

An Analysis of Code-Mixing at University Level in Peshawar: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Sohaima Nasir*

Abstract

The phenomenon of code-mixing, mixing of linguistic elements of two or more languages in a communicative context, is a common characteristic of multilingual societies. Code-mixing is the common phenomenon in multilingual setting of Pakistan particularly in higher education institutions where English is used as a medium of instruction. This study aims to explore patterns, functions and pedagogical implications of code-mixing in the context of teachers and students of Qurtuba University, Peshawar. The convergent mixed-method research design was adopted, which involved classroom observations, teacher semi-structured interviews and student questionnaires. The results show that code-mixing is pervasive and plays various important roles in the classroom interaction, such as improving understanding, aiding participation, clarifying complex ideas, and minimizing barriers in communication. After applying communication accommodation theory, the results show that teachers and students use linguistic convergence in making strategic adjustments of their language choice to reach communicative effectiveness and mutual understanding. While a few participants commented on the risk of over-reliance on native languages and how they may adversely affect English language acquisition, the results also indicate that code-mixing, when purposeful and strategic, can be a valuable teaching and learning tool in multilingual classrooms. The study makes a valuable addition to sociolinguistic research on higher education multilingualism by offering empirical data on the multilingual practices of Pakistani learners in higher education and emphasizes the importance of embracing inclusive language policies to reflect the multilingual context of Pakistani learners.

Keywords: code-mixing, sociolinguistics, multilingualism, University Classroom, Pakistani Higher Education, Communication Accommodation Theory

Introduction

Language is an important tool in social interaction and is a vital medium for creating knowledge, articulating identities, and engaging in social and educational activities (Halliday, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). In multilingual societies, language usage may also involve more than one language, which leads to the development of such phenomena as bilingualism, multilingualism, code-switching and code-mixing. The practices enable speakers access to several linguistic resources and interact with

* Student Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology Peshawar

communicative and social environments that are complex (Grosjean, 2011). Pakistan is a rich context to study multilingual language practices. English is the official language and is the main medium of instruction in the higher education institutes, Urdu is the federal language while regional languages like Pashto, Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi and Saraiki are indicators of local and cultural identity (Rahman, 1995; Mansoor, 2004). This linguistic diversity often results in language being used in a bilingual and multilingual manner in both formal and informal contexts.

One of the most frequently occurring language behaviour patterns that has become evident in this multilingual context is code-mixing. It is a process of borrowing words, phrases, clauses or grammatical features from one language into another when communicating (Muysken, 2000). In contrast to code switching, where the shift takes place at the sentence level, code-mixing in general takes place at the sentence or discourse level and indicates speakers' competence in using several linguistic systems at once (Poplack, 1980).

However, code-mixing has become a more prominent phenomenon in the educational field, especially in university settings. In most of the universities of Pakistan English is the medium of instruction, but students' English language proficiency (ELP) varies (Coleman, 2010; Shamim, 2011). Teachers also often use Urdu or regional languages for the discourse of the class so that students can understand and follow, explain the difficult issues in the class, and get them to participate in the class. In a similar vein, students use code mixing when they want to achieve a communicative objective that cannot be achieved through the use of English alone (Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009).

In recent years, the traditional monolingual theory of language learning has been increasingly under challenge. García and Wei (2019) have suggested that multilingual learners can make use of their entire linguistic repertoire when approaching academic content. Likewise, research on English Medium Instruction (EMI) indicates that the use of students' first language can provide support for understanding and boost outcomes of learning the content to an acceptable level, while not necessarily impacting the acquisition of the second language (Macaro, 2020). This has led to the understanding of multilingual classroom practices as resources for learning, not deficiencies in language skills.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, code-mixing is not only a linguistic convenience, but is a result of a variety of other social, cultural and psychological processes (Heller, 2007). It enables speakers to negotiate identities, build social relationships, assert group membership and meet communicative needs. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Giles and Coupland (1991) gives a useful theory to understand this phenomenon. Speakers modify their communicative style to meet the communicative and social goals by converging or diverging with their interlocutors in accordance with CAT theory (2006). Linguistic convergence is a practice for teachers to use within classrooms to help reduce social

