



Multilingualism in Practice: Code-Switching in ESL Writing among Urdu Speakers in Faisalabad

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ABSTRACT

In order to explore the reasons behind the code-switching and the results of code-switching for academic practice and self-expression, the current research is going to examine the phenomenon of code-switching in multilingual ESL learners' writing in Faisalabad. 20 multilingual ESL learners and 5 ESL teachers were the sample of this qualitative research study. The data for this research was collected from ESL learners' writing samples and interviews. The data showed that code-switching provided students with convenience in clarity, expression of identity and culture, and in case they do not find a suitable word in English. Moreover, because of the academic norms in writing, the ESL learners did not use code-switching in writing. Additionally, some teachers thought that code-switching is a major problem in ESL learners' writing because the conventions in formal writing did not allow code-switching in the formal context, whereas other teachers perceived code-switching as a useful pedagogical tool. The study's findings suggest that rather than discouraging students from using code-switching and viewing it as a sign of academic weakness, educators should encourage its use in the classroom. The findings also suggest that there is a need of more inclusive approach towards the use of code-switching in ESL classrooms in teaching and learning.

Introduction

Background of the study

The modern-day world is formed in such a way that the multilingual students from various parts of one country as well as from various parts of the world come across each other where they live and

get education as well as earn their bread. It has been seen that during their education they have to write abundantly in order to complete their education, due to which they excel in multiple languages. The students who are supposed to write their exams, assignments, and other educational requisites in one language, but they use another language in their writing. Such a phenomenon is called code-switching. Code-switching seems to be an organic phenomenon because the students have to naturally find a way to write navigating through multiple languages in their daily lives. There are multiple views on code-switching. There is a school of thought, which claims code-switching to be a very useful phenomenon in writing, as they link it with creativity and reflection of the individual identity of students, whereas the other school of thought considers it a linguistic inefficiency and a lack of language proficiency. Pakistan is a linguistically rich country where 77 different languages are spoken (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2023). In different provinces of Pakistan, multilingualism is observed in all spheres of life. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, whereas English is the official language of Pakistan dominating all government and private offices, whereas there are many other local languages. In the ESL context, code-switching is one of the most widely used and noticeable phenomena. ESL learners with a background of Urdu language generally use words and sentences from Urdu while writing in English. Faisalabad is the third biggest city of Pakistan, where students are used to code-switching between Urdu and English according to the needs of the situation. Code-switching is also observed amongst students' writing.

On one hand some ESL teachers recognize it as a useful linguistic strategy in teaching and learning English and, on the other hand most of the ESL teachers see code-switching as a linguistic barrier and lack of language proficiency. The current study attempts to examine code-switches as a valid linguistic strategy in ESL students' writing.

Statement of the Problem

Pakistan is a multilingual country where multilingualism is observed in all spheres of writing; ESL learners' writing is no exception. It is due to the strict writing conventions that most of the ESL teachers discourage the use of code-switching in ESL learners writing. This strict approach ignores the linguistic reality of ESL learners from Urdu background who code-switch between Urdu and English in order to express meaning in the writing skill. There is a research gap in addressing the usefulness of code-switching on ESL learners' writing skills.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to analyse the purpose behind the use of Urdu expressions in writing English compositions. This study will further identify the socio-cultural motivation behind code-switching. Another purpose of this study is to strive for an understanding of teachers' perspectives on code-switching. Moreover, it will also determine whether the phenomenon of code-switching is useful or not for the ESL learners' writing skills.

Significance of the study

The current research is significant in that it will present insight into the use of code-switching in the academic writing of ESL learners with a multilingual background in a linguistically rich city of Pakistan, Faisalabad. By eschewing the deficit model, which portrays code-switching as a language problem, this research study promotes an inclusive approach in ESL pedagogy. The current research not only holds significance for the ESL learners but also for the ESL teachers, educational policymakers and curriculum designers of Pakistan.

