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Levelling the Hard Pitch of Politics in Organisations Through Code Switching: An Insider View from Education Sector

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Abstract: *Public sector universities in Pakistan have a strong political and hierarchical structure that leads to power struggles between the managers and subordinates (Shaheen, Abrar, Saleem, Shabbir, & Zulfiqar, 2021). According to Esdahl (2003), all conversations are also battles for power, and in these battles, linguistic resources can be used as tools. Therefore, the current study aims to find how code-switching, as a linguistic resource, is used as a tool to achieve higher status in the power hierarchy by the employees of a higher education institution. This research brings forward the functions of code-switching by observing the actual interactions from a native perspective and exploring the multiple goals achieved through shifting to English and Urdu during the conversation between/among employees in the organisation. This paper extends a rare in-depth understanding of the role of code-switching in a public sector institution while giving directions for future research in this field.*

Introduction

Pakistan is linguistically diverse in general, and thus, surviving in Pakistani society requires fluency in at least three languages (Shahnaz, 2015). That is to say, individuals in Pakistani society unconsciously mix and switch between languages in their conversations (Fareed, Humayun & Akhtar, 2016). In the current research, the functions of switching between English (as the official language and language of power and authority), Urdu (as the national language), and Punjabi, Potohari, Saraiki and Pashto (as local languages) have been taken under study. For a long time, English as the language of development has dominated the political and official discourse in Pakistan (Shamim, 2007). The emblematic status of English, due to its historical association with

the elite and proto-elite, has helped in making it a prestigious language (Rahman, 2001). Thus, English is the language of power in comparison with Urdu, the national language and other regional languages of Pakistan (Shamim, 2011). On the other hand, Urdu, as the national language of Pakistan, is the symbol of national identity and integration.

In a collectivist society like Pakistan, individuals emphasise membership within groups and communities and focus on communal goals (Hofstede, 1980) and therefore, among the functions of code-switching identified by scholars, the most relatable function in Pakistani society is effective communication (Abbas, Aslam & Khan, 2011). Nilep (2006) suggests that it is necessary to observe actual interaction, rather

than starting from assumptions about the general effects of code-switching. According to Gumperz (1982), a thorough analysis of brief spoken interactions is required to discover and define the roles of code-switching. In a context where group membership is highly important, shifting to a local language affirms solidarity of the in-group, where the local language carries the cultural philosophy (Rivard, 2010). For instance, Pakhtun society is organised around the Pakhtunwali principles, which primarily revolve around generosity, hospitality, courage, the obligation to avenge, and other warrior-oriented values (Khan et al., 2011). As a result, speaking Pashto identifies the speaker as a member of the Pakhtun community and obligates the listener to respect him/her according to Pakhtunwali principles. It means that code-switching is a purposeful activity. Nilep (2006) further suggests that although the lists of functions proposed by researchers provide a useful step in the understanding of code-switching, they are far from satisfactory answers to the questions of why switching occurs as it does and what functions it serves in conversation.

Consistently, the current study examines various regional languages, such as Punjabi, Potohari, Pashto, Hindko, and Saraiki, and their involvement in boundary-levelling, increasing group cohesion and conflict resolution among speakers.

A reasonable scholarship is available on code-switching in Pakistan, and predominantly the focus of existing research has remained on code-switching as a teaching strategy. The other functions of code-switching are overlooked though code-switching is used in all fields of life. Considering this missing piece between practice and research, the researchers aim to contribute to intellectual discourse by exploring code-switching as a power tool in hierarchical organisations.

Literature Review

The history of code-switching research in sociocultural linguistics is often dated from Blom and Gumperz's (1972) "Social meaning in linguistic structures" (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1993;

Rampton, 1995; Benson, 2001). By 1972 the term "code-switching" was well used in literature, linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. Perhaps no sociocultural linguist has been more influential in the study of code-switching than John J. Gumperz (1982). His work on code-switching and contextualisation has been influential in the fields of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and the sociology of language. The idea that linguistic form is affected by setting and participants, as well as the topic, was influenced in part by Ervin-Tripp (1969). Her definitions of setting, topic, and function provide an important base for the work of Gumperz and others. According to Morand (2000), the study of language has gotten little attention in organisational studies. He went on to say that understanding how power differentials are embedded in language helps provide insight into the process of organisational status levelling.