distance and to help promote understanding for students by using the students' native language. Although code mixing is found in educational contexts all over Pakistan, it is still debatable whether it is pedagogically useful (Sridhar, 1978; Bokamba, 1988). Some researchers believe that the use of code-mixing supports language learning and inclusion while others believe that the excessive use of native languages could have a negative effect on exposure to English and language acquisition. The divergent viewpoints underlined the need for empirical studies investigating the role of code-mixing in real classroom settings.

While some studies have been conducted on teachers' code switching and multilingualism in Pakistan (Mahboob & Talaat, 2008), there is little in-depth research that has focused specifically on code-mixing among teachers and students at the university level in Peshawar. In addition, there are not many studies which examine classroom observations, teacher interviews and student perceptions in a single research framework. To overcome this drawback, this study examines the pattern, function, benefits and challenges of code-mixing in Qurtuba University, Peshawar. The results will be used to advance the research of sociolinguistics as well as higher education language usage.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. To identify the frequency and patterns of code-mixing in university classrooms.
2. To examine the functional role and benefits of code-mixing in teaching and learning.
3. To identify the challenges associated with code-mixing in higher education.
4. To analyze code-mixing through the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What patterns of code-mixing are used by teachers and students at Qurtuba University, Peshawar?
2. What benefits are associated with code-mixing in classroom communication?
3. What challenges are associated with code-mixing in higher education?
4. How can code-mixing be explained through Communication Accommodation Theory?

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the theory that was developed by Giles and Coupland (1991) called Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). The theory helps to understand how language and communication is adapted for successful interaction, understanding and social acceptance. CAT suggests that speakers might start to approach the speech of their interlocutors to eliminate communication barriers and make them easier to understand.

To cope with multilingual learners in the university classroom, teachers tend to include Urdu or Pashto in their English teaching, and students use code-mixing in their learning of English, thereby expressing ideas and making themselves more at home in English classrooms. Hence, Communication Accommodation Theory was found to be a helpful theory in understanding the patterns and functions of code-mixing of teachers and students at Qurtuba University, Peshawar.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Code-Mixing

Code-mixing has attracted considerable attention within sociolinguistic research because it reflects the dynamic interaction between languages in multilingual communities. Muysken (2000) defines code-mixing as the incorporation of linguistic elements from one language into another within a single discourse event. According to his typology, code-mixing may occur through insertion, alternation, or congruent lexicalization. These categories indicate that code mixing is a patronized language phenomenon with identifiable patterns and not random language usage.

Likewise, Myers-Scotton (1993) claims that bilingual speakers select between different linguistic codes in a systematic way depending on communicative needs. She proposes that one language usually supplies the structure and the other language supplies the lexical elements in what is known as a Matrix Language Frame Model. These views go against the idea that “mixed-language” discourse is somehow deficient, and reflect its systematic nature.

Code-Mixing and Sociolinguistic Identity

The use of language is an important aspect of individual identity construction and social interaction. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) point to the fact that the use of language is used strategically by speakers in order to indicate social affiliation, cultural identity and group membership. Codemixing is sometimes a token of identity and social solidarity in multilingual societies.

In addition, Heller (2007) claims that bilingual language use is influenced by social, political and institutional factors. People use specific language resources in appropriate ways, for different purposes, to different audiences. In the educational context, code-mixing can thus serve not only as a way of communicating but also as a way of fostering rapport and social relationships.

Code-Mixing in Pakistan

The Pakistani linguistic setting is apt for code mixing phenomena to flourish. English has a high prestige value in terms of education, employment and social mobility, Urdu is used as a national language and languages of the regions are used to express local identity, says Rahman (1995). This linguistic hierarchy makes it more desirable to speak languages together for the purpose of communicating in various situations.

