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## The Language of Praise: Exploring Urdu, English Code Switching in Compliments among Pakistani Undergraduate Students

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### Abstract

This paper explores Urdu- English code switching in compliments among Pakistani undergraduate students. Based on the given frameworks in connection with pragmatic communication and bilingual interaction (Rafiq, Chaudhary, and Fazal, 2022; Tariq and Zahid, 2024), the studies will examine the patterns, frequency, or social motivation behind the usage of the Urdu and English language in the exchange of compliments by students. The data was gathered using a mixed-method of a combination of a closed- questions questionnaire and Discourse Completion Test. The qualitative results indicated that code-switching is an expression of the inclination of students to be polite, contemporary, and socially up to date to coexist with peers, but not to lose cultural closeness to the language Urdu. Overall, the research concludes the necessity of teaching professionals to see code-switching as a natural and significant part of communicative competence of students. The results provide a clue to those involved in curriculum development and language teaching to incorporate pragmatic awareness, sociolinguistic sensitivity, and bilingual patterns of communication in the classroom teaching. This kind of pedagogical sensitivity can empower the students to survive in multilingual interactions that would be authentic as well as confident.

**Keywords:** Urdu-English, Code Switching, Compliments, Sociolinguistics, Bilingual Identity.



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## 1. Introduction

One of the most evolutionary methods of establishing and sustaining social relations is through language and complimentary actions are crucial in establishment of positive interpersonal associations. Complimenting in the multilingual societies can be said to reflect not only politeness, but also cultural identity and social awareness. As a multilingual nation, in which English and Urdu coexist on the educational and social spheres, Pakistan offers an excellent backdrop on which to research the topic of language selection as a determinant of its use in the mundane aspects of conversation. Urdu mixing with English has become a characteristic of the speech among the university students who are under a constant pressure to move between local and global language influences. This tendency corresponds to sociolinguistic theories that conceive code-switching behavior as a form of linguistic resource to guide an identity, solidarity, and group membership (Rahman, 2011; Mansoor, 2005). Besides, when examining the linguistic interaction in South Asia, it is possible to note that the practices of language use among youths tend to adopt cultural and other trends in relation to the perception of prestige and modernity (Rahman, 2011; Mansoor, 2005).

Past studies of code-switching have investigated the role of code switching in identity drawing, social status and language attitudes. Nevertheless, the little attention has been paid to the transition of language between bilingual speakers in a given speech act of compliment provision to an area of the speech where the politeness, emotion, as well as social norms play a significant role. Pragmatic research stresses on the fact that compliments are deeply rooted in the social expectations and relationship cognitions, and they may be treated as face-enhancing behaviors (Holmes, 1988; Herbert, 1990). Although much has been written on the topic of code-switching in Pakistan, little has been written on the interplay relationship between complimenting behavior and bilingual language choice. This gap should indicate that it is important to integrate the pragmatic theory into the analysis that will bridge the gap between the behavior of students and more general concept of communicative competence that should consider linguistic accuracy, sociocultural appropriateness, and contextual sensitivity (Canale and Swain, 1980; Taguchi, 2005).

Nonetheless, code switching is a field where a lot of research has been conducted in Pakistan, the works have been concentrated on the overall tendencies of conversational code-switching, school discussion, attitudes to language and identity formation. Minor studies have been allocated to pragmatic speech acts particularly compliments in which language choice and selection are held together with politeness, emotions and relations. Besides, the majority of the research on compliments has investigated them in monolingual studies or not within Pakistani higher education. Compliments have been an important aspect of positive communication and social bonding, but scarce studies have focused on how bilingual speakers in Pakistan switch languages to convey praise (Ahmad, Mahmood, and Shahid, 2023). This current research study is an attempt to discuss the patterns, frequency, and reason of code-switching in compliments by the Pakistani undergraduate students, in Urdu and English. It will discuss the following tasks: (1) to study the frequency with which students mix Urdu and English when they are using compliments, (2) social and attitudinal aspects that may affect their language choice, and (3) how communicative situation affects those tendencies. Based on a mixed-method approach, which involves the combination of the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the given paper aims to become a constituent in the further elaboration of the topic of the bilingual interaction and expression of identities in the context of higher education.