Most people utilise more than one code as speakers and require a specific code anytime they desire to talk with others. Bilingualism or multilingualism refers to the phenomenon of persons possessing more than one code (language) (Wardaugh, 2006). When a speaker inserts two different languages into his utterance, this is known as code-switching. According to Poplack (1979), Code-switching is the change of two languages inside the same discourse, sentence, or constituent. Code-switching, according to Gumperz (1982), is based on the meaningful juxtaposition of what speakers must consciously or subconsciously process as strings produced according to the underlying norms of two different grammatical systems. According to Rampton (1995), code-switching refers to any juxtaposition or interaction of communication codes that are received by the listeners. He goes on to say that these switches are used as "contextualisation cues," which are used by speakers to indicate and listeners to comprehend what the action is, how semantic material should be perceived, and how each sentence relates to what comes before or after it. As a result, code-switching cannot be analysed separately. Code-switching can become a planned method for achieving

specific aims at certain points in a conversation (Nwoye, 1993).

Pakistan is a socially close-knit, multilingual society where a major population is either bilingual or multilingual. Shahnaz (2015) states that Pakistani society uses at least three languages at the same time, and people are supposed to learn and use them to survive in society. Urdu carries the status of a national language along with a variety of regional languages which are spoken across the country. English holds a central position in the linguistic scenario of Pakistan as it is the language of education, offices, administration, technology, research, etc. (Dar & Khan, 2014). English is considered the vehicle for achieving modernisation, scientific and technological development, and economic advancement for self and the country (Shamim, 2007). English as an official language of Pakistan has become a special domain as well as the dialect of chance, social distinction, control, accomplishment and, in addition, social predominance in Pakistan (Rahman, 2010). Das (2005) believes that when social status and prestige are associated with a language, the language itself starts enjoying the status of the elite. Since the independence of Pakistan, English has been associated with the ruling elite in urban centres and has consequently been identified as the language of power and dominance (Shamim, 2007). The reason behind this is that Pakistan has remained a British colony. Thus, colonialism is an important factor responsible for the development of bilingualism (Bolton, 2002). In Pakistan, code-switching (CS) as a teaching strategy has lately been examined, and several scholars have deemed it to be an effective technique in language classes. In countries like Pakistan, where students are more likely to study more than one language, Gulzar (2010) sees code-switching as a beneficial phenomenon.

Abass, Aslam and Khan (2011) claim that code-switching is not a source of interruption but rather a means of maintaining consistency and fluency. As a result, it has become a very valuable communicative strategy, and students employ it on their own initiative since they are aware of the communicative benefits they obtain by doing so. According to Younas, Afzaal, Noor, Khalid, and Naqvi's (2020) research, teachers primarily employ code-switching in their lectures to advance material delivery and negotiate teacher-student relations. They also believe that developing a theoretical understanding of CS, its roles and functions, and its impact on students learning is critical for university professors in Pakistan. It is crucial to investigate not only the type of code-switching that occurs but also the function it serves (Younas et al., 2020).

According to Gal (1988), code-switching is a language technique for constructing, crossing, or destroying group barriers in order to construct, invoke, or change interpersonal relationships with their rights and obligations. He goes on to say that CS might happen when someone wants to show solidarity with a certain social group. The speaker is a social actor, and by changing the language used, the speaker reveals the subjectivity of social actors and social relations in the form of inequality and gender boundaries (Garcia, 2010). Code-switching can occur in a discourse between two speakers who speak the same language or languages because they want to express their shared identity (Chung, 2006). People who do not share the same code can be isolated and excluded using code-switching resources. Gumperz (1982) used the expression "we code" to define a minority (close group) language, as well as informal in-group activities, togetherness, and proximity, while 'they code' as the language of a big group with formal activities and institutionalisation.

Research Methodology and Methods

This study used qualitative research methods to gain a holistic, in-depth understanding of the problem. The qualitative technique was employed to collect data, which was suitable due to the nature of the subject under investigation. The purpose of this research was to put the importance of particular behaviours into context. Personnel who were spontaneously proficient in English, Urdu, and