In universities, students often are taught academic material in English while their experiences in school have been influenced by Urdu or regional languages. Consequently, code-mixing can frequently be a useful tool for achieving understanding and involvement.

Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) offers a useful framework for the explanations of code-mixing. Giles and Coupland (1991) suggest that the language a speaker exhibits is influenced by communicative situations.

Convergent behaviour refers to speakers' modification of their language in order to make it nearer to the one used by their interlocutors, while divergent behaviour refers to the highlighting of the language differences between the two parties. Teachers are often seen converging toward students' language preferences in educational settings, and they use Urdu or regional languages in English medium classes. This type of accommodation can improve understanding, minimize communication problems and encourage positive relationships between teachers and learners.

Code-Mixing and Educational Practice

The pedagogical value of code-mixing has been demonstrated in the past. Ahmad and Jusoff (2009) reported that teachers' application of multilingual instructional strategies positively affected the learning and engagement of students. In a similar way, Malik (2014) found that the use of code-mixing in the classroom fostered interaction and lessened the anxiety of the learners in the classroom who studied at Pakistani universities.

Building on this work, Sert (2005) further suggests that code-mixing is an important communicative means in EFL classes, which allows the teacher to facilitate learning and provide support to target language learners with low proficiency. Likewise, Bokamba (1988) showed that code-mixing is not evidence of linguistic incompetence, but rather it is a systematic and rule-governed linguistic phenomenon, and challenged deficit theory of multilingual classroom practices.

The evidence from other studies also comes from Üstünel and Seedhouse (2005), who reported that teachers strategically use code-mixing to facilitate classroom interaction, to provide explanations to grammar, and to negotiate meaning with students. Their results indicate that code-mixing is not an unintended consequence of speech communication in the classroom, but is an effective pedagogical tool.

In the Pakistani context particularly, Mahboob and Talaat (2008) noted that the English-medium university teachers often resort to Urdu in their instructional discourse to improve understanding and keep students engaged. The present study is of significance for the findings in this study as it is carried out in a similar multilingual educational environment in Peshawar.

These have been followed up by more recent studies. Garcia and Wei (2019) highlight the idea of translanguaging as a way of thinking about multilingual speakers as having a unified linguistic system, not multiple language systems. Macaro (2020) suggests that strategic use of L1 can facilitate L2 content learning in L2 classrooms. Moreover, Lin (2021) shows how multilingual classroom practices engage learners in the cognitive domain and involve them in learning activities.

Challenges Associated with Code-Mixing

Although code mixing has its advantages, it is a matter of controversy. There are concerns that excessive use of native languages might diminish opportunities for target-language input and practice. This is especially important for universities that use English as the language of instruction, where English proficiency can be associated with academic and career outcomes.

Yet, modern scholarship has come to a greater respect for a middle-ground approach. While some researchers consider code mixing to be either positive or negative, others stress the need for strategic use of code mixing to facilitate learning with adequate exposure to the target language, English.

Research Gap

While code switching, translanguaging and multilingual classroom practices have been a subject of extensive investigation, not

much attention has been given to code-mixing in the university context of Peshawar. Research in these areas tends to focus on the school, the language classroom or a larger-scale context of multilingualism, but not on the specific experiences of university language teachers and students. In addition, there are very few studies that combine the information produced from classroom observations, interview, and questionnaires in an integrated mixed-method approach. Therefore, empirical studies to investigate the pattern, functions, benefits, and problems of code-mixing in higher education would be welcome. The present study aims to overcome these limitations by focusing on the code-mixing phenomenon in Qurtuba University, Peshawar, and analyzing the data with the help of Communication Accommodation Theory.

Research Design

For this study convergent mixed method research design was used in which patterns, functions of code-mixing phenomenon in the classroom of Qurtuba University, Peshawar were studied along with the pedagogical implications. Mixed-method approach was chosen as it enables the qualitative and quantitative data to be combined to give a more holistic view of the phenomenon under study. Using quantitative data, trends and language patterns were identified and using qualitative data, insights into the experiences, perceptions and communicative practices of the participants were gained.