The concentration of emphasis on compliments intensifies the attention given to this study as one of the novel additions to the field of sociolinguistics in Pakistan. It brings out the ways in which

students tactfully switch between Urdu and English as a way of being polite, negotiating modernity and strengthening interpersonal relationships. Thus, the study addresses a purposeful void in bilingual pragmatics and provides an understanding of how the hybrid linguistic identities are formulated in university matters.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

- Q1.** How do undergraduate Pakistani students code-switch with Urdu and English in complimenting?
- Q2.** Which complementation categories are applied by Undergraduate Pakistanistani Students during Urdu -English codeswitching?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Concept of Code-Switching**

The concept of code-switching (CS) has been broadly understood in sociolanguage as more than a linguistic mistake or a language mixing; code-switching, in fact, serves not only as a means of communication in reference to identity, context, and social intentment. The latest literature on the Pakistani context focuses on socio-pragmatics, peer norms, and identity negotiation as the motivation behind code-switching (Rafiq et al., 2022; Tariq and Zahid, 2024). More recently, Rafiq, Chaudhary, and Fazal (2022) conducted a study in the Urdu-English bilingual population in Pakistan, and the intra- and inter-sentential switching is influenced by socio-pragmatic factors including the peer group norms and identity negotiation. Such theoretical approaches as the Model of Markedness (Myers-Scotton, 1993) and Matrix Language frame (Myers-Scotton, 2002) are useful in the analysis of the choice to switch made by bilingual speakers.

### **2.2 Code-Switching in Pakistani Educational and Social Contexts**

Pakistan Bilingualism (Urdu, and English) is typical of Pakistan particularly in schools and the young people. Tariq and Zahid (2024) researched EFL teachers and learners in Pakistan and discovered that English code-switching is associated with the perceived economic security and modern identity. Equally, the linguistic competence, ethnicity, and peer norms were determined by Zia, Batool and Qureshi (2024) as being critical factors that affected CS among bilingual classroom students. In addition, a study conducted by Anwar, Samo and Fareed (2025) in their Okara Cantt research indicated that teachers and students are in support of Code-switching/Code-Mixing during English classes due to its ability to scaffold meaning. These studies demonstrate that the Code Switching is common, socially significant, and context-influential in the classrooms and peer contexts of Pakistani schools.

### **2.3 Compliments and Language Choice in Multilingual Settings**

Compliments are a functional speech act and they are employed in order to show admiration, to preserve rapport and bargain social relationships (Holmes, 1988). In a multilingual situation, the solidarity, formality, prestige, or intimacy may be indicated by the language used in a compliment. Indicatively, in other bilingual locations, research has established that speakers switch to such a language which is relatively better in prestige in order to receive more appreciation or even to conform to the demands of interlocutors. Undergraduate students in Pakistan, though not representative of the general population, Khan (2023) discovered that in Mandarin English insertions in Urdu compliments, Khan (2023) observed that in Mandarin English the use of insertion in compliments signified modernity and group affiliation; however, in pure Urdu compliments, it signified cultural closeness. The findings imply that the topic of language selection in compliments is an abundant field of research on identity and communication in the context of using two languages.

## **2.4 Use of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in Compliment Research**

The work on compliments by Holmes (1988) has a lot to be of use in the current study since compliments are considered a pragmatic form of speech act within the social context, which takes the form of offering approval and solidarity to stabilize interpersonal relations. Holmes (1988) speaks about typical areas, including appearance, ability, personality, and possession. These directly guide the construction of the self-designed Discourse Completion Task that was employed in this study. Concentrating on ordinary social contexts, Holmes asserts that compliments are context specific and differ depending on the social relationships- which also forms a central point of the on-hand study. Hence the researcher extends this model in the present study by investigating the naturalistic responses concerning compliments in situations involving familiarity in the university. This makes it possible to analyse the ways in which bilingual speakers use switching languages strategically as a way of expressing politeness, emotional expressiveness and social alignments.

## **2.5 Empirical Studies on Code-Switching and Compliments**

Although there is much literature on CS in general, there is less literature on compliments. Code-Switching and Code Mixing Among Bilinguals by Ahmad, Mahmood, and Shahid (2023) also explored the contextual switching (military, civilian) and discovered that English is to be used in cases of professional or prestige-related discourse, whereas Urdu was to be used when it concerned cultural/emotional content. In their study, Awan, Begum, and Khan (2025) noticed that English is used when formality (or academic register) is needed whereas Urdu is used when emotional or cultural expression is to be made in case of code-switching and code-mixing of English and Urdu. Likewise, Shafique and Zahid (2024) observed that the socioeconomic status and educational background of parents has an effect on the children to shift towards English. According to these findings, there is a complicated correlation between social, psychological, and pragmatic aspects of Code-Switching behavior. Nonetheless, these studies do not directly investigate the use of compliments as a speech act in a situation in a Pakistani university among the undergraduates.

