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A Case Study of Code Switching in Trilingual Conversations

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Abstract
In this paper, the codeswitching patterns in two trilingual conversations between two brothers, conducted in Punjabi, Urdu, and, and English, have been analyzed. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of code switching in both speakers shows that not only the two subjects are fluent in all three languages, but the use of switching is significantly similar in both brothers across a number of features, including relative frequency of different switch types, and the incidence of hybrid constructions involving items from two languages. The subjects appear to display qualitatively similar patterns of intra-sentential and extra-sentential codeswitching in the trilingual mode. Similarities in patterns of trilingual codeswitching and the language combinations, used by the two brothers, were found due to the same linguistic, social and cultural background of the speakers.
Keywords: Code switching, Code mixing, Multilingual communication, Conversation analysis, Communicative competence, Lexical convergence, Discourse strategies

Introduction

This case study investigates the codeswitching patterns of two Punjabi-Urdu-English trilinguals who live in Punjab, Pakistan. Due to their having grown up in a bilingual family, in an area where Punjabi and Urdu are in close contact, codeswitching was an inherent part of the two speakers' natural speech. Their bilingual codeswitching eventually changed into trilingual codeswitching after they each started their schooling where English is taught as a foreign language from grade one. An analysis of the speakers' conversation reveals the dynamics and interaction of three languages. This paper will analyze the bilingual and trilingual codeswitches produced by the two speakers within two conversations of 50 min each.

As seen in most of the previous studies, English is often one of the languages spoken by multilinguals, and a tremendous amount of research can be found on multilinguals who speak English, be it as their LI, L2, L3. The other two languages that constitute the focus of the present study, Punjabi and Urdu, are far less researched.

A broad definition of codeswitching is given by Gumperz (1982) as being 'the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems'. It is important to remember that, more often than not, codeswitching is a sign of proficiency in several languages rather than a lack thereof. Codeswitching speakers usually tend to use more than one language in the same speech passage, combining their linguistic resources to better get a given message across. Some linguists use the term 'codeswitching' to refer to switching from one language to another between sentences and 'code mixing' for switches occurring within the same sentence or clause. However, other scholars use these two terms interchangeably. In this paper, codeswitching is used as the overarching term for any switch between two or more languages, and when necessary, the distinction will be made by using the terms *extra-sentential* (i.e. a switch between two clauses or sentences) and *intra-sentential* (i.e. a switch within a clause) codeswitching.

There are numerous factors that affect codeswitching patterns. These include conversation topic, interlocutor's linguistic repertoire, power relationship between speakers, linguistic distance, age, and relative degree of fluency in the languages involved. As a result, variance both in the type of switching (extra-sentential and intra-sentential switching) and the amount of use of one or the other language(s) can be observed in codeswitchers' discourse.

Weninger (2007) investigated the language choice of multilinguals in an academic setting and found that the power relationship between the interlocutors plays an important role in who initiates the conversation and who determines what language is used as the base language. Similarly in this study Punjabi has been used as the base language as the conversants are real brothers whose L1 is Punjabi and they are in an informal setting. If the same study had been conducted in an academic/professional setting with speakers from different backgrounds, the base language might have been Urdu or English being the national or academic/professional languages in formal settings.

The linguistic distance between the languages involved in a conversation will also have a considerable effect on the patterns of codeswitching. For instance, according to Muysken (2000: 11), 'perceived similarities between the languages bilinguals speak facilitate code-switching'. In this study, the speakers use three Indo-

European languages: Punjabi, Urdu, and English. Punjabi and Urdu are closer to each other (SOV) than English (SVO) is to either of them in terms of syntactic and morphological structures.

Case Study

This case study analyses the codeswitching patterns of two male multilinguals (brothers). From as early on as birth, the two speakers (referred to hereafter as Z and T) were exposed to two languages: Punjabi, L1 and Urdu, L2. They each attended an English medium school from first grade to graduation. Thus, speaking and being understood in different languages, and even two or three languages in the same conversation, were very much a part of the participants' daily lives. English was mainly used at school for academic purposes. Even though neither of the two speakers received any schooling in Punjabi, it was the majority language of the community, it was the language spoken within the family and neighbors. Urdu was the majority language of their home country and primarily used by the speakers for functioning in the community at large. However, the status of English up until Z and T's college years was that of a foreign language. But with the passage of time, their codeswitching patterns may have included more English terms, not as a foreign language, but reflecting social and cultural realities of living or having lived in a community of professionals, with high level of proficiency in English.

