SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF CODE-SWITCHING
IN CLASSROOMS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Codeswitching, use of two languages in one speech event, is a natural phenomenon in multilingual and bilingual societies. This practice is common in Pakistani society as well – people speak in two or more than two languages in service encounters, social encounters, in radio programmes, on television talk shows. All the people with competence in two or three languages make use of these languages whenever and wherever they interact with other people. The same bilingual practices are carried over to educational settings despite the fact that most educational institutions (at primary, secondary and especially at the tertiary level) do not encourage codeswitching in classrooms. In fact, this practice is prohibited in a large number of educational institutions. It has been observed that due to the students' lack of communicative competence in, teachers sometimes resort to the use the mainstream language to facilitate learning in some classrooms. That is the reason that codeswitching between English and Urdu (or any other language) takes place in nearly all classrooms in Pakistan. For example, it has been observed and recorded at certain universities that teachers and students both 'construct knowledge' in Urdu and English. This paper describes and analyses a few patterns of codeswitching in such classrooms and tries to explore some possible reasons and outcomes this sociolinguistic phenomenon.

Keywords: codeswitching, classroom, tertiary education, sociolinguistics, discourse, English, Urdu

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore codeswitching in Karachi University classrooms. In many departments in the faculties of Arts, Commerce, Science and Pharmacy, teaching takes place in two languages: Urdu and English. Codeswitching is seen as the employment of two languages alternatively for the purpose of communication which can occur at any level: morpheme level (book*e~* = book*s*), at the word level (policy ***saazi*** = policy ***making***), lexical level (look down upon ***karna*** = ***to*** look down upon), clause level (If we don't follow the rules, ***ma'ashra xaraab ho jaae ga***. = If we don't follow the rules, ***the society will go corrupt***.). This occurs at the larger discourse units as well. The paper seeks to find out the following questions:

What types of codeswitching are employed?

Why do people use codeswitching in classrooms?

What are some possible consequences of codeswitching?

Review of Literature

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This phenomenon is not unique; use of two languages is now widespread throughout the world. A number of studies have been conducted on classroom bilingualism in the last three decades in different parts of the world (Martin Jones, 1995, 2000). Lin (1988, 1990) studied bilingual discourse in Anglo-Chinese schools in Hong Kong where English is the official medium of instruction. Lin audio-recorded large classrooms and observed patterns of codeswitching there. The reason for codeswitching was lack of students' linguistic competence in English. Camilleri (1996) reported a similar situation in secondary schools in Malta. Canagarajah (1995) described that in secondary schools in Jaffna (Sri Lanka) students switched to Tamil when the teacher's attention was diverted. Arthur (1995, 1996) gave an account of primary schools in Botswana where bilingualism was common as a teaching strategy. Martin (1996, 1999a, 1999b) reported that in Brunei, where bilingualism in primary classrooms is official (known as *dwibahasa* system), students and teachers use two languages, English and Malay, in classroom interaction. De Klerk's (1996) study revealed the growth of codeswitching among university students in South Africa after the abolition of apartheid as more and more students with insufficient proficiency in English were given admission. However, this codeswitching occurred outside the classroom. Khan (2004) studied the prospects and problems of codeswitching in classrooms in the University of Karachi. Van der Walt (2008) reported that South Africa has a policy of bilingual education in universities to help students. Unamuno (2008) discussed the classroom codeswitching among 10-12 years old second language learners from conversation analysis and interactional point of view.

A number of researchers studied codeswitching in primary and secondary classrooms specifically where the use of the mother tongue is not allowed. Students and teachers experienced conflicts and tensions (Ferguson, 2009) in classrooms, in different countries, where only one language is considered "proper" in schools (Cummins, 2009; McGlynn and Martin, 2009; Tien 2009; and Hilaire, 2009). The notion of legitimacy was used by Heller (1996), and Martin-Jones and Heller (1996). Ioannidou (2009) also employed this concept in the context of the conflict between the Greek Cypriot Dialect and Standard Modern Greek in Cyprus. However, Wei and Wu (2009) perceive codeswitching as a valuable strategy to facilitate learning in school classrooms despite the official one language only policy. Probyn (2009) from South Africa and Raschka *et al* (2009) from Taiwan have reported a similar situation where codeswitching is used as a privilege and a strategy.