The mixed method design is a good choice for sociolinguistic study because language phenomena are affected by both measurable behavior pattern and complex social phenomena. The methodological triangulation was used to increase the validity and reliability of the results found in the study by using various evidence together.

Research Site

The study was carried out at a higher educational institution Qurtuba University Peshawar where English is the medium of instruction in different subjects. The university is a suitable environment for the study of code-mixing because English is the language used by students and teachers on a regular basis, while Urdu and regional languages (Pashto in the case of the university) are also used to communicate during lessons.

The rationale for the choice of Qurtuba University was that it has a multilingual community of students, and English is the medium of instruction at the university.

Participants

Twenty participants were chosen for the study. Ten university teachers and ten undergraduate students were selected as the sample. The presence of both groups was deemed indispensable as the teacher and the learner were expected to be the key players in classroom communication and to have the most important contributions to the building of linguistic interactions.

The teacher participants were from various academic subjects and had different teaching experiences. The students who participated in the study were chosen from the second, fourth and sixth semester of undergraduate programs.

Sampling Technique and Rationale

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participants who were actively involved in using English as their language of instruction and are likely to use code-mixing in their communication with others in the classroom. The selection of study participants was deemed as appropriate when using purposive sampling as the method of sampling was required to include participants who have first-hand experience of multilingual educational practices. To provides rationale for selecting Second, Fourth, and Sixth Semester Students.

Students from the second, fourth and sixth semester were chosen on purpose to make sure that different stages of under-graduate academic progression are represented. The second semester are students who have recently started to be taught in the English medium at the university level. The fourth semester is for students who have had a moderate level of exposure to academic English and academic learning practices at university. The sixth semester is advanced learners who have now undergone multiple years of post-secondary education.

These three groups allowed the researcher to consider the following questions: Can academic experience, language ability, and exposure to EMI be correlated with code-mixing practices? The sampling was thus taken to give a wider picture of code-mixing at various levels of university education.

Data Collection Instruments

The use of three research instruments was made to obtain comprehensive data.

Classroom Observations

The classroom observations emphasized the use of the language in the classroom as it was used in the processes of teaching and learning.

The observation of the codemixed frequency, codes-mixed context and codes-mixed linguistic forms of the participants' codemixing were focused on. An approach was followed to obtain truly reliable information about classroom communication activity and to reduce the amount of self-reported information.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers' attitudes towards code-mixing, its purpose and how it helps teaching. The design of the interviews was flexible, allowing for the participants to share their experiences in detail, whilst allowing the researcher to be consistent in each interview.

Student Questionnaires

Students were given questionnaires to gather quantitative data on the situation of language practices, perception of code-mixing and experiences in English-medium classroom. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open type questions making it easy to not only get numerical data, but also explanatory comments.

Data Analysis

The data obtained by filling out the Questionnaires were analyzed descriptively by frequency and percentage. These methods were used as a way of uncovering trends in the responses received from students.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data from observation and interview. This involved coding participants' responses, and identifying recurring themes and interpreting the pattern of the functions, benefits and challenges of codemixing.

This process of incorporating the quantitative and qualitative results allowed for a more holistic understanding of classroom language practices, and supported the validity of the study's results.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles were guided during the research process. Before the data collection, participants were told the purpose and objectives of the study. All participants gave informed consent, and it was made clear that their participation was voluntary. Identifying details were removed from research records and results presented in summary form to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the subjects.

Findings

Findings Related to Research Question 1:

Patterns of Code-Mixing

The results showed that code-mixing was found in classroom discourse of teachers and students.