Research Questions

This study will address the following research questions:

1. What prompts multilingual students to code-switch in their writing?
2. In what ways do students alternate between languages in their written work?
3. How does code-switching influence the meaning and overall quality of their writing?
4. What perspectives do teachers hold regarding code-switching in student writing?

Delimitations of the study

There are delimitations of this research study, including the focus, methodology, and sample used for the study. This research is conducted with a focus on analysing the usefulness of code-switching for the ESL learners with Urdu background in the Faisalabad city of Pakistan. The students were selected from high schools and undergraduate institutions in Faisalabad. The study is limited to the writing skills of ESL learners, excluding the listening, the speaking and the reading skills of these ESL learners.

Defining Key Terms

Code-Switching

Code-switching involves the use of two or more languages within the same sentence, paragraph, or conversation, applicable to both spoken and written forms. Poplack (1988) outlines three primary types of code-switching, as inter-sentential code switching is an alternating between sentences (e.g., “I couldn’t finish my homework. *میں سر رے*”) (I couldn’t finish my homework. I had a severe headache.) whereas intra-sentential code-switching is within a single sentence (e.g., “She was crying because *اُس کا* best friend *ناراض* ہو گیا” (She was crying because her best friend got upset.) and the tag-switching is to insert brief phrases or words from another language (e.g., “Well, *میں نہیں جانتی*.” (Well, I don’t know.)

ESL Learners (English as a Second Language Learners)

ESL learners refer to the learners for with a non-native English background. The learners belong to the ex-British colonies like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, etc. ESL learners learn English as a subject and as a second language.

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is a phenomenon where an individual or community understands and uses more than two languages.

Translanguaging

It is a linguistic phenomenon that motivates the multilinguals to use all of their language resources for communication.

Literature Review

Code-switching has been a topic of vast research by scholars all over the world. A major emphasis of scholarly research has been on code-switching between English as a second language and other major languages of the world. ESL learners frequently code-switch between English and Urdu in the ESL context of Faisalabad, Pakistan. The literature review that is going to be presented here mainly deals with code-switching in written documents of ESL learners. Moreover, there is a

presentation of the existing literature in the domains of code-switching in ESL teaching as well as the importance of code-switching in ESL learning.

Theoretical Foundations of Code-Switching

The phenomenon of shifting between two or more languages is called code-switching. Most of the research on code-switching deals with code-switching used in speaking. Recently, scholars have paid attention to code-switching in other productive skills like writing skill. Gumperz (1982) calls code-switching an intentional communicative strategy useful for expressions of emotions and information. According to him, in code-switching, the selection of language mainly depends on the sender's and recipient's social relations as well as power dynamics. The postulates of Gumperz (1982) can lead to the way to classroom research on code-switching between English and Urdu—in order to understand the expression of cultural meaning and identity. According to Blom and Gumperz (1972) there is a difference between situational and metaphorical code-switching. According to them, situational code-switching means the shifting between languages which is based on context and communication participants whereas metaphorical code-switching is done with a symbolic purpose of expression of identity and culture.

Code-Switching in Student Writing

Scholars have recently shifted their attention towards the use of code-switching in written discourse, as Bhatt and Bolonyai (2011) conducted their research on the use of code-switching in writing in ESL context of India. According to them, ESL learners frequently use code-switching as a strategy to fill in the deficiency in translating an expression from one language to another. According to their findings untranslatable expressions of Hindi are mostly written in Hindi while writing English compositions by ESL learners. Likewise, Auerbach's research (1993) was focused on the usefulness of code-switching in ESL writings. She found that the quality of writing of ESL writers significantly improved when they were allowed by their teachers to code-switch between English and their native language. Moreover, she found out that there was an improvement in the students' confidence in writing when allowed to use code-switching in writing. She suggested that code-switching in writing should not be seen as a linguistic incapability by ESL teachers. In the ESL context of Pakistan, Urdu cannot be removed from the writing skills of the ESL learners, as their mother tongue is Urdu and they have been taught in the Urdu language in schools, colleges, and universities, which impacts their writing in English.