Finally I would like to quote here Ferguson (2009) who summed up some researches on classroom codeswitching:

> Implicit in these accounts, and successfully demonstrated … is the utility of CS as a communicative and pedagogic resource in bilingual contexts, especially where pupils struggle to understand difficult subject matter whilst simultaneously learning a foreign language, one that is nominally the official medium of instruction" (Ferguson 2009, p. 231).

Background of students

There are more than 30, 000 students who are enrolled in regular graduate and post-graduate programmes at the University of Karachi. Besides students who come from English-medium institutions, a large number of students from Urdu and Sindhi medium institutions are also admitted to these programmes. In addition to this fact, speakers of other languages are also admitted who speak Urdu as their second language and English (if at all!) as their third language. A great number of them, especially in the Faculty of Arts, listen to lectures in English for the first time in life. They come from different parts of the country and they belong to all social, cultural and economic groups that exist in Pakistan. There are a hundred or so foreign students as well who do not know Urdu at all. Most teachers use English as the academic language and a survey of 426 students reveals that in nearly every class there are a few students who do not understand English (Please see Table 1).

Table 1: Students' Self-declared English Language Proficiency

English Proficiency	Total	%
Poor	78	*18.31*
No response	85	*19.95*
Monolingual (Non-English)	15	*3.52*
Bilingual (Non-English)	6	*1.41*
Trilingual (Non-English)	6	*1.41*
Good	199	*46.71*
Very Good	32	*7.51*
Excellent	5	*1.17*
Total number of students	426	**100**

Education is defined by UNESCO (1953) as an organised and sustained communication designed to bring about learning, and its objectives are to develop and maintain knowledge and skills in an individual. These goals are achieved through listening,

speaking, reading and writing activities in a formal setting, in a language that the teachers and students *must* know. The selection of the medium through which these skills are achieved is, therefore, an important issue in a multilingual society. The University has a very clear policy about the medium of instruction in classrooms:

> The medium of instruction and examination shall be English or Urdu. Candidates for B.A./B.Sc. (Pass) Examination may be permitted to write their scripts in Sindhi as well ... Candidates for the B.Ed. and M.A. examinations may be permitted to write their scripts in Sindhi as well." (*University of Karachi Code*, 1984, p. 344)

Nevertheless, despite the clear rule that either English **or** Urdu should be used, both teachers and students employ **both** the languages in classroom discourse.

Examples of classroom discourse and discussion

I have selected three short excerpts from my classroom data to illustrate the phenomenon of codeswitching, one from Social Sciences, one from Sciences and one from Commerce.

Social Sciences

In the following passage, the teacher is talking about functions of social institutions. There are many students in this class who either do not understand English or have poor comprehension. Being aware of this fact the teacher has decided to use English lexical items and a few phrases in otherwise Urdu syntax. The same pattern went on in the entire lecture.

[a] Original 'codeswitched' text:

> (*unke* functions *he~*) Research *karna, idaaro~ ko* manage *karna, idaaro~ ko chalaane ke lie logo~ ko* mobilise *karna*. Participate *karna*, fund *faraaham karna*, *logo~ ko* motivate *karna phir is baat pe bhi Ghor kiije ke* what happens in this case: *tamaam ke tamaam* units they have to consume.

[b] Urdu translation:

> (*un ke maqaasid he~*) *tehqiiq karna, idaaro~ ka intizaam chalaana, idaaro~ ko chalaane ke lie logo~ ko mutaharrik karna, hissa lena, raqm faraaham karna, logo~ ko maail karna phir is baat pe bhi Ghor kiijie ke is maamle me~ kia hota he: tamaam ke tamaam hisse unko khaana he~.*

This variety of Urdu is hard to find in Karachi University classroom except in the Department of Urdu and Faculty of Islamic Studies.

