



## Urdu-English Code-Switching in Pakistani English

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### Abstract

*This paper defines Urdu-English code switching, focusing on its classifications and on how its influence on Pakistani English has shaped the nation's language identity. It highlights the manner in which code switching has left a mark on the communication dynamics of Pakistan. This is a qualitative form of research, more specifically, a textual analysis of the data that already exists in the realm of Pakistani English. Through it, attention has been brought to the different types of code switching that exist in language which include inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching whose deeper analysis provides the reader with a better understanding of the English spoken in Pakistan. It also takes a look at the various types of Urdu phrases (noun and adjective phrases), tags and clauses utilised in Pakistani English, making communication easier and reflecting the cultural, social and linguistic aspects of Pakistani society.*

**Keywords:** Urdu-English Code Switching, Pakistani English, Inter-sentential, Intra-sentential, Tag switching, Noun Phrase, Adjective Phrase



## **Introduction**

The English language is not restricted to a single variety of American or British English. Instead, it encompasses a huge variegation with each variety possessing definite characteristics that represent the values, culture, tradition and norms of the region in which it is spoken. These distinctive varieties are termed as World Englishes. They include all the varieties of English, both standardised and the ones that are in the process of being standardised. Pakistani English (PE) is one of these numerous varieties that consists of its own unique features and is a product of various cultural, religious, regional and social influences.

The practice of code-switching serves as an effective tool to ensure fluent communication in multilingual societies. Within them, there exists a multitude of languages each with its own unique grammar, syntax, pronunciation etc. Code-switching is the process of utilising words from different languages (two or more) within a discourse. While engaging in code-switching, people tend to use words from their mother tongue along with those from the foreign language to create a sentence that is comprehensible. Its frequent use facilitates them in terms of technological and educational advancements.

The need to exercise code-switching, particularly in the sub-continent, arose, majorly, due to colonisation. Colonists brought with them their own language and culture and thrust it upon the locals. The lack of effective communication between the colonists and the colonised, during their interactions in terms of trade, education, etc., created tensions between them making it difficult to conduct day-to-day activities. To overcome this hurdle in communication, people resorted to practices such as borrowing of words, code mixing, code-switching etc.

In order to understand the code switching of Urdu-English within Pakistani English, it is crucial to know when and how English came into contact with the languages of the subcontinent. Formally, the establishment of the East India Company in 1600 paved the way towards the spread of English in the subcontinent. British merchants had been given permission, by the Queen, to engage in trade with India (as it was known at that time) and to do so, this company was founded.

Gradually, the British began to spread their culture in the subcontinent. They claimed that the people there were uncivilised, uneducated and barbaric and that they needed to be turned into a civil community. They wanted to transform them into “Brown Englishmen” by not only replacing their regional languages with English but also portraying the English lifestyle as the



ideal one and encouraging the locals to dress, look, talk and behave like them (Asgher, Shahzad, & Hanif, 2023). The British succeeded greatly in their goals and consequently, the English language spread throughout the subcontinent and, later on, continued to remain an official language in India and Pakistan after partition. Colonisation by the British played a significant role in developing bilingualism within Pakistan.

Due to the global influence of the language, its impact in the realm of technology, education, economy etc. there has been a growing need to learn English worldwide. In Pakistan, while Urdu serves as a national language, English serves as an official one, thus highlighting its importance. Pakistani English is influenced by both the local or regional languages (which include Urdu, Pashto, Balochi, Sindhi and Punjabi) along with the American and British versions. These languages have shaped the manner in which English is spoken in Pakistan. Although the regional languages of Pakistan have had an effect upon PE, no impact on it has been greater than that of Urdu. Being the national language, used and understood widely within the country, and a product of multiple languages like Arabic and Persian, it contains a vast vocabulary which has been broadly used in Pakistani English. People of Pakistan frequently engage in Urdu-English code switching while learning and communicating in English because it helps them understand the language, through the use of their mother tongue.

There are a large number of words that have been borrowed from the Urdu language and have, over time, become a part of Pakistani English. For example, words like 'rickshaw' (which is the Urdu word for 'auto'), 'mela' (the Urdu word for 'fair'), 'chai' (Urdu word for 'tea') etc. have been incorporated into the English spoken by the people of Pakistan (Qazalbash, Irfan, & Batool, 2023). This is known as Urduization. The purpose of it is to reduce the element of foreignness in the English language.