Urdu-English Code-Switching in Pakistan

The main focus of research in the domain of code-switching has been on the correlation of codeswitching and power dynamics, as Rehman (1999) found out that English is the symbol of power and modernity, while Urdu is used for identity and cultural continuity. According to him, ESL learners use both of these languages based on the need of the situation. In writing, this duality manifests in the seamless blending of languages, where students use Urdu to describe local customs or concepts (e.g., "mehndi," "dastarkhwan," "roza") that lack adequate English translations. Khan and Ali (2010) conducted their research on code-switching between English and Urdu in Lahore and found out that ESL learners used Urdu strategically in written assignments to explain complex cultural ideas, especially when writing narratives or reflective essays. Sultana (2014) conducted research on code-switching used on digital platforms like Facebook. According to her, code-switching is a normal and frequent strategy used for writing Facebook posts and comments because there are no strict rules for writing comments and posts only in English, which has improved the confidence of writers while writing English. Many of the linguistic patterns

found in informal digital writing carry over into classroom writing, especially when the audience is perceived as friendly or informal.

Pedagogical Implications of Code-Switching

Research on pedagogical code-switching has mainly dealt with whether code-switching should be used or not by ESL educators and learners. As far as the traditional approaches to ESL instruction are concerned, ESL pedagogy should take place in English-only environment, whereas modern approaches have emphasized on the more inclusive and multilingual ESL pedagogy. According to Turnbull and Arnett (2002) the actual aim of ESL pedagogy acknowledged should be the strict use of English while allowing their pupils to use code-switching where they find difficulty in expression. In an attempt to understand the use of code-switching between French and English in ESL writing workshops, Ammar and Spada (2006) found that French-English bilingual students used L1 strategically in the writing workshops. They found that when there was no restriction on making use of the French language during writing English compositions, the ESL writers wrote more lengthy and more meaningful English compositions. Their findings suggest that code-switching can play a positive role of a facilitator when writing ESL documents. Siddiqui and Mahmood (2020) suggested that there is a need to lay emphasis on teachers training with regard to multilingual classrooms, including how to interpret and evaluate code-switched writing.

Code-Switching and Identity Construction

Many writers have identified a strong linkage between code-switching and expression of individual identity, as Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) suggest that multilingual ESL learners not only use their first language to convey information in writing ESL manuscripts but also convey their cultural identity. Mahboob (2009) coined a new term for the use of the Urdu language in writing English compositions as “glocalization”—local in its flavor and global in its function. According to him, glocalization allows ESL learners with the Urdu background to express themselves with their Urdu touch in the English language. In writing, this hybridity becomes particularly visible, where English sentence structures are interwoven with Urdu idioms, proverbs, and culturally specific terminology.

The Role of Code-Switching in writing

Most of the research concentrated on the use of code-switching in spoken discourses. Nonetheless, there is a growing interest of scholarly researchers in code-switching in written discourses, as García and Wei (2015) suggest that, in writing, code-switching is a useful means of expressing inherent skill among multilingual ESL students. According to some other scholars like Canagarajah (2006), multilingual students code-switch to clarify complex concepts. Some educators consider that code-switching is a hindrance in achieving proficiency in a second language, whereas other scholars like Hornberger and Link (2012) see code-switching as a beneficial strategy for fostering understanding.

Challenges Associated with Code-Switching

Although there are benefits to using code-switching in multilingual classrooms, there are potential challenges. Allowing code-switching in a multilingual classroom presents challenges, as the ESL teacher might not be familiar with the native language used by ESL writers in multilingual classrooms. For instance, an ESL teacher from India or Pakistan who knows only English, Urdu or Hindi might find it difficult to understand the Arabic used by ESL writers in their writing.