[c] English translation:

> (Their functions include) doing research, managing institutions, mobilising people in order to run institutions, participating, providing funds, motivating people, then also speculate on what happens in this case: they have to consume the entire units.)

This variety of English is not unusual but most teachers will avoid it to facilitate student learning. Students easily understand the codeswitched text in [a] because they are familiar with English vocabulary through books. Complete English discourse presented in [c] is difficult for them to understand. There is one English noun "functions" that is inserted here. We observe a very common structure:

> research *karna*
>
> manage *karna*
>
> mobilise *karna*
>
> participate *karna*

The interesting point is that all the above English items are verbs but the speaker has used an Urdu operator, *karna* (do), to make them a codeswitched verb. Other operators, *hona*, *lena*, *dena*, and their causative forms are also used. Another interesting item is "fund *faraaham karna,*" in which the headword is an English noun and the whole chunk is a verb phrase. Then the speaker suddenly switches to Urdu, then English and within this unit a compound Urdu noun is used to modify an English noun: "*tamaam ke tamaam* units".

All this happens naturally and smoothly.

Science

This is a typical Urdu-English scientific classroom discourse. The pattern is more or less the same as seen in the Faculty of Arts. English words and technical terms are inserted in Urdu syntax but fragments of English sentences are also used. The main difference between the two is that in the scientific talk large units of English are also produced which cannot be quoted here due to constraints of space.

> …*to abhi aap ko ye bataaya he ke* acidic proteins ... permanently associate *nahi~ rehte he~. unki* amount *bhi* vary *kar sakti he. to* one of the examples is: these DNA replicating enzymes. *jab* DNA replication *ki zuruurat ho gi us vaqt vo* enzymes chromosomes *ke saath* associate *ho~ ge aur jis vaqt* DNA replication *nahi~ ho raha ho to us vaqt vo* enzymes associated *uske saath nahi~ ho~ ge. to* acidic protein requirement *ke lehaaz se jis vaqt jo* requirement *he* cell *ka uske lehaaz se kam ziaada hote rehte he~* but the histone proteins remain permanently associated with the DNA but the three which you see in the microscope are actually the proteins…

English translation:

> ***... so I have just told you that*** acidic proteins ***...*** ***never*** remain permanently associated. ***Their amount can also*** vary. ***So*** one of the examples is these DNA replicating enzymes. ***When*** DNA replication ***is required at that time those enzymes will be*** associated ***with*** chromosomes ***and when*** DNA replication ***will not take place*** at that time enzymes ***will not*** associate ***with that***. ***So according to*** acidic protein requirement whenever the cell requires ***accordingly the number can increase or decrease*** but the three which you see in the microscope are actually the proteins…

In addition to large codeswitched units in this case, the speaker has used a more complex structure than the one used above:

> acidic proteins … permanently associate ***nahi~ rehte he~***
>
> modifier+noun + adverb   +   verb + negative + verb

This script reveals the use of complete chunks of Urdu and English. Again, the idea is to promote general understanding and to save classroom time.

Commerce

The third excerpt is from the Faculty of Commerce in which a dialogue between the teacher and a student is observed. Most students are able to ask short questions in English and produce some other utterances as well in a formulaic fashion but longer discourse chunks are produced in Urdu with English items insertions. ("Sorry!" "Pardon", "Thank you", "Excuse me!", and the like).

S: May I ask a question?

T: Yes!

S: ***is ka matlab*** simple ***sa to ye hoga ke jo*** asset ***ham ne becha he is dafa yaqiinan vo hamaara*** extra-ordinary loss ***pehle se raha ho ga to us ka*** depreciation ***pichhle saal ke*** balance ***se*** match ***kar le~ ge to*** obviously ***is saal jo hamaara*** depreciation ***aaya he vo aae ga nikal ke***?

T: ***pichhle saal ka*** depreciation ***hamaare paas he***.