a local tongue and were prone to code-switch during their conversations were considered for this study. The field study was undertaken and lasted 30 days. Open-ended, in-depth, and realistic research methods were frequently used, allowing the researcher to explore the immediate participant. The department heads were briefed on the research's aims and objectives before it began. In order to conduct the interview and case studies, the respondents' agreement was also secured. Anonymity and secrecy were preserved to avoid any future concerns. These respondents were chosen using a purposive sampling technique, which allowed for more in-depth and experiential knowledge of the topic. To obtain authentic and reliable data, field research was conducted in a naturalistic context. The aforementioned researcher performed face-to-face, in-depth interviews with eight female and two male workers. Apart from that, participant observation was used to monitor the everyday interactions between six employees from two departments. The typical interview lasted 30–40 minutes, and it was conducted in Urdu to maintain a casual, pleasant atmosphere. Mini case studies were compiled to have a better understanding of the problem. After classifying the data into themes, it was analysed using the Discourse Analysis Technique. A comprehensive literature review was used to create themes. Primary data from the field, in addition to secondary data, assisted in the development of new themes. For the validity of the results, observations, respondents' dialogues and mini-case studies were used. To maintain privacy and research ethics, the name of the institution and respondents have been replaced.

Field Data and Results

The field results have established the excessive use of code-switching in all sorts of situations and facilitate employees to effectively develop their social standing and achieve their targets. Additionally, it helps them to combat organisational politics and maintain their own influence in the organisation. The mini-case studies acquired from the field data help to have an insider view of the prevailing situation and phenomenon.

Imposing Power

The field data has unleashed that the employees use code-switching to influence people and transform situations which are in line with the findings of Hughes, Shaunessy, Brice & Ratliff (2006) and Fairclough (2001). Through specific language (like English) and words, the employees reflect their power, dominance and complete understanding and control of a situation. The following case study facilitates to get an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

Case 1

Ms A was a permanent faculty of the education department. She joined the university in 2001 and was regarded as one of the department's most senior teachers. She came from a religious family and was well-liked by her colleagues. She had a great sense of humour, so her coworkers got along well with her and frequently shared their opinions with her.

Once, she was discussing (in the Urdu language) with her colleague (B) that she had promised her younger daughter to give her 80,000 PKR six months ago, and she had not yet given it to her. B asked her when she was going to fulfil her promise. A responded that she would give the money to her daughter as soon as possible. She continued by saying, "I borrowed 150,000 PKR from my elder daughter one year ago and have not returned it to her yet. It's fine to return to her late because she's already doing her job, and I don't think she needs that much money right now," she laughed. When B heard this, she confronted A, telling her that she was not being fair to her elder daughter and that, as a mother, she was obligated to treat them equally. A replied to her with a smile, "No, this is not unfair... She herself told me that she doesn't need that much money right now." B insisted that this was unfair, and then she suddenly shifted to English and continued, "Sorry to say that, but this is not

fair at all... You are supposed to pay back your debt to M (elder daughter) as soon as possible."

The above case clearly indicates that code-switching is situation motivated and reveals the process of using code-switching for realignment and reproducing the hierarchy. As mentioned earlier, B often emphasised speaking Punjabi in her conversations, and she avoided using English phrases and sentences as much as possible in order to respect her native language and national identity. But she suddenly shifted to English during her argument with her senior colleague, A. The reason behind this is that when B came to know that A was not treating her daughters equally, she immediately criticised her, although she was aware of the fact that A possessed a higher status in the social hierarchy due to her age and expertise. At first, B showed her disappointment in Urdu, but when she realised that her criticism was not taken seriously by A, she shifted to English.

B attempted to realign her status against A by switching to English, despite the fact that she was younger and had less experience; by speaking the language of power, she tried to achieve equal status with her senior colleague.

This data is in line with the previous literature (Hughes, Shaunessy, Brice & Ratliff, 2006; Fairclough, 2001). The above-mentioned case study reveals that speaking English could be used as a tool for imposing power and dominance or to enhance one's status in the social hierarchy. In line with the idea of Nilep (2006), language serves an indexical function. This case study further supports the stance of Esdahl (2003) that all conversations are battles over power, and in the battles of the conversations, linguistic resources can be used as tools.

Boundary Maintaining

The field data has also revealed the prevalence of code-switching for determining one's position and setting the boundary. A respondent highlighted the notion of avoiding local language with students,

"I avoid speaking Pashto with my Pashtun students, despite the fact that Pashto is my native language, and I feel more comfortable speaking it at work."

When asked the reason, she replied,

"As the department's head, I must maintain a professional distance from my students. If I spoke to them in Pashto, I would establish an intimacy with them and allow them to get close to me."

Another respondent from the same department mentioned,

"Speaking English, in my opinion, sometimes indicates a formal relationship between the speakers. This is my personal opinion, and I don't want to generalise it to other teachers, but when I want to create a social distance with someone, I tend to communicate with her in English. This also occurs during interactions with my students."