Table 1

Percent of students who use code-mixing in some way (N = 10)

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Always	4	40%
Often	3	30%
Sometimes	2	20%
Rarely	1	10%

Note. Responses reflect self-reported frequency of code-mixing during classroom interaction

Table 2

Frequency of code-mixing use among teachers (N = 10)

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Always	3	30%
Often	4	40%
Sometimes	3	30%
Rarely	0	0%

It can be observed in the tables below that there was considerable code mixing by both the students and teacher. 70% of the students reported that they always or often used code-mixing in classroom interactions, and 10% reported that they rarely used it. Likewise, 70% of the teachers reported that they always or frequently used code mixing in their teaching time. The present study indicates that code-mixing is widespread in classroom communication and is an important tool in classroom interactions in multilingual classrooms.

From observations done in the classroom it was found that the most frequent types of code-mixing were English–Urdu and English–Pashtun. The use of Urdu or Pashto words while explaining technical terms was common in teachers' explanations, and code mixing was used by students in asking questions and in the discussions.

Table 3

Semester-wise distribution of code-mixing frequency among students
(N = 10)

Semester	High use	Moderate use	Low use
2nd	75%	25%	0%
4th	50%	33%	17%
6th	33%	33%	34%

Note. High use = always/often; Moderate use = sometimes; Low use = rarely. Values represent percentages of students within each semester group

Table 3 reveals that the differences in code-mixing practices were found throughout the academic semesters. The second semester students had the highest code-mixing with 75% of students classified as high users of code mixing. On the other hand, the number of code-mixing students was lower among sixth semester students and a higher percentage of low code-mixing level was found. The findings indicate that the use of code-mixing may reduce over time as students become more confident in the use of English for academic purposes and acquire more experience in the university's English-medium instruction.

Interpretation

The results indicated that code-mixing, as a communicative strategy, serves as a convenient tool for participants' needs to overcome the

language barriers to ensure the smoothness of classroom interaction. The high proportions of code-mixing suggests the normalisation of multilingual language practices in the educational setting.

Findings Related to Research Question 2:

Benefits of Code-Mixing

A majority of student participants reported that code-mixing enhanced their understanding of lectures and facilitated comprehension of complex academic concepts. Teachers similarly reported that strategic use of Urdu and Pashto improved classroom communication and increased student engagement.

Table 4

Perceived effect of code-mixing on understanding (students, N = 10)

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Improves understanding	7	70%
No significant effect	2	20%
Causes confusion	1	10%

Note. Responses reflect students' perceptions of how code-mixing affected their comprehension of academic content.

As indicated in Table 4, most students believed that code-mixing was useful for them in their learning process. In particular, 70 per cent of the respondents said code-mixing helped them to understand the content of the course while only 10 per cent said that code-mixing confused them. Further, 20 % of the respondents indicated that code-mixing had no impact on their comprehension. The results indicate that code-mixing is a helpful teaching technique that enhances comprehension and aids in effective learning in multilingual classrooms.

Interpretation

The results suggest that code-mixing is a pedagogical tool that aids learning through the connection between the students' prior knowledge of language and new academic knowledge. Participants felt that code-mixing was an effective strategy to clarify information and to encourage active participation.

Findings Related to Research Question 3:

The issues related to code-mixing.

Participants seem to have positive attitudes towards code-mixing, but there are some concerns identified. Too much use of native languages in the

classroom was cited by some teachers as having the potential to limit students' exposure to English. Likewise, a few students noted that sometimes code-mixing reduced opportunities for them to use academic English.

Interpretation

The results indicate that code-mixing has immediate advantages for comprehension, but heavy use of code-mixing can pose problems for

long-term language development. The findings thus confirm the need for an equitable and strategic implementation.

Findings Related to Research Question 4:

Communication Accommodation Theory

Observational and interview data showed that teachers often adapted their language as needed based on students' communicative requirements. The teachers sometimes used Urdu or Pashtoon to explain things without English when students did not grasp the concepts, and other times used Urdu or Pashtoon as a language to convey a message. Students also adjusted their use of language when expressing ideas, by mixing English with familiar languages.

Interpretation

These results corroborate the applicability of CAT to understanding classroom language use. Linguistic behaviour was constantly modified by both teachers and students in order to communicate and to gain mutual understanding.