S: ***pehle se nikaale~ ge use?***

T: ***nahi~.***

S: ***vo to mojuud hi he is ke andar, jab*** net income ***ke andar to*** depreciation ***he hi. use dubaara aane ki zuruurat hi nahi~ he***.

T: ***haa~. jo*** asset is sold that that is deducted also. ***ab use leke nahi~ chalna. jo*** asset ***bik gaya he*** that is also accumulated.

English translation:

S: May I ask a question?

T: Yes!

S: *It* simply *means that the* asset *that we have sold this time it must have been our* extra-ordinary loss *beforehand*, *so if we* match *its* depreciation *with last year's* balance *so* obviously *whatever* depreciation *we have this year we'll get that*?

T: *We have the* depreciation *of the last year with us*.

S: *(We) will deduce beforehand*?

T: *No*.

S: *That exists in it, when depreciation is in the* net income, *there is no need for it to deduct again.*

T: *Yes.* The asset (*that*) is sold that that is deducted also. *No (we) don't carry it*. The asset *that has been sold* that is also accumulated.

This excerpt reveals a pattern in which the student, after using a formulaic utterance in English, keeps speaking Urdu. The student is definitely thinking in Urdu while he is trying to communicate with the teacher. For example, "simple *sa*" is used for "*asaan sa*." The Urdu tag "*sa*" is used with the English word. He has used only twelve English words with repetition. This type of lexical codeswitching is fairly common among those students in the classroom who lack English proficiency.

When teachers realise that most or few students are unable to understand their English lecture or talk or students request them to speak in Urdu as well so that they can also comprehend what is going on in the classroom, teacher codeswitch between Urdu and English. Almost all the teachers are fluent in both the languages and they easily do it but a number of students pay attention only when Urdu is used. It goes without saying that the three examples presented above are far from enough to show the full picture but they do give us a glimpse of what is going on. There are many patterns of codeswitching available in Karachi University classrooms. For instance, a teacher may deliver a whole lecture in English and towards the end summarises it in Urdu. Another teacher speaks for nine or eight minutes in English and then gives the gist of that much in Urdu and switches back to English. One teacher begins in English and provides the exact Urdu translation of her talk orally paragraph by paragraph. Some teachers speak English only but repeat key terms in Urdu side by side. Some teachers deliver their talk in English but briefly explain concepts in Urdu. One interesting pattern that I observed in a science classroom was the teacher was codeswitching fluently in English and Urdu without repeating anything. It was a continuous flow of discourse in two languages. For those who were good at English received it well as they knew Urdu but Urdu-only students were at a loss for more than half the lecture. This type of codeswitching was not helpful for learners; it was just the teacher's habit.

There are different reasons for classroom codeswitching. One of them is to make participants less tense and more relaxed because it indicates teachers' friendliness. However, most of the times, it is used as a strategy to compensate for linguistic deficit – something that cannot be said easily in English is said in Urdu or, on the other hand, if a teacher realises that some students in the class will not be able to understand something in English, he or she will say it quickly in Urdu. So it is also employed as a time-saving device.

The problems that are faced in the above mentioned classrooms are witnessed only in those departments where students are admitted regardless of their English language competence. Except for language departments – Arabic, Bengali, Persian, Sindhi and Urdu – and Islamic Studies, all the other subjects have reading material mostly in English. In order to help them acquire essential concepts in the field, teachers codeswitch frequently. Lin (1996, p.60) sounds as if she were speaking about our situation: "Many students have to resort to rote learning and copying from text-books to cope with the English medium of learning. It is clear that creative higher learning cannot take place under such conditions." Eldridge (1996, p. 308) asserts, "Codeswitching appears to be natural and purposeful phenomenon which facilitates both communication and learning." He adds, "... it (codeswitching) has some short-term benefits for the students but these benefits are reaped with a risk of hampering long-term acquisition."