According to the over view of existing literature, code-switching in ESL writing is a complicated, significant, and context-driven phenomenon, especially among Pakistani Urdu-speaking ESL learners. It should be seen as a reflection of students' multilingual competency, cultural identification, and communicative aim rather than an indication of linguistic inadequacy.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This investigation employed a qualitative approach, aiming to gain a deep understanding of students' experiences and perspectives.

Participants

The study included:

- 20 multilingual ESL learners each from from a high school and a university, all of whom speak at least two languages, including English.
- 5 English teachers with experience of teaching multilingual students.

Data Collection

Two primary methods were employed:

Student Writing Samples: Each participant provided two writing samples—one formal and one informal—to analyze for instances of code-switching.

Interviews

- Students discussed their reasons for code-switching, the contexts in which they do it, and their feelings about it.
- Teachers were interviewed to explore their insights on code-switching and their classroom approaches.

Data Analysis

Aligning with the purpose and research questions of the current research study, qualitative research design was adopted for the collection and analysis of data. The data was collected with an interview (semi-structured) and students' compositions as well as teachers' interviews. The themes of the data analysis (collected through interviews and students' writing) surround different types, patterns, motivations, and perceptions for code-switching.

Patterns of Code-Switching in Student Writing

The data of 40 writing samples (50% formal, which consisted of academic reports and argumentative essays, and 50% informal, which consisted of personal reflections, diary-style entries, or informal essays) showed that ESL learners used code-switching in informal writing. In the informal texts, students frequently moved between English and Urdu to express emotions, cultural ideas, and complex concepts, whereas in formal writing samples, ESL learners showed the use of much less code-switching, which shows that ESL learners consciously stuck to English-only norms in academic writing.

Table 1: Code-Switching Patterns in ESL learners' Writing

Writing Type	Percentage of Samples	Content Type	Use of Code-Switching
Formal Writing	50% (20 samples)	Academic reports, Argumentative essays	Minimal code-switching; students adhered to English-only academic norms
Informal Writing	50% (20 samples)	Personal reflections, Diary-style entries, Informal essays	Frequent code-switching between English and Urdu to express emotions and cultural concepts

Moreover, inter-sentential code-switching was mostly common to informal writing of the ESL learners. Such code-switching was observed mostly in order to add emotional tone to their writings. Similarly, intra-sentential code-switching was found abundantly in the bilingual ESL learners writing. According to ESL learners, they used intra-sentential code-switching from English to Urdu only when they felt that an expression was incomplete in English. Likewise, tag switching was observed in students' writings, but this was the least used type of code-switching. Tag-switching was the least frequent but still observable, particularly at the beginning or end of sentences. According to ESL learners, tag-switching was used because this added conversational flavor and reflected the oral-literacy crossover in student writing.

Students' Motivations for Code-Switching

According to the interview data, there were mainly three motivational factors to use Urdu in writing English documents. 60% of the ESL learners, which is the majority of ESL learners, expressed that they used English-Urdu code switching in writing because their motivation was clarity in writing. Whenever they did not find an exact alternative of an Urdu concept in English, they switched code from English to Urdu. As one of the ESL learners stated, "Some feelings don't sound the same in English. When I write about my childhood or family, I naturally switch to Urdu." 20% of the ESL learners indicated that they used code-switching from English to Urdu in their daily lives outside of the classroom, that is why they form a habit of using Urdu in writing informal English. Such habit formation motivates them to use Urdu in their informal English writing. A student's response in the interview goes like this, "I don't even realize when I do it. It's just how I speak and write sometimes." 20% of ESL learners said that they shifted from English to Urdu only when they do not find an alternative English word, phrase, or idiom equal to Urdu. "If I forget the English word, I just write the Urdu word instead so I can keep going."