English wasn't, originally, the language of the subcontinent and was only introduced to and imposed upon the people of the subcontinent by the British, thus it was an alien language that represented a culture, values, norms and traditions that differed vastly from those of the subcontinent and were, hence, unknown to them. This made the people of the subcontinent hesitant while learning the English language. The Urduization of Pakistani English helped remove the unwillingness of Pakistani learners since they were able to easily understand English because of the presence of Urdu words in it.



## Literature Review

English performs the function of serving as the lingua franca of the world (Qureshi, Muhammed, & Jadoon, 2023). Its influence transcends mere communication, impacting fields like that of education, politics, media etc (Soomro, 2022). Furthermore, it is the only language which is spoken, taught and read world-wide (Fareed, Khan, & Ghangro, 2022). Detailed studies conducted on the South Asian version of English revealed that different hybridised structures are used frequently in the varieties of English spoken in the region. The most commonly used structure is that of combining a single native word with an English one (Akhtar, Baig, Aslam, Khan, Tayyaba, & Iqbal, 2020). The Pakistani variety of English regularly uses this structure, borrowing words from both Urdu and other regional languages spoken around Pakistan and combining them with those of the English language (Rahman, 2020).

The use of one's first language can facilitate the acquisition of a second language (Sarwar & Rashid, 2022). To do so, the first language can be used in three ways: syntactically, lexically and phonologically (Meeuwis & Ostman, 2022). The syntactic aspect of the language is concerned with the structure in which words are used within a language, the lexical aspect of it focuses on the vocabulary that exists within that language and, finally, the phonological aspect pays attention to how words are pronounced. Thus, in the learning of any second language, those parts of the language which are similar to the learner's native (or first) language are comprehended much more easily by the learner as compared to those which are dissimilar.

Vocabulary, being one of the most important aspects of a language, is frequently used as a medium to learn a second language. In the case of Urdu-English code switching, there is a repeated borrowing of words from the Urdu language into the English language. Learners use words from Urdu to both learn English and converse in it. Since Urdu is spoken and understood by a vast majority of the Pakistani population, its use in Pakistani English makes it easier for people to convey their meaning more clearly. Many times, speakers of Pakistani English use Urdu words in their speech despite the existence of English substitutes for these words. This is done, mainly, to preserve the cultural, religious and social essence of these words (Khan et al., 2022).

Code switching from one language to another tends to occur in three forms: Tag switching, Inter sentential switching and Intra sentential switching (Khan et al., 2022). Usage of tag words, belonging to one language, in another language is termed as Tag switching (Fathima



et al., 2023). In the context of Urdu-English code switching in Pakistani English, this means that tag words from Urdu language are used while speaking English and vice versa. The placement of these tag words is either in the beginning of the sentence, the middle or the end of it (Khan et al., 2022).

Another frequently used type of code-switching is called the Inter-Sentential Switching. In it, a shift occurs from one language to another at the clausal level (Fathima et al., 2023). In other words, within a compound sentence, one clause is in the native language while the other is in the second language. So, when focusing on Urdu-English code switching within Pakistani English, this means that one clause is spoken or written in Urdu while the other is in English. Although useful, this form of code-switching is not easily applicable as it requires the speaker to be fluent enough in both the languages so that the grammatical structure, of both the clauses, remains accurate and in accordance with the rules of each language (Khan et al., 2022).

Finally, another commonly utilised method of code-switching is known as the Intra-Sentential Switching. Within it, the change in language takes place inside the clausal boundary, at the word level (Fathima et al., 2023). Under this form of code-switching, words from one language are used in a clause of another language. In terms of Urdu-English code switching within Pakistani English, an Urdu word can be used in an English clause and vice versa (Khan et al., 2022).

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore the topic of Code Switching, in general, and Urdu-English Code Switching, specifically, in Pakistani English.
2. To determine the impact that Urdu-English Code Switching has on Pakistani English.
3. To examine the manner in which this impact is reflected in the linguistic features of Pakistani English.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is Code Switching and Urdu-English Code Switching in Pakistani English?
2. What is the impact of Urdu-English Code Switching on Pakistani English?
3. In what way is the impact of Urdu-English Code Switching on Pakistani English reflected in its linguistic features?