The responses provided above are consistent with the literature, which states that code-switching serves as a boundary-leveling strategy that defines roles and role relationships. According to the first respondent, despite the fact that she is Pashtun, when she speaks in Urdu with her Pashtun students, she is indirectly maintaining a boundary with them and preventing them from becoming too close. And, according to the other respondent, by switching to English from Urdu, you can not only maintain but also create and set a boundary during a conversation whenever you feel it is necessary.

Case 2

Ms C has been a regular staff member of the media and mass communication department for almost a decade. In an in-depth interview with her, she mentioned that she did not have an issue shifting to Punjabi while speaking with her colleagues in the working environment, but during fieldwork in that department, it was observed that she rarely switched to Punjabi and often spoke short phrases of that language. Instead, it was noticed that she tended to speak Punjabi with one of the cleaners, especially when the cleaner discussed some of her

personal issues with her. One day, when C arrived at her office, she noticed that her office was dusty and the floor had not been mopped the previous day. She decided to wait for the cleaner to come. When the cleaner (D) arrived, she called her to the office and asked her in Punjabi why she had not done her task. D replied that she had done the dusting but forgot to mop the floor. C told her, "Yesterday, I reminded you two times to clean my room, but it seems that you have not even entered my room to clean it." D replied, "I swear to God, I had cleaned it." After hearing this, C got annoyed as the cleaner was lying to her, switched to Urdu, and said, "You are lying to me." As D tried to defend herself and say something, C gave her a shut-up call and continued in Urdu, "I don't want to hear anything... you can leave."

The above case study demonstrates boundary levelling via code-switching. C had a habit of developing close relationships with her coworkers and even the cleaners. She used code-switching as a communicative strategy to get closer to employees for this purpose. In the shared situation, she did otherwise as it was a negative context, and she had to maintain a distance because the cleaner was deceiving her. Therefore, she intended to switch to Urdu. According to the literature, code-switching is used to help establish the language of intimacy versus distance and to distinguish between the in-group and outsiders (Rivard, 2010). As a result, when D failed to complete her task properly and lied to C, she distanced and declared D an out-group, which is why C switched from Punjabi (an indicator of intimacy and in-groupness) to Urdu in order to signal distance to D.

Impression Management

The field data has further revealed the use of code-switching as an impression management technique to influence people to establish and enhance one's status in social circles and the organisation. The following case study facilitates seeing a clear and in-depth understanding of the issue at hand.

Case 3

Dr E was a permanent faculty member of the Department of Education. She attended Punjab University in Lahore and earned her PhD in Germany. During her education at Punjab University, she was very impressed by a classmate who used Punjabi phrases and sentences while talking with teachers and other students. From that time onwards, E decided to use Punjabi phrases and sentences during conversations with her colleagues. She believed that speaking a native language, especially at work and in formal settings, indicates a higher intimacy and confidence level of the speaker. By deliberately shifting to her native language during her talks, she tried to portray her affiliation and love for her people, culture and country. Consistently she portrayed herself as a patriot in an effort to counter the liberal image of her personality, as she was well known for her liberal and feminist views. Thus, during conversations with her peers and colleagues, by shifting to the local language, she tried to show her respect for traditional values and customs.

In fact, E was trying to use code-switching as a communicative strategy for the purpose of impression management. As mentioned earlier, code-switching may be unconscious in immediate comprehension but quite an intentional choice in the brain (Rivard, 2010). Although, during the conversation, E was not conscious of her shift from Urdu to Punjabi, she admitted this phenomenon during her interview. Her case is a good example of CS as a strategy to create better impressions, attract people, and influence their perception.

Group Identity and Cohesion

The research has also brought to light the use of code-switching to establish in-out group identities and cohesion/distance. One of the respondents shared a very interesting view:

"In the workplace, having a similar native language is a true blessing. I recall having a Pashtun coworker in this department a few years back. She worked as a visiting teacher. Despite the fact that I had close relationships with all of my peers and colleagues, the

intimacy and closeness I experienced with my Pashtun colleague was unparalleled. Because of our shared culture, having a similar language, such as Pashto, helped us understand each other so much better."