The literature reviewed proves that the phenomenon of code-switching is well-established in the Pakistani ambiguous situations and also shows that compliments provide an important area of research regarding language selection in multilingual environment. Nevertheless, there remains a gap: not much literature dwells on the speech act of compliments in code switching between Urdu English, among undergraduates in Pakistani institutions of higher learning. The majority of the studies deal with classroom interactions, language proficiency, teacher perception, or overall Code-Switching behavior as opposed to compliments and peer interaction. Although there is substantial body of research on Urdu English code switching in Pakistan, the available studies have mainly studied the language practices, classroom talk, and identity associated functions. Very little focus has been attached to the code-switching in pragmatic speech acts especially compliments that are important in the maintenance of social relations and in expressing courtesy. In addition, there are limited empirical studies that concentrate on Pakistani higher education situations involving undergraduate students. This paper supports this gap by exploring patterns, frequency, and social impetuses of Urdu English code switching in compliments among university learners.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The mixed-methods research design was used in this study and it included quantitative and qualitative approaches. To quantitatively establish the frequency and patterns of Urdu English

code-switching in compliments a survey questionnaire using Google Forms was used to collect quantitative data. Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) were used to obtain qualitative data based on natural language usage when the students are interacting with each other. The combination of both approaches enabled the study to obtain numerical data and understand the pragmatic linguistics behavior of students on a deeper level, which guaranteed a more thorough and high-quality analysis.

### **3.2 Participants**

The research subjects in this study were the Pakistani undergraduate students in various universities. One hundred students were sampled using convenience sampling, and they represented various fields of study. The total number of valid responses that were received and analyzed was 70. The number of students used was both male and female and was between the ages of 18 and 24 years. The selection was based on the fact that participants are frequent communicators in two languages and represent the multilingual population of the Pakistani universities.

### **3.3 Instruments**

This study used two instruments to gather the data a questionnaire that is distributed through Google Forms and a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The Google Form had seven close ended statements that aimed at investigating the frequency, patterns, and motivation of code-switching Urdu English in compliments. The measurements were all done on a five-point scale of Likert, with a Strongly Agree (5) to a Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire addressed such important factors as politeness, emotional expressiveness, confidence, social context, and thought to be perceived genuineness of bilingual compliments. Besides that, a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was also created, having four situational preference settings of appearance, character, ability and possession, to gather data among the English undergraduate students regarding the application of compliments using Holmes (1988).

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedures**

Response to a closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was compiled of 7 items that were meant to gauge the frequency, motivations and perceptions of students on Urdu English code-switching in compliments. All the items were found on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, 5; Strongly Disagree, 1). The statements touched on politeness, emotional expressiveness, social situation, confidence and perception of sincerity in bilingual compliments. The number of respondents to fill in the questionnaire was 70, and the number of individual responses made was 490 (70 participants x 7 questions), which underwent quantitative analysis. Google Forms were used to distribute the questionnaire and made it as accessible as possible. The objectives of the study were explained to the participants, and they were assured that their answers would not be disclosed to anyone and they would only be used to conduct research. Informed consent sheets given to all the participants beforehand. A total of three weeks took place during data collection.

### **3.5 Data Analysis Procedures**

The descriptive statistics was applied to quantitative data wherein frequencies and percentages of every questionnaire item were calculated to determine common trends and patterns of Urdu English code switching behavior among students. In addition, the Markedness Model developed by Myers-Scotton (1993) underpins the theoretical framework of the analysis as the conceptualization of the studies on the socio pragmatic perspective that suggests that speakers use languages, according to social norms and identity, and thus justify the analysis of why and how

reason as to why and how undergraduate students switch languages when paying compliments. The analysis was conducted with 490 responses to get a better insight into the patterns, motivations, and perception of UAE students code switching among Urdu and English based on the works of Rafiq, Chaudhary and Fazal (2022) and Tariq and Zahid (2024). The researcher compared the responses of the students on the compliments in English DCT on a one-on-one basis according to the four situational settings of appearance, character, ability, and possession (Holmes 1988).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The questionnaire was created according to investigate the regularity of applying the Urdu-English code-switching on giving compliment to the hearer by undergraduate students, the scheme by which the switching takes place and the functionality it provides in social interactions among each other. Through closed ended Likert scale questions, the instrument was able to capture the feelings of students with regard to the frequency with which they switch linguistic and context in which they consider bilingual alternating to be desirable, and the social connotations held about bilingual lauding. The research concerning these replies helps us to understand that code-switching can be discussed as a regular and meaning communicative approach in the everyday communication of the students.