### **Research Methodology**

The qualitative nature of this paper requires the use of a textual analysis of all the corpus available on the topic of Urdu-English Code Switching and its impact on Pakistani English. The data of study has been collected through a variety of research articles, books and



journals. A number of examples have been used to show how Urdu-English code switching has brought about changes, impacting Pakistani English. Majorly, four sources have been used to collect data for this research.

- Dawn Newspaper, published daily in Lahore, Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2022).
- Herald Magazine, which is published monthly in Karachi, Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2022).
- Mag Magazine, which is published weekly in the city of Karachi, Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2022)
- Some of the examples have also been taken from the research article titled “Code-Switching and Code Mixing: A Textual Analysis of Wajahat Ali’s The Domestic Crusaders” (Khan et al., 2022)

### **Discussion/Analysis**

The close contact between Urdu and Pakistani English, resulting in frequent borrowing of lexical items at the phrasal, clausal and word level, has provided Pakistani English with a unique identity of its own. Consequently, some of these lexical items are not used in the Standard British English manner but rather develop an Urduised meaning (Irfan, 2022). In this section of the paper, a detailed discussion regarding the occurrence of inter-sentential code switching, at clausal level and intra-sentential, at word or phrasal level, will take place thus highlighting the manner in which it is executed and how it does not wrongly influence the true syntax of the English language.

#### **Intra-sentential code switching (phrasal level)**

A phrase isn't a complete sentence, rather it is a group of words which form a part of the clause (sentence), lacking any subject or verb in them. A detailed study on the subject revealed that Pakistanis tend to use some phrases from the Urdu language and some from English within a clause. This paper will explore some examples of these code-switchings, keeping in mind the different kinds of phrases, Noun phrase (NP), Adjective phrase (AdjP) and Prepositional phrase (PPs), used in the process. Sources for these examples will also be given.

##### **1. Noun Phrase**

A Noun Phrase contains a noun as the head and is used either as a prepositional object, a subject or a complement. Some noun phrases may also contain a qualifier and modifier in addition to the head noun but the occurrence of these two is optional.



### Urdu Noun Phrases in Pakistani English (Examples)-

- a) ‘An honourable **sardar or wadera (landlord or chief)** can walk free even after a proven record of the most heinous kinds of crimes against him’ (Iqbal et al., 2022).
- b) ‘Please put some **Aqal (idiocy)** and sense into him.’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- c) ‘I want the **malai (cream)** on top.’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- d) ‘Your precious **chai (tea)** will be ready soon.’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- e) ‘They alleged that the **naib nazim (the vice municipal officer)** was receiving threats to force him to part ways with the PPP-backed Awam Dost panel.’ (Iqbal et al., 2022)
- f) In example (a.) an English adjective ‘honourable’ has been used to modify the Urdu Noun Phrase ‘sardar or wadera’ while in example (e.) both the modifying adjective ‘naib’ and noun head ‘nazim’ are written in Urdu. In both cases the determiners of the noun phrases ‘An’ and ‘the’ remain English. Similarly in examples (b.) the English determiner ‘some’ is used while the Noun ‘Aqal’ is in Urdu.

### Using English to introduce the Urdu Noun Phrase in a clause (examples)

- a) ‘Amjad considered her as **ustad se ziyada dost (friend rather than teacher)**’ (Iqbal et al., 2022).
- b) ‘According to one of them, they were not shunned by the public as **lula, langra and apahaj (lame and paralyzed)**’ (Iqbal et al., 2022).
- c) In both of these examples, the English adverb ‘as’ has been used before the noun phrases as a means to introduce them.

### Using Urdu Noun Phrases as a complement in Pakistani English (examples)

A complement refers to a group of words that occur at the end of the clause, completing its meaning. Oftentimes, in Pakistani English, Urdu phrases are used as a complement within a sentence.

- a) ‘Atif Amin feels it's true that to some extent visiting therapists is an **ameeron ka nakhra (arrogance of the rich)**’ (Iqbal et al., 2022).
- b) ‘I don’t do **gheebat (backbiting)**.’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- c) ‘Coming here and giving me and your father a **taqreer (lecture)**!’ (Khan et al., 2022)

### **Adjective Phrase**

Within a clause or a sentence, the word or group of words which function as an adjective constitute the adjective phrase. An adjective phrase (AdjP) may also occur within a noun phrase as an adjective describes a noun. It contains a head adjective which might be supported by an intensifier.



