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Code-Switching in Pakistani TV Talk Shows: A Corpus-Based Investigation of Patterns, Functions, and Sociolinguistic Implications



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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the frequency patterns, practical value, and sociological implications of code switching as indicated in Pakistani TV talk shows. The research aims to focus on integrating corpus-based techniques into a sociolinguistic framework to develop empirical bases for data analysis and systematically examine the frequency of intersentential and intrasentential code switching (Poplack, 2001) and the role of marked and unmarked linguistic choices (Myers-Scotton, 1994) in relation to social variables. A specialized corpus was compiled using Pakistani talk shows with varying themes, namely *Off the Record*, *Jirga*, *Report Card*, *Dunya Kamran Khan k Sath*, and *Mazaaq Raat*. These episodes were selected through careful and systematic stratified sampling. The corpus analysis tool AntConc 3.5.9 was used to generate word lists and concordance lines to evaluate frequencies and linguistic patterns and to observe pragmatic roles. This study provides a detailed empirical analysis and contributes to the broader discussion of the role of bilingualism and multilingualism in Pakistani media.

Keywords: Code-switching, corpus analysis, TV talk shows, AntConc

1. Introduction

Code switching has broader functions and practical implications in today's globalized world. It is a strategically contextual phenomenon involving the manipulation of linguistic patterns of two or more languages, often called "codes" (Ahmad et al., 2023). In multilingual and bilingual societies, code switching is a common occurrence in which speakers shift from one language to another without compromising the grammatical patterns of either language (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1994). Code switching allows speakers to creatively intermix codes to construct identity, express solidarity and distance, and perform a number of pragmatic functions (Urbaite, 2025). Studies reveal that code switching is not a random phenomenon; rather, the occurrence of multiple codes by one speaker follows a systematic pattern (Bilal et al., 2012c; Tariq et al., 2013). South Asian societies exhibit bilingualism and multilingualism at a high level; hence, code switching is widely observed in everyday discourse such as media, workplaces, homes, and other platforms (Asghar et al.,

2021).

The basis of code switching was put forward by Blom and Gumperz (1972), who described two types: situational and metaphorical code switching. Later, Poplack (2001) introduced intersentential and intrasentential code switching, further elaborating its functions at the micro level and its role in shaping interactional dynamics. Myers-Scotton (1994) provided an expanded theoretical framework, the Markedness Model, to emphasize speaker–listener roles and the contextual function of switches in conversation.

These theoretical frameworks have allowed researchers to explore various dimensions influencing code switching among bilingual and multilingual speakers, including cognitive aspects, interactional dynamics, and structural patterns. Moreover, as the world becomes increasingly digitized, code switching has gained a digital dimension. It is no longer restricted to educational institutions but extends to digital communication, entertainment, media, political, and bureaucratic discourse.

In multilingual and bilingual societies like Pakistan, code switching is a common phenomenon in everyday communication. Although the Pakistani linguistic landscape is rich and code switching can be observed between local languages such as Punjabi–Urdu and Sindhi–Urdu (Panhwar, 2018; Ramzan et al., 2021), the most common form occurs between Urdu and English, reflecting the bilingual and multilingual competence of Pakistani speakers and highlighting the sociocultural complexity of Pakistani society.

1.1 Research Gap

While this area has been extensively explored qualitatively in structural domains, a significant gap exists in empirical, corpus-based approaches, especially in the context of talk shows in Urdu–English bilingual settings. Earlier studies have primarily focused on conversational analysis of code switching (Gumperz, 1982), ideological perspectives (Sawaie et al., 2004), psychological and cognitive mechanisms (Weinreich, 1953), causes and functions of code switching (Mabule, 2015), analysis of bilingualism in dramatic literature (Kanwal et al., 2020), and identity construction through language contact (Poplack, 2001). There is a need for more comprehensive and systematic analysis, particularly in underexplored genres such as debates, talk shows, and entertainment media.

To address this gap, a corpus-based approach incorporating tools like AntConc is used to examine code-switching instances in greater depth. The combination of sociolinguistic theories and corpus-based methodologies offers a broader scope of analysis and helps systematically capture the frequency of switches, pragmatic functions, and social dynamics of code switching, particularly in Pakistani bureaucratic and entertainment discourse.