While codeswitching facilitates learning and helps participants learn the subject matter in question, disadvantages too. Codeswitching, in the opinion of most of the teachers and learners in the University of Karachi, although facilitates learning, at the tertiary level of education, it is indicative of low standards. Since most knowledge is exclusively available only in English students remain away from it and get only that much amount that is presented to them in Urdu. Lo Bianco (1990) reports that when teachers codeswitch in the classroom and translate contents of subject matter into the first language of students, they [students] "often tend to ignore the material presented in the second language. If similar messages are available in both the languages, then there is lowered motivation for the student to make an effort to understand the message being presented in the second language" (Lo Bianco, 1990, p. 46).

I would like to quote here Hasan (1965, 2) who mentioned this problem in his Urdu book that was about Urdu as a medium of instruction:

> "Nowadays our students are busy in learning English. They learn English through history, through geography, through logic, through philosophy, and through all the other sciences. But they have no time left to master these very sciences—; and what is the result of all the efforts? Whatever broken English is acquired, it is not worth mentioning—. Thus knowledge is not acquired and English also remains unlearned." [My translation]

Since Urdu is used where English has to be employed, those who lack proficiency in English no longer have the incentive to acquire it and remain less 'educated'. Most of students get the degrees in the specified academic field (Sociology, General History,

International Relations, Botany, Genetics, etc.) without appropriate required knowledge and skills in the field. They are hired to jobs they are not fit to do. Nevertheless, they accept and do without requisite knowledge which adds to corruption. With this meagre amount of knowledge and skills, if they fail to secure good jobs they become frustrated because they think that despite having required qualifications they are denied jobs (without realising that they are merely degree holders and not properly educated or trained persons). On the other hand, if they are inducted into the workforce in the society, they add to corruption in the long run, because they are assigned duties to perform for which they lack ability. This has more serious consequences for the future. I quote Cazden (1988) here who talked about the outcome of classroom discourse. She asserted:

> We have to consider how the words spoken in classroom affect the outcomes of education: how observable classroom discourse affects the unobservable thought process of each of the participants, and thereby the nature of what all students learn" (Cazden, 1988, 99).

Students simply stop listening when English is used in the classroom (Wong Filmore, 1980; Lo Bianco 1990). Most teachers and students that I interviewed accepted that this is the case with them as well. It is not because Urdu is used as a crutch and students might listen to English if it were used instead of Urdu. They would not listen to it at all. This has been stated by both students and teachers.

Conclusion

As it has been suggested by the UNESCO (1953), teaching of all subjects should be provided in the mother tongue of students from the very beginning of their academic career, if possible. However, at the same time, it is the responsibility of the government to ensure that English is taught to every school-going child in such a manner that by the time these students join a college or a university in Pakistan they must be able to pursue all courses in English. The speech of Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India 1898-1905) is quoted by Krishnamurti (1990, pp. 17-18):

> "By all means, let English be taught to those who are qualified to learn it, but let it rest upon a solid foundation of the indigenous languages, for no people will ever use another tongue with advantage that cannot first use its own with ease…. Unless a good training in the vernacular is given in the schools, no effect of the university will avail."

Classroom language should be shared by both the teachers and the students because if the classroom language is not well understood then communication will not take place and the purpose of teaching and learning will fail. And the long term consequence would be:

a) *Frustration*: If these people do not get jobs because they do not have appropriate skills and knowledge and only a piece of paper, they experience frustration.

b) *Corruption*: On the other hand, if they get jobs for any reason [through political favoritism, nepotism, bribery, etc.], they are expected to perform duties for which they lack adequate skills and knowledge.

c) *Imperfect and incomplete education*: because they got only what was given to them in Urdu and they remained away from the treasure of knowledge that was available only in English.

The most risky consideration about codeswitching in the classroom is that those who lack communicative competence in English would restrict themselves to the Urdu version and until they acquire English properly would remain away from the treasure of knowledge that is available in English. I believe that at the university level, students of pure sciences as well as of social sciences and humanities must learn to read English, if not all other skills, so that they can keep themselves abreast of the recent developments in their own fields. And here reading means the abilities: to get information from the printed page; to retain it in the brain; to recall this information when it is needed; and finally, to communicate.

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