Examples:

- a) 'City life and modern education makes men very **beghairat (dishonourable)**.' (Iqbal et al., 2022)
- b) 'She is such a **pyari larki (beautiful girl)**.'
- c) 'We saved ourselves from a **taiz raftar (speedy)** motorcycle at the last minute'. (Iqbal et al., 2022)

In example (a.) intensifier 'very' is used to show the intensity of the quality (adjective) attribute to the noun (men). In (b.) the Urdu AdjP 'pyari' is used to describe the Urdu NP 'larki'. Finally, in (c.) the Urdu AdjP 'taiz raftaar' is used to describe the English noun 'motorcycle'.

### Inter-sentential Code Switching

In this form of code switching, two clauses from different languages are used by switching from one to another at the end of each clause. So, to say, shifting of language occurs at the clausal boundaries. These clauses may be of subordinate or coordinating type which join two clauses together by the use of conjunctions. While in coordinate clauses, both clauses hold equal importance, in subordinating clauses one clause is, usually, more important than the other. In Inter-sentential Urdu-English code switching, the speaker can use either Urdu or English conjunctions.

Examples-

- a) 'They reached there on time **lakin (but)** the cake order wasn't ready.'
- b) Within this example, the conjunction used is in Urdu.
- c) I was just kidding **bus (just)** Esai bol raha tha (Khan et al., 2022).
- d) In this example, the Urdu conjunction 'bus' is used.
- e) **Mujhe shikayat hai (I have a complaint)** that we are not making history. (Iqbal et al., 2022)
- f) In this example, the Urdu clause acts as the main one while the English clause serves as the subordinate one.
- g) 'Baytho. Sit with us for a while.' (Khan et al., 2022)
- h) In this example, the first clause is in Urdu while the second one is in English but each of them is independent clauses not joined together by conjunctions.
- i) 'Fatima, **buss! (enough!) Chup ho jow (Be quiet)! Tum ko kya maloom? (What do you know?)** You don't know how it was in those days.' (Khan et al., 2022)
- j) In this example, more than two clauses have been used with three of the clauses using Urdu and one using English.





- k) ‘Take care, **apna bahut khayal rakhiya ga (Take care).**’ (Iqbal et al., 2022)
- l) ‘Feroz was very drunk. **Usko chad gayi thi (He was drunk).**’ (Iqbal et al., 2022)
- m) In both (f.) and (g.) examples, the same clause is repeated in both languages. Once in English and once in Urdu. Both of them mean the same thing but are repeated to emphasise the meaning.

### **Tag Switching**

This is another form of code switching which is frequently found in Pakistani English as it is relatively easier, than the other forms, to accomplish. In it, tags from one language are used with another language. In Pakistani English, this means that tags from Urdu are used in English and tags from English are used in Urdu while communicating.

#### Examples:

- a) ‘Theek. You could have just said that instead of arguing about it.’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- b) ‘Why is he being so rude? Ajeeb.’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- c) ‘Kya? What’s so funny?’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- d) ‘Kal ghumne jatey hain. Okay?’ (Khan et al., 2022)
- e) ‘Hum toh kisi ko judge nahi karty, you know, kal ko Khuda ko munh dikhana hai’.  
(Khan et al., 2022)

In examples (a.), (b.) and (c.) Urdu tags ‘Theek’, ‘Ajeeb’, ‘Kya’ have been used in examples (d.) and (e.) English tags of ‘Okay’ and ‘you know’ have been used.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Through the examples presented in this paper, the reader can get an insight into the extent to which Urdu-English code switching has had an influence or impact upon Pakistani English which adds to the uniqueness of it collectively. It highlights the fact that when a new language comes into contact with a region, oftentimes the use of national and regional languages within it becomes essential to fill any lexical gaps that might arise due to the locals’ unfamiliarity with the foreign language. Hence, they depend upon the use of their mother tongue to understand the new language and be able to communicate in it. Through this paper, an attempt is made to emphasise the crucial role played by Urdu-English Code Switching on shaping the structure of Pakistani English.



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