**Table 4.1:** *Trends and Patterns of Codeswitching among Undergraduate Students in Pakistan*

| Question                                                                                        | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. I often use more than one language (Urdu/English) when giving compliments to my friends.     | 32             | 31    | 4       | 2        | 1                 |
| 2. I feel that using English words in compliments sounds more polite or modern.                 | 29             | 34    | 2       | 4        | 1                 |
| 3. I switch languages to make my compliments sound more emotional or expressive.                | 23             | 30    | 11      | 5        | 1                 |
| 4. I notice my classmates often mix languages when complimenting others.                        | 26             | 37    | 5       | 2        | 0                 |
| 5. I find compliments that include code-switching more genuine than those in a single language. | 13             | 32    | 16      | 7        | 2                 |
| 6. Code-switching in compliments is more common in informal settings than formal ones.          | 15             | 37    | 15      | 2        | 1                 |
| 7. I feel more confident giving compliments in my native language than in English.              | 19             | 28    | 19      | 2        | 2                 |

According to Table 4.1, Urdu English code switching is a frequent and well-established practice among Pakistani undergraduate students when giving compliments. For Item 1, which examined the general use of more than one language in compliments, the highest responses were recorded in

the agreement categories, with 32 students strongly agreeing and 31 agreeing, while only one participant strongly disagreed, indicating a very high frequency of bilingual complimenting among peers.

A similar trend is observed in Item 2, where students associated the use of English in compliments with politeness or modernity. Here again, agreement responses were dominant (34 agree and 29 strongly agree), whereas disagreement remained minimal (only one strongly disagree response), suggesting a shared perception of English as a socially valued linguistic resource. Item 3 further supports this pattern, as most participants (30 agree and 23 strongly agree) reported switching languages to make compliments more emotional or expressive, with the lowest responses appearing in the strongly disagree category (one respondent).

One of the highest level of consensus is on item 4 which involves the observation of the behavior of classmates: 37 students admitted and 26 strongly admitted that they use language mixing in their social circle, and no respondents strongly corrected this idea. This demonstrates that using multiple languages when complimenting is not only common, but also socially apparent and accepted in peer relations. In Item 5, responses were a little more diverse; the number of participants who rated the code-switched compliments with the highest ratings (32 agree and 13 strongly agree) was the largest, but it is important that 16 neutral and two strongly disagree responses were also used, which means that the individual attitudes towards the concept of authenticity are diverse.

### **Results of the Use of Compliment Categories among Pakistani Undergraduate Students**

Discourse Completion Task (DCT) enhanced the study of the role of the use of Urdu English code switching by Pakistani undergraduate students in the context of formulation of compliments in various communicative contexts. Although the quantitative patterns of frequency and attitudes were revealed in Table 4.1, Table 4.2 contains the qualitative diversity of what is really used by the student in particular situations. The more emphasis is placed on the categories of the compliment types, the language choices which are dominant, and the degree of the code-switching which is noted in the answers of students.

**Table 4.2:** *Compliment Categories among Pakistani Undergraduate Students*

| <b>Compliment Category</b> | <b>Situations Included</b>                  | <b>Dominant Language Choice</b>       | <b>Code-Switching Tendency</b> |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Appearance                 | Glasses, traditional dress, profile picture | Urdu–English mixed                    | High                           |
| Personality / Character    | Kindness, patience, calm attitude           | Urdu-dominant with English insertions | Moderate                       |
| Ability / Performance      | Debate, music performance, problem-solving  | English-dominant with Urdu support    | High                           |
| Possessions                | Backpack, bike                              | Urdu-dominant                         | Low to Moderate                |

Table 4.2 reveals that the Urdu English code-switching is dependent on the category of compliment being used and the social meaning of a particular situation. This difference brings out the fact that selections of language by students are dependent on context and pragmatic in nature and not accidental.

In situations where students are complimented on appearance, mixing of Urdu and English was very common. The English adjectives like stylish, nice, perfect, and amazing had been regularly integrated in the Urdu sentences. The tendency is indicative of the fact that English is a

modernized and visualized language, whereas Urdu enhances emotional coziness and intimacy. Owing to this, code switching in this group was intense which is indicative of unsanctioned interaction with peers and expressiveness.