T works as a lawyer in an multilingual working environment and uses Punjabi as the home language. Z works as an Accounts Officer in mainly an Urdu-English, bilingual environment, and uses Urdu as the home language. When T and Z talk to each other, they speak Punjabi as the base language, with Urdu and English elements sprinkled throughout their conversations. Even though the two speakers have full linguistic ability to carry on conversations with monolingual speakers of all the three languages. The two participants speak with each other at regular intervals (on the average thrice a week), and the recorded conversations from which the data for this study were gathered were informal conversations. As far as the length and topic are concerned, the two conversations were 50 min long each and T and Z spoke about politics, family, current affairs and other such commonplace subjects. The analysis of the data is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the patterns of codeswitching in these trilingual conversations?
2. Do the two speakers converge or diverge in similar ways with regard to choice of language at the level of a grammatical unit?

Data collection and analysis

The data for the present study are based on two Skype conversations that the participants had over a period of two weeks. The conversations amount to a total of 100 minutes. The recordings were audio taped. After all data collection was completed, the conversations were transcribed, and an analysis of the data followed. In the codeswitching examples that follow, different fonts have been used in order to facilitate understanding by the reader. The coding has been used in the following pattern:

Punjabi (*Italicized*)

Urdu (bolded)

English (underlined)

Due to the fact that the two speakers displayed similar patterns of codeswitching, their discourse was analyzed as a whole. Every codeswitching instance was counted and placed in its respective language category.

Results and Discussion

As a whole, in this one hundred minutes conversation between T and Z, there were 588 instances of codeswitching. Of these, more than half (58%) were English-Punjabi codeswitches. The other significant amount of the code- switches were Urdu-Punjabi (42%). The frequency of Punjabi words in T's speech is significantly higher (62%) as compared to that of Z's speech (38%). Similarly, Urdu words are more frequently used in Z's speech (53%) as opposed to T's speech (47%). The reason might be the use of Punjabi as a home language in T's case and Urdu as a home language in Z's case. Although the two speakers differ in terms of frequency of lexical codeswitching of the three languages yet they adhere to the Punjabi syntax as the base language and do not use complete sentences of Urdu and English except a few phrases. The following table shows the frequency of codeswitching between the two speakers.

Speaker	Turns	Total Words	Punjabi Words	%age of Punjabi	Urdu Words	%age of Urdu	English Words	%age of English
Total	149	2732	2144	80%	246	8%	342	12%
Z	76	1099	805	38%	130	53%	164	47%
T	73	1633	1339	62%	116	47%	178	53%

Punjabi-English Codeswitching

All the English sentences used in these conversations were direct quotes (where Z referred to English-only context twice in his conversations). For instance, when reporting what people say when they meet in the US, Z stated: 'How 're you doin?' He talked about the intonation of people in the South of the US. He told his brother

how his name was mispronounced by Americans. He referred to an instance when he received a call for an interview and he was addresses as: 'Can I talk to Mr. Za'heed?' (his real name is Zahid) and he was about to say 'no' when he suddenly realized that he was in the US. T used just one sentence in English in the whole conversation when he mentioned Pakistan Airlines (PIA) as: 'Great people to cry with', to make fun of PIA's TV advertisement which says: 'Great people to fly with.' Other than the above mentioned examples, all the instances of English-Punjabi codeswitching were intra-sentential.

The use of English words was mostly based upon Usage frequency. Some words, expressions, or phrases were simply more easily accessed in English due to the speakers' historically more frequent use of these words in English as compared to Urdu or Punjabi. For instance welcome, supporter, press, petition, degree, candidate, campaign, competition, office, weekend, provincial, application, family, knowledge, decision, warrant, scandal, routes, collapse etc were frequently used in these conversations. The major reason is that the educated L1 speakers of Punjabi, in Pakistan, do not usually make use of a large Punjabi vocabulary since they are not literate in Punjabi. Urdu and English are the medium of instruction in academic institutions. So, the educated multilingual speakers prefer to use certain vocabulary items of one language (English) to the other (regional) languages to sound educated, sophisticated, and proficient.

The speakers also made use of English compound words like warm welcome, press conference, public transportation, well-maintained, vote bank, tough competition, load shedding, blood pressure, eye sight, late night, week end, provincial government, nomination papers, political affiliation. Most of these expressions are nouns with a few exceptions of verbs. These expressions show the competence of speakers in English language. The speakers are able enough to incorporate their linguistic and communicative competence in English while they use their L1 as the base language.

A lexical convergence between Punjabi and English, resulting in Punjabi plurals of English nouns, occurred when T made use of Punjabi inflections to pluralize English nouns like game+aan=*gamaan* (games in Punjabi), file+aan=*filaan* (files), council+aan=*counncilaan* (Councils), assembly+ian=*assemblian* (assemblies), film+aan=*filmaan* (films), story+ian=*storian* (stories), airline+aan=*airlinaan* (airlines). Z, however, did not use any such pattern in his speech. T is professionally a lawyer and his profession requires him to closely interact with clients of semi literate, monolingual, rural Punjabi background. Moreover, he uses Punjabi as a home language so he is more flexible and proficient in Punjabi syntax than Z to the extent of blending English and Punjabi morphology.

