps, 17.5% thought that to add emphasis was a reason of CS, 15% said to have privacy, 12.5% supported the reason: to seek language, 10% supported to convey intimacy, 7.5% said to catch attention and no similar words available in English, 5% said CS helped them and no hesitation was there, whenever they did not know

English words they used CS and for good communication as well.



Reasons of Code Switching Thoughts and Perceptions of the Teachers

The analysis of the semi structure interviews of the teachers, uncovered the reasons of the existence and practice of code switching in English language classrooms which were mentioned below:

During classroom practices, when students were asked to provide answer to a certain question, they started feeling shy, confused and lacked confidence just because while answering, they forgot a specific word to be used in the occurrence, hence they switched codes in order to complete their answers. The students and the teachers, while explaining some concept, shifted the topic and started giving examples from their everyday routine, in order to clarify their thoughts. At the time when teachers started

explaining a certain idea, they switched codes, as they had to quote examples from other literatures as well. When the students were unable to interpret what was being taught to them, in that situation teachers started translating the sentences. Most of the students switched codes just to make sense of what they wanted to explain, when they were not feeling comfortable in using English language. The teachers and students used code switching in order to clearly represent their thoughts for the understanding of a certain concept or theory. The students and teachers felt relaxed while switching codes from English to Urdu just because they shared the same mother tongue, which was Urdu. One of the major reasons of code switching was that student lacked accurate words to express themselves clearly. They just used their receptive vocabulary comprised of novice words. The main duty of teachers is to let their students understand the lectures effectively and while doing so they switch codes just to assure that the students got their ideas. Most of the times, the students faced problems while uttering a sentence and there would be a change in tense.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research focuses on the main reasons leading students and teachers towards the use of code switching. According to the collected data the responses calculate their experiences and illustrate the reasons of code switching:

- The students of BS. (Hons.) feel comfortable while switching codes during their classroom practices.
- The teachers and the students used CS for translation purpose that if any student, a group of students or the whole class was not proficient then code switching was applied.

- The teachers switched codes to associate something with culture or from other cultures and to provide examples to clarify their thoughts.
- The teachers being interviewed declared that they started switching codes when students observed refused to answer or respond in English during classroom interactions.
- Another reason showed that the students having Islamiat, Punjabi, Urdu and Persian major did not understand English to a great extent. Their capabilities were very restrained and limited that is why the teachers switch codes.
- Lack of confidence, anxiety and shyness were also some of the reasons due to which the students switched codes.
- It was assessed from the feedback of the students and interviews of the teachers that lack of sufficient vocabulary also played an important role in students' code switching.
- To fill the gaps between the discussion of the students.
- The students and the teachers switched codes to add emphasis on a certain idea in order to clarify it.
- For the improvement of students' grades.
- For the encouragement of students in English language classrooms.
- For good communication skills, better learning and for representation of good thoughts.

- Most of the times, it would be a personal style of the teachers to switch codes during her/his lectures in order to add humour.

The qualitative and quantitative investigation of this research revealed that the chief reason of code switching in Pakistani classrooms is students' incompetence in English language. The main aim of the students is to compete in the world and to get a tight grip on English language that seems alien to them. The responses of the teachers being interviewed showed that the ratio or frequency of code switching differs according to the major subject, level of semester and socio economical background of the students.

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