1.2 Research Questions

- a. What are the frequency pattern of Urdu-English code switching in Pakistani Talk Shows?
- b. How code switching reveals communicative intentions and pragmatic functions of speakers in Pakistani media discourse?
- c. How does the use of code-switching reveals social variables such as identity, prestige, solidarity and modernity?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Background

Hudson (1996), a famous British linguist, is of the view that code switching is an inevitable consequence of bilingualism. Code switching is a diverse phenomenon that is now spread all across the world. Early foundational works in code switching include the research of Gumperz (1982), Poplack (2001), Fishman (1972), and Myers-Scotton (1993), whose theoretical frameworks are now used in contemporary studies to expand the literature on code switching. Scholars agree that code switching is contextual. Bilingual students generally switch between two languages in the same conversation depending upon the situation they are in (Bilal et al., 2012a, 2012b; Han et al., 2022).

Gumperz (1982) is of the view that during the process of code switching, the speaker chooses two or more grammatical systems and integrates them in the same speech to create meaningful and grammatically accurate utterances. Code switching is an effective strategy for people with skills in multiple languages because it helps them deal with communicative events more effectively, which results in fewer misunderstandings and ensures smooth interactional flow (Kanwal et al., 2020). Myers-Scotton (1993) contributes to this area by adding that code switching is the selection of linguistic forms from two or more languages within the same

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conversation, where such choices index social meanings, rights, and obligations. It is imperative to note that context plays a major role in the process of code switching, since in most cases it occurs without the speaker's awareness (Mabule, 2015).

Code switching has both social and psychological functions. While code switching, people use different languages and exploit these functions; shifting from one code to another (by mixing languages and filling lexical gaps) helps to construct bilingual identity, manage social relationships, develop social networking, and balance solidarity and distance during interaction (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Cedden et al., 2024).

One of the most seminal examples of code switching is Poplack's (2001) quantitative study of a bilingual Puerto Rican community in New York, where she examined efficient and effortless shifts between languages without compromising the grammatical rules of either language. Jabeen (2018) observed that code switching, code mixing, and borrowing are common phenomena in multilingual societies and operate in multiple domains, especially in daily conversations, media, writing, and other fields. To understand the functions of code switching, Batool and Akram (2025) conducted research on code switching in Pakistani TV dramas. They claimed that Pakistan is rich in linguistic diversity, due to which code switching and code mixing are prevalent in everyday interaction, especially between Urdu and English. Pakistani media frequently reflects this mixing and switching of languages, showing how it constructs status, identity, and class distinction through language use (ibid).

However, on the positive side, bilingual and multilingual proficiency allows speakers to effectively communicate in different environments by switching languages according to context and ease, facilitating clear and smooth interaction while also highlighting the pragmatic and functional value of bilingualism (Kanwal et al., 2020). Scholars are of the view that code switching is a strategic tool that enables speakers to convey meanings by alternating between codes while managing social relationships and linguistic dynamics (Kanwal et al., 2020). They also support this claim through conversational analysis of Urdu–English code switching in Pakistani talk shows. Kanwal et al. (2025) further applied sociolinguistic theories of Labov and Bourdieu to study code switching in bilingual Pakistani dramatic literature. Moreover, earlier Pakistani dramas mainly depicted elite classes engaging in code switching to

represent higher social status. However, Channa et al. (2021), using quantitative statistical measures, observed that code switching is also evident in the speech of middle-class individuals in modern dramas, not only among children but across all age groups. This reflects the dominance of bilingualism in Pakistani society and explains how English has become a necessity in everyday interaction.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Poplack's Inter-sentential and Intra-sentential Code Switching

Poplack's (2001) work is notable for classifying code switching into intra-sentential code switching (occurring within a sentence and also referred to as code mixing), inter-sentential code switching (occurring between sentences), and tag switching. Inter-sentential code switching is a major focus in sociolinguistic studies. It is common for bilingual and multilingual speakers to exhibit both types of code switching simultaneously, often to emphasize a topic, shift stance, show status, or mark identity (Poplack, 2001; Rahat et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model

Myers-Scotton (1993), as cited in Mabule (2015), is of the view that code switching is motivated by social interaction in which speakers alternate between ordinary, everyday language (unmarked choice) and marked choices that highlight language switching. Mabule (2015) highlights Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, in which markedness refers to choosing one language over another even when alternatives are available. Myers-Scotton's model (1994) further expands this by introducing the concept of Rights and Obligations (R&Os), which define expectations and responsibilities shaped by social interaction. These roles implicitly associate speakers with their rights to speak and their obligations to perform through speech. Due to these rights and obligations, speakers navigate between marked and unmarked choices. In the Pakistani context, Urdu and English are commonly used in media. English functions as a marked choice, while Urdu operates as an unmarked choice. It can also be argued that code switching is highly strategic in various contexts, as observed in Shah and Nisa's (2024) study of Urdu-English code switching in Pakistani talk shows.