Table 2: Motivational Factors for Code-Switching from English to Urdu in ESL Writing (Interview Data)

Motivational Factor	Percentage of ESL Learners	Explanation / Interview Excerpt
Clarity in Expression	60%	Students switch to Urdu when English lacks an exact equivalent for a concept. "Some feelings don't sound the same in English."
Habit Formation due to Daily Life Code-Switching	20%	Use of Urdu in daily communication becomes habitual in informal writing. "I don't even realize when I do it."
Lack of Equivalent English Word / Forgetting English Term	20%	Students substitute Urdu when they forget or cannot find a suitable English term. "If I forget the English word, I just write the Urdu word."

Teachers' Perceptions and Responses

According to three ESL teachers, code-switching is a natural and practical strategy, particularly in the early phases of ESL instruction. They maintained that permitting a certain amount of code-switching can lessen cognitive burden and boost pupils' self-expression. Two teachers expressed concern that habitual code-switching might hinder students' long-term academic writing development.

Table 3:

Aspect	Percentage	Teacher Views
Code-switching as a strategy	60% ESL Teachers	Code-switching is natural and practical, especially in early ESL learning.
Concern over long-term development	40% ESL Teachers	Code-switching hinders academic writing skills.

Discussions

The data demonstrate that Urdu-speaking ESL learners intentionally and contextually move between English and Urdu while writing in English. It represents students' bilingual realities, cultural affinities, and flexible meaning-making techniques rather than being haphazard or irresponsible. Even if formal academic writing could call for greater linguistic discipline, teachers should think about how students' multilingualism might be used as a teaching tool rather than as a weakness. This knowledge may open the door to more linguistically responsive and inclusive teaching methods in Pakistani ESL courses.

The findings of this research showed that code-switching should not be considered a language inefficiency and lack of proficiency; rather it should be seen as a strategy of the ESL writers that is closely linked with expressing their individual identity and culture and a way to enhance the meaning of their written expressions. However, it has been found out that the ESL students face criticism and pressure due to the use of multilingual expressions in their writings, and their teachers view it as a linguistic disability. It is suggested that in a multilingual classroom the teachers should not only themselves use code-switching in their pedagogy but also allow their students to switch-codes for the expression of their cultural and individual identity. This could not only motivate the student to write with confidence but also enhance their writing performance. The study showed that code-switching exists in most of the ESL multilingual writers and helps them in various ways as, writing with clarity, expressing their sentiments and emotions through writing and well as expressing their own culture. Although, the writing conventions do not allow students to switch-codes in their formal writing, it can foster student voices and understanding. By seeing code-switching as a link between languages and ideas rather of a weakness, educators may identify and use it to their advantage in the classroom.

Conclusions

The objective of the current research study was to explore code-switching in the English writing of Urdu-speaking ESL learners in Faisalabad. It is clear from the data analysis that code-switching exists in the academic and informal writings of ESL learners. It is an intentional strategy employed by the ESL learners, which indicates the multilingual or bilingual linguistic proficiency of ESL learners. The findings of the current research also revealed that ESL learners in Faisalabad switched from English to Urdu mostly in informal writings, while they very rarely codes-switch between English and Urdu in formal academic writings because of the constraints of academic

norms. This indicates a strong awareness among students of the contextual appropriateness of language choice. According to data from interviews, code-switching improves clarity, preserves cultural resonance, and makes expression easier, among other communicative purposes. ESL teachers responses, meanwhile, showed a range of opinions, from apprehension about how it would affect formal academic standards to recognition of its expressive and instructional worth. Teachers who encouraged multilingual instruction stressed that, when used carefully in the classroom, ESL learners' usage of Urdu can act as a springboard for improving their writing abilities in English.

To sum up, the study indicates that code-switching should not be discouraged in a multilingual classroom. Code-switching between English and Urdu shows the natural multilingual reality of ESL learners' environment that should be taken as an educational resource instead of considering it a linguistic deficiency. Ultimately, this research contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for multilingual awareness in language education. It encourages Pakistani educators and policymakers to shift from rigid monolingual models to more flexible, context-sensitive approaches that validate and support the complex linguistic realities of Urdu-speaking ESL learners.

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