Finally, the speakers frequently used English vocabulary (especially jargon terms) which is considered as common vocabulary in multilingual Pakistani society. These words do not have commonly used linguistic equivalents in local languages. For example, election, laptop, touchpad, camera, email, zip, file, data, delete, generator, battery, medical, record, certificate, computerized, assembly, airlines, company, specialist etc are used across the board in all linguistic communities in Pakistan.

Urdu-Punjabi Codeswitching

The integration of Urdu in these Punjabi based conversations is more deeply rooted than just finding an equivalent in another language, as both of the speakers have been balanced and simultaneous bilinguals in Punjabi and Urdu. Moreover Punjabi and Urdu have the same syntax i.e. SOV. Both languages are inflectional and have loose structure so they allow the integration of other languages at all the grammatical levels. Interestingly, no extra-sentential codeswitching was observed in the Urdu-Punjabi codeswitching pattern.

Urdu quantifiers were preferably used by the two speakers in these conversations. Some of the quantifiers are phonologically different while the others are completely different words. For instance, **bada** (enough) is *wada* in Punjabi, **itna** (this much) is *aytna* in Punjabi, **kitna** (how much) is *kitra/kin'na* in Punjabi with phonological differences. While **Kafi** (sufficient) is *bahat* in Punjabi, **zaida** (much) is *changa* in Punjabi which indicate marked difference with no apparent similarity on the phonological level. Therefore the preference of Urdu quantifiers to English quantifiers is deliberate rather than due to phonological similarities.

Urdu relationship terms were preferably used by both speakers. In Urdu and Punjabi, there is a wide range of relationship terms to show maternal, paternal and in laws relations. The speakers used **bhabi** (*bharjai*, sister in law), **bhateeja** (*bhetreeya*, nephew), **bhai** (bhera, brother), **walid** (*piyo*, father), **damad** (*jawai*, son in law) despite they know the exact equivalent of these relationship terms in Punjabi. These Urdu relationship terms are due to the superior status of Urdu as compared to Punjabi in the socio-cultural hierarchy of these two languages.

Urdu and Punjabi collocations were used by both speakers. They made use of noun-noun collocations for example: **parha likha** (literate and educated), **shughal mela** (fun and recreation), **dhokha fraud** (deception and fraud), *ghar baar* (house and property), *aa vanj* (interaction/relationship), *ookha sokha* (hook or crook) and verb-verb collocations: **soch smajh** (think and ponder), **baat cheet** (talk and dialogue).

Both speakers made use of Punjabi numeral system for instance: *vee* (20), *yaaraan* (11), *panj to sat* (5-7), *saat uth* (7-8), *challi* (40). A lexical convergence between Punjabi and Urdu also occurs, resulting in Punjabi plurals of Urdu nouns. Both speakers use Punjabi inflections to pluralize some Urdu nouns. They are most

probably familiar of the Punjabi equivalents of the same nouns which shows their preference to use Urdu nouns for example: **tasveer***an* (pictutres), **din***aan* (days), **barish***aan* (rains), **elaq***ean* (areas), in order to sound literate and sophisticated.

Conclusion and Implications

The codeswitching patterns between the trilingual speakers of this study are complex and revealing. The speakers move back and forth between the monolingual, bilingual and trilingual mode as reflected in their Punjabi-English and Punjabi-Urdu codeswitching. Even though the amount of extra-sentential codeswitching was remarkably lower than the intra-sentential codeswitching, there is sufficient evidence in this study for the existence of three separate linguistic systems. The findings of this study show that the speakers used Punjabi (their L1) as the base language and Urdu and English as markers of their socio-cultural background. The data shows that Urdu and English are integrated not only as facilitators but social markers of identity in these Punjabi conversations. The three languages play three clearly assigned roles in these conversations (Punjabi at the syntactic level, Urdu at the phonological and morphological level and English at the morphological level). Still the socio-political status of each language has a decisive role in making the speakers prefer one language to the other. The speakers' discourse was in large part a reflection of their social and cultural identity. To use Stavans and Swisher's (2006: 215) remark regarding the codeswitching of trilinguals: 'Reconciling three language systems entails "juggling" not only conceptual information but also linguistic and cultural information.' Thus, the speakers in this case study brought their linguistic and cultural history into their discourse as revealed through codeswitching.'

However, the sample size in this study was too small to establish anything with certainty. This study found no significant differences between the two brothers with respect to the frequency of types of codeswitching. Both of them used more intra-sentential and significantly less extra-sentential switches. It is difficult to speculate if these patterns occur in the same way, when these speakers are in a different setting, talking to people of different background in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, profession, and education. There is a need to explore trilingual conversations and the codeswitching patterns that will emerge in different contexts and speakers with diverse background.

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