2.2.3 Corpus Methodology

Corpus methodology complements Myers-Scotton's framework of Rights and Obligations and marked and unmarked choices. By incorporating both qualitative and

quantitative analysis, it becomes easier to extract frequency, pragmatic functions, and sociolinguistic implications of code switching, revealing patterns of negotiation of power, solidarity, and identity (Biber & Egbert, 2018).

Significant work has been done on the social and pragmatic functions of Urdu–English code switching; however, a knowledge gap still exists regarding the use of advanced linguistic tools and corpus linguistic methodologies in the study of code switching. This has limited the full application of corpus-based approaches to sociolinguistic analysis of code switching.

3. Methodology

The research is based on a mixed-method approach. Data was first analyzed quantitatively through corpus methodology and then examined sociolinguistically. During corpus compilation, the researcher followed the principles outlined by McEnery and Hardie (2012). The corpus compilation process followed six steps: (1) sampling, (2) data selection, (3) transcription, (4) cleaning, (5) formatting, and (6) saving metadata. It was also ensured that the corpus was as balanced and representative as possible (McEnery & Hardie, 2012).

The sampling frame used in this research was stratified purposive sampling. First, Pakistani TV talk shows were stratified into five topic domains: (1) political debate, (2) panel analysis, (3) interviews, (4) investigative shows, and (5) entertainment, across three broadcasting channels (Geo News, ARY News, and Dunya News) to ensure representativeness and avoid channel bias. After applying selection criteria, five shows were selected: (1) *Off the Record*, (2) *Jirga*, (3) *Report Card*, (4) *Dunya Kamran Khan k Sath*, and (5) *Mazaaq Raat*, with each show representing a different domain.

One episode from each show was selected, and fifteen-minute segments from each episode were manually transcribed using ExpressScribe and simple-ELAN 1.5 (2025). The data was cleaned and annotated manually and then converted into .txt format in UTF-8 encoding. The corpus was analyzed using AntConc 3.5.9 (2020). For further qualitative analysis, Poplack's (2001) concepts of intersentential and intrasentential code switching were applied, along with Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (1994).

4. Data Analysis

This section of this article deals with the detailed analysis of the data through the application of above mentioned theoretical framework. The data will be analyzed using mixed-method approach i.e., both quantitatively and qualitatively. Starting off with the findings, the data was derived from five different Pakistani talk shows (one episode each) carrying different themes. Since it is a small scale study, a corpus of approximately 13000 words was constructing by taking fifteen minutes segments from each episode. Each segment was randomly chosen and transcribed into roman Urdu annotating the intrasentential code switching initiatives with the token [en] and intersentential code switching initiatives with [/en]. The data was further analyzed using corpus tool widely known as AntConc (version 3.5.9). This section will further describe;

- a. The frequency distribution of code switching, its type and frequently switched English items,
- b. Pragmatic function of code switching in Pakistani Talk shows and,
- c. Sociolinguistic implications of code switching.

5. Findings

5.1 Overview of the Data

Across the corpus of approximately 13000 words (12813 words to be precise), a total of 649 hits were identified including both intersentential and intrasentential code switching. The instances of intersentential code switching evinced 15 hits and, intrasentential code switching revealed 634 hits. The total frequency of [en] switches calculated was 5.1% and per 1000 words was 51%. Below table demonstrates the code switching patterns and their frequencies in individual talk show:

Table 5.1.1: *Distribution of codeswitching patterns among different shows.*

Channel	Talk Show	Word Count	[en]/[en] switches	CS freq %age
1 Geo News	Report Card	2654	165	25.42%
2 Ary News	Off The Record	3100	157	24.19%
3 Geo News	Jirga	2524	150	23.11%
4 Dunya News	Dunya Kamran Khan K Sath	2619	115	17.71%

5	Dunya News	Mazaaq Raat	1801	62	9.5%
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The overall frequency and the density of code switching varies across all five shows. It is evident that the frequency of code switching in panel discussion talk shows is the highest and it is lowest in entertainment shows. Through this analysis, it is observed that formal and professional discussions inculcate more Urdu-English switches than informal contexts.