This is consistent with the stance of Gumperz (1982), who introduced the term "we-code" and stated that it is associated with a close-group language that creates solidarity and intimacy; whereas "they-code" is the language shared by all the people around and is associated with formal, less personal, out-group relations, authority and distance. According to the same respondent,

"I even remember discussing work-related issues with my coworkers and even that Pashtun colleague in Urdu when we had formal or informal meetings with other teachers, but if I happened to share my personal view or issue with my Pashtun colleague during the discussion, I unconsciously shifted to Pashtu. I know it sometimes seems awkward to speak Pashto with a coworker in front of other coworkers who don't understand what you're saying, but it happens unintentionally because I felt like the Pashtun teacher was the only one among all of my coworkers who could be considered an in-group."

According to the data, Urdu is considered "they-code," while Pashto is considered "we-code". The view shared by the respondent demonstrated that Pashto, as a "we-code," refers to solidarity and intimacy while excluding outsiders (similar to the stance of Gumperz, 1982).

Conflict Resolution

The field data has also highlighted the prevalence of code-switching for resolving workplace conflict and normalising the situation. The following case sheds light on the matter.

Case 4

Ms M, F, and S were talking about bank-financed home loans. S was attempting to persuade M to obtain a loan from a bank in order to finance her home. F, who came from a religious background, believed that the money paid to the bank as a premium was deemed *sood* or *riba*. She was adamantly opposed to taking out a bank loan and was attempting to persuade S and M as well. S informed her that she had sought the advice of a religious scholar, who assured her that this was not *haram*. She even tried to offer F his phone number, but F insisted that this was deemed *sood*. She tried to persuade M at first, but her words were ineffective due to Ms liberal mindset. She then tried to persuade S to change her mind and told her, "You mean a lot to me... I know you're a religious person, which is why I don't want illegitimate money to be included in your life." S replied that she had confirmed with several religious scholars that it is not considered as *sood*, and she was sure about that. Their discussion was devolving into an argument. After almost 10 minutes of discussion, when the situation became tenuous, M suddenly switched to Punjabi and said, "her mind is not working properly… she does not understand me at all", and S and F laughed; the conflict was immediately defused.

In the above-mentioned case, code-switching is used to resolve conflict and inject humour when matters become tenuous. Although M disagreed with F until the end of the discussion, she attempted to relieve tension between the speakers by switching to Punjabi at the end of the conversation. By doing so, the argument suddenly changed to an intimate conversation.

Respondents shared that shifting to the native language during a serious conversation often indicates intimacy, which in turn helps ease the stress level of the speakers. This corresponds to Blom and Gumperz's (1972) concept of code-switching. Their findings show that the context does not determine language choice; rather, speakers create the situation through the code switch. To put it another way, code-switching indicates a change of direction in some way. Shifting to Punjabi, for instance, signalled a change in mood and discussion mode in the preceding case study.

Conclusion

One of the fundamental findings and insights from this research is that code-switching is an established practice in the research field and is used pervasively as a tool of power and influence. The insiders' view acquired through in-depth field data has revealed that individuals use this technique in their day-to-day lives in order to effectively establish their status and group identity, extend their influence and resolve conflicts in the social hierarchies of the organisation. The research results have also uncovered that switching to English is a useful tool for imposing power and realigning the social hierarchy since it is a prestigious language in Pakistani culture. Data also revealed that avoiding using the native language is, in fact, sign of social distancing and boundary-setting, and shifting to English signifies formal relations between the employees, and therefore, it is considered a useful tactic for creating a boundary with the person who is trying to get unnecessarily close. Quite contrarily to this, field data has established that code-switching to a native language has also become an impression management technique in a particular situation to demonstrate love and respect for indigenous culture and traditions. An additional function of code-switching to an indigenous language is to enhance in-group inclusion and group cohesion while also the exclusion of outsiders from the group, as pointed out by the field data. The results have also confirmed the role of code-switching as an effective technique for conflict resolution and defusing tension because it eliminates the possibility of audience misinterpretation. Despite the knowledge contribution, this research has limitations. We could not extend our study to other organisations working in other sectors and foreign organisations working in Pakistan (KFC, McDonald etc.); however, it was beyond the framework of this research. Nonetheless, contemporary research results have revealed that practices of an organisation working in a similar cultural context extend more similarities than differences (Saher & Mayrhofer, 2014; Khilji, 2003). Further research can explore if and how code-switching can be used as a tool of power to combat organisational politics and extends influence in organisations of other sectors as well as multinational companies working in Pakistan. Finally, this paper can be helpful in extending rare insight to national as well as international managers to comprehend secrets (tacit knowledge) regarding the role of code-switching in organisational politics in Pakistan.

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