Discussion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that code mixing is a very important aspect of classroom communication at Qurtuba University, Peshawar. The code-mixing was not random, but rather seemed to be a strategic strategy used by the teacher and students to aid in understanding and participation.

This finding agrees with Ahmad and Jusoff (2009) who found that using multilingual teaching practices would affect students' understanding of the academic content. García and Wei (2019) further suggest that multilingual learners have advantages of using their entire language repertoire(s) to build meaning and process content when engaging with the learning material. The present results corroborate these views because they have shown that students often use code-mixing to bridge between their linguistic proficiency in English language.

The results also indicate that teachers do not routinely use code mixing but rather strategically. This is in line with Macaro's (2020) study

on English Medium Instruction that underscores the role of selective use of the L1 for L2 content learning. The teachers in the present study reported that code-mixing helped them to explain complicated concepts and involve students in the classroom without switching to English as the language of instruction.

The findings can be explained with the help of Communication Accommodation Theory. Giles and Coupland (1991) have stated that speakers will modify their linguistic behaviour to meet the communicative purpose and minimize social distance. The classroom exchanges that have been observed in this research are certainly examples of linguistic convergence because the language(s) used by the teachers were modified so that they could communicate with the students' needs. Similarly, students used code-mixing to help negotiate meaning and to assist in interaction.

The results also mirror the overall sociolinguistic facts in Pakistan. The use of English is still a symbol of academic esteem and job prospects, and Urdu and regional languages still hold significant meaning in terms of social bonds and identity. The code-mixing therefore helps to mediate between formal academic discourse and students' natural language experiences.

The findings do reveal, however, the need for caution. Using code mixing to make messages comprehensible and comprehensible in more than one language can also decrease the amount of English language use. This concern is related to the modern scholarship that promotes balanced multi-lingual pedagogies that take into account the importance of linguistic diversity and provide enough exposure to the target language.

The results of this study thus confirm that code-mixing is not a language problem and not an uncontrolled phenomenon, but a deliberate and communicative phenomenon in the multilingual context of higher education in Pakistan. If applied purposefully, it can act as a link between what students have learned and the learning content in the English medium. The results strongly support the importance of pedagogical practices that are sensitive to language variety of learners and that continue to build English language proficiency for academic and professional endeavors.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the pattern, function and pedagogical implications of code-mixing in the classroom discourse of teachers and students of Qurtuba University, Peshawar. The results reveal that code-mixing is present in classroom communication in multilingual learning contexts and functioned as an important communication tool.

The study shows that code-mixing helps in the comprehension of classroom texts, helps to interact with one another and helps to participate in the classroom in the English-medium classrooms. The results of this study

show that both teacher and student adapt their linguistic behavior to achieve communicative effectiveness and understanding from Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT).

The results also show that overuse of native languages can negatively affect opportunities for the development of English language skills. So, code-mixing must not be considered as a problem that has to be eradicated or as a practice that has to be used in every situation. Alternatively, it should be used in a strategic way as a pedagogical tool to facilitate learning for meaningful engagement with English.

Overall, the study is helpful to the field of sociolinguistic studies as it offers empirical evidence of language practices in the multilingual classroom and emphasizes the need to adopt language policies that are reflective of the language situation of Pakistani learners in higher education.

The following recommendations are made based on the results of this study:

- 1- Code-mixing should be used strategically by teachers to help students understand the language, while they are still being exposed to English.
- 2- Professional development opportunities for instructors to effectively practice multilingual pedagogical practices should be offered by universities.
- 3- Language policies in HE institutions must be aware of the multilingual realities of the classroom. 4- Students should be encouraged to progressively use English, using code-mixing as a transitional strategy, if necessary.
- 5- Future studies should have larger number of samples and more universities to provide generalizability.
- 6- Long-term effect of code-mixing on the English language competence and academic performance in longitudinal studies should be studied.

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