5.3 Distribution of Types of Code Switching

It has already been mentioned above that Poplack (2001) distributed code switching types into two types. Intersentential code switching and Intrasentential code switching. The data was annotated in a way so that it could be easier to identify intersentential [/en] and intrasentential [en] code switching in the transcribed text. The table below demonstrates the distribution of both these types of code switching in various shows.

Table 5.3.1: *Distribution of the Types of Code Switching*

Types	Switching events	Freq. %age
Intrasentential CS [en]	634	97.6%
Intersentential CS [/en]	15	2.3%

The table 5.3.1 indicates that the frequency of intrasentential code switching is higher than intersentential code switching which is almost negligible. This shows that media discourse in Pakistan (Talk Shows) is highly inculcated with Urdu-English switches at words and phrasal level and do not often use code switching at sentence level. This point further aligns with formerly done researches in sociolinguistic implications of code switching and code mixing in Pakistan (Ahmad et al, 2023; Kainat et al, 2025).

5.4 Frequently Switched English Items

To find frequently used English switches in intrasentential code switching, concordance lines of the token [en] was generated and words appearing right after the token [en] marker were observed.

Table 5.4.1: *Lexical Frequency and Contextual Function*

English Words	Frequency (hits)	Contextual Function
Police	23	Security policy
Corruption	16	Governance evaluation
Comedian	16	Entertainment
Supreme/high court	13	Judiciary and institutional criticism
Opposition	7	Governance and criticism
Army	7	Security policy
Agriculture	6	Economic Developmental policy
International	6	Foreign policy
Higher education	5	Educational policy

The table 5.4.1 showcases the most frequently used English language switches observed in Pakistani Talk shows. It is observed that code switching in Pakistani media usually circles around political and bureaucratic discourse. The technical and formal terms are mostly used in professional and formal discussions.

5.5 Pragmatic Functions of Code-Switching Patterns in Pakistani Talk Shows

This section of the article proposes the pragmatic functions frequently observed in Pakistani TV talk shows. Myers-Scotton (1994) proposed the Markedness Model based on linguistic choices made by bilingual or multilingual speakers. The Markedness Model explains how individuals engage in productive speech exchange while switching between different languages depending on context. This model operates on R&Os (rights and obligation sets), which are socially constructed expectations about the linguistic behavior of speakers. Furthermore, the codes selected by speakers reflect their attitudes toward these expectations, either aligning with them (unmarked choice) or departing from them (marked choice) to perform specific pragmatic functions.

In the Pakistani context, people often switch between Urdu and English, where Urdu is considered the unmarked choice and English, on the other hand, is the marked choice. In the data, intrasentential code switching is common and widely observed in the speech of hosts and guests (analysts, political figures, celebrities, and audiences), revealing their interactive attitudes. The following sections elaborate various pragmatic functions of code switching (shifting between marked and unmarked

choices) observed among interlocutors during analysis.

5.5.1 Indicating Professionalism

The talk shows were divided into different strata, each representing a single theme. It was observed that shows with institutional and political themes contained more instances of code switching than entertainment shows. Concordance analysis revealed that while speakers discussed topics such as corruption, security, and policy, they were more likely to shift from unmarked to marked choice (Urdu to English).

For instance: *woh aik enabling environment ban jayega* instead of *woh aik saazgar mahol ban jayega*, and *...humaray mulk mein legal hain, entirely lawful hain...* instead of *humaray mulk mein qanooni hain aur mukammal tor par jaiz hai*.

This switch mainly occurs to assert implicit authority and knowledge.

5.5.2 Providing Emphasis

Speakers often insert marked linguistic choices to attract listeners' attention and create rhetorical impact. In the data from Pakistani talk shows, speakers sometimes first expressed ideas in English and then translated them into Urdu by shifting from marked to unmarked choice to emphasize their point. For instance: *that doesn't matter, woh masla nahi hai*. Both clauses carry the same meaning, but the bilingual shift is used for emphasis.

Certain evaluative expressions were also embedded to strengthen rhetorical effect. English nouns or phrases were frequently inserted into Urdu sentences at lexical or phrasal levels to convey socio-culturally loaded meanings. For example: *...fauj ko apolitical hona chahiye...*, *...woh corruption hai lekin...*, and *zimmedar opposition ka kirdar...*

5.5.3 Projection of Identity

Code switching can also function as a marker of identity. To express group solidarity, nationalism, patriotism, and cultural loyalty, unmarked Urdu switches are used, whereas marked English switches indicate status, authority, global orientation, and modernity.

In Pakistani TV talk shows, English is often incorporated at word and phrasal levels, while Urdu remains the dominant language in both political and entertainment discourse to align with national identity.

5.5.4 Politeness and Solidarity Building

As discussed earlier, code switching is often used to express group solidarity. However, the data also shows that in formal contexts, speakers use code switching to demonstrate politeness. This is commonly observed in greetings and expressions of gratitude used to maintain social relationships.

Hosts and guests in Pakistani talk shows often use greetings such as “welcome back” after breaks and expressions such as “thank you very much” to demonstrate comfort, solidarity, politeness, and face-saving friendliness.

5.5.5 Lexical Feasibility and Vocabulary Need

In most cases, code switching in Pakistani media is used to ensure conceptual precision. It is strategically employed when Urdu equivalents are lengthy, less natural, or difficult to use in conversational flow; in such cases, English equivalents are used to maintain clarity and professionalism. This is also because English often provides more precise technical vocabulary than Urdu.

For example: ...*yahan par jo tycoons hain...* where the word “tycoons” replaces Urdu expressions such as *seth*, *baray tajir*, or *taqatwar karobari log*, and *Supreme Court* instead of *aala tareen adalat*.

In some cases, borrowing also occurs to fulfill lexical needs. Words such as *pandora*, *kilometers*, and *police* are used where no direct Urdu equivalents exist. Speakers also code switch to name institutions and organizations that are not easily translated into Urdu, such as *Transparency International* and *IMF*, which are used to refer to global organizations that lack direct Urdu equivalents or standardized translations.

6. Sociolinguistic Implications

Since code switching is a social phenomenon, it has wide sociolinguistic implications. Language switching patterns are shaped by social context, especially in bilingual and multilingual societies. The study emphasizes that code switching allows fluid interaction and dynamic language use in multilingual societies and constructs notions of power, identity, group solidarity, prestige, and distancing in Pakistani TV talk shows.

In institutional and formal settings, code switching is a significant resource for regulating discourse. In Pakistani talk shows, whether political or apolitical, linguistic

choices reflect an individual's identity and group belongingness (Hudson, 1996), which is particularly relevant for analyzing media discourse (Ahmed et al., 2023). The elite class often uses code switching as a symbol of prestige; however, findings show that Urdu–English code switching is not limited to elite groups (Nahdoh et al., 2019) but is now used widely across social classes to facilitate communication.

Code switching challenges rigid language hierarchies by enabling speakers to utilize multilingual competence and construct hybrid linguistic identities in today's globalized (English-dominated) world (Mustafayeva et al., 2025).

However, it is important to note that highly proficient Urdu–English bilinguals have greater access to globalized communication, while less proficient speakers may face marginalization within their own society. Code switching also reflects tension between tradition and modernity, and between national identity and global identity. Thus, code switching is not a simple communicative strategy; rather, it carries broader sociolinguistic implications of power, prestige, and identity in Pakistani media discourse, both positively and negatively.

7. Limitations

Firstly, the study is based on a small-scale corpus that cannot be widely generalized. Although systematic stratified sampling was used, researcher bias may still occur during episode selection. Manual annotation was also performed, which is prone to human error. The study focuses only on TV discourse, which may differ from natural conversational settings. Lastly, the study does not capture all possible pragmatic functions and sociolinguistic implications of code switching in media discourse.

8. Conclusion

This paper explores code switching as a complex and intricate phenomenon shaping communicative events and highlighting the role of bilingualism and multilingualism in shaping societal, interactional, and cultural dynamics. The incorporation of a corpus-based approach provides a systematic analysis of code switching in Pakistani media and entertainment discourse, offering clarity and precision in pragmatic and sociolinguistic interpretation.

Corpus analysis revealed that talk shows related to politics, security, and bureaucracy exhibit more frequent code switching compared to entertainment shows, indicating the formal and professional function of code switching in such contexts. It

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was further observed that speakers engage more frequently in intrasentential code switching, while intersentential code switching occurs at a relatively lower frequency. Code switching not only functions at the sociolinguistic level but also serves to fulfill lexical needs. Moreover, it is used to provide emphasis, construct identity, express politeness, and build solidarity. This is achieved through switching between marked and unmarked choices, where English functions as the marked choice and Urdu as the unmarked choice. Marked choices signal prestige, professionalism, and modernity, whereas unmarked choices emphasize solidarity and identity.

The study demonstrates that code switching is deeply embedded in media and public communication. By integrating corpus-based methodology into a sociolinguistic framework, code switching reveals complex discursual and structural dynamics of media interaction.

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