On character and personality-based compliments, there were more replies in Urdu and in some cases, it had some English nuggets like kind, supportive, patient and respectful. This implies that students would rather use their first language where it is easy to convey moral values, empathy, and sincerity. There was an intermediate level of code-switching in this category since English was more used to highlight positive qualities instead of substituting Urdu.

Conversely, the complimentary activities in terms of ability and performance had a high accuracy in English majority answers. The academic ability, debating skill or musical performance were complemented with the full or a small support of the Urdu language with a significant number of students using English. This indicates the great prestige of English in educational and professional sectors in Pakistani universities and, consequently, a high tendency to code-switch occurs in this group.

Praise regarding items, i. e. a new backpack or a bike, was also Urdu preponderant with minimal English wording. Those cases did not have so emotional or even social nuances, so Urdu was enough to express gratitude. As such, the level of code-switching in this category was low to medium as compared to other forms of compliments.

The obtained DCT results show that Urdu English code-switching in compliments among Pakistani undergraduates is systematic and has a social meaning. The choice of languages among students is strategic and dependent on the category of compliments, involvement of feelings and the value of communication that the students perceive to have in social life. Such qualitative evidence backs a quantitative outcome provided in Table 4.1 and helps to sustain the opinion that the process of code-switching is a pragmatic tool that helps one to express politeness, identity, and social alignment within the context of bilingual peer communication.

Findings of the current research revealed that the convergence of the outcomes of the questionnaire and the Discourse Completion Task give a holistic meaning to the code switching in compliments among the Pakistani undergraduate students in Urdu English. Findings of the given questionnaire (Table 4.1) demonstrated that code-switching is a commonly used and socially acceptable phenomenon and it is positively perceived especially when used in informal interactions with peers when students relate bilingual compliments with politeness, modernity, and emotional expressiveness. The results of the DCT (Table 4.2) went a long way to support these quantitative trends since they indicated that the language choices made by students were circumstantially dependent and strategically motivated by the kind of compliment and its social connotation. Although the English language was more preferred in the compliments regarding skills and performance because of its connotations of skill and prestige, the Urdu still dominated in statements that talked about personalities and their emotional sincerity with selective English intonations that would provide amplifiers. The findings that have been achieved with both instruments verify that the code-switching in compliments in Urdu-English is not incidental but as a pragmatic and identity-based communicative tool. Such combination of quantitative and qualitative data contributes to the validity of the results and indicates code switching as one of the most effective means by which bilingual students can manage politeness, social congruence, and linguistic identity during the normal university communication processes.

## **5. Conclusion**

The paper examined Urdu English code-switching in compliments among Pakistani undergraduate students in terms of how frequent and patterned and pragmatic the bilingual

complimenting behavior is. Using the mixed-method approach, the study investigated not only the way students feel about code-switching but their practice when certain circumstances arise. Such results show code switching in complaints to be a socially sensitive and meaningful practice and not arbitrary or impaired use of language. In the findings, the majority of the participants frequently used the Urdu English code-switching during the process of the compliment when communicating with a person informally. It has been seen that bilingual compliments are linked with politeness, modernity, confidence, and expressiveness of emotion among students. The findings indicated that use of language depended on the type of compliment and social context. The preeminence of English was in the areas of compliment about the ability and the performance since this language was associated with academic capability, whereas the Urdu language was vital in denoting the personality and reflection of good-will and the emotional short message. According to these trends, students are generally strategic in their choice of linguistic resources in order to manage relationships in society, express identity, and improve communication between individuals. The research concludes that, Urdu English code-switching in compliments is both a pragmatic and identity resource in communication of Pakistani undergraduate students. Instead of interpreting code-switching as a sign of linguistic impairment, the results demonstrate its impact in reinforcing social relationships, healthier negotiation of bilingualism in modernity and valuable dialogue within a multilingual context. The alignment between quantitative and qualitative findings also leads to the conclusion that the bilingual situations in complimenting behavior are systematic and based on social grounds.

## **6. Recommendations**

The scholar asks educators and curriculum developers to acknowledge code-switching as a good and acceptable part of communicative competence of a student. In education, especially higher learning institutions, language teachers are advised to embrace the pedagogical strategies that can recognize bilingual status of the students and use pragmatic learning to enhance the learning experience at the classroom. The applications of controlled and intentional code-switching (role plays, discourse-based tasks, pragmatic analysis of a real-life interaction, etc.) can be helpful in managing students to become more sociolinguistically aware without losing their mastery of English. Pedagogically, this paper is based on the idea that the didactical practices must shift toward not practicing monolingual standards but rather instruct to adopt an inclusive perspective on bilingual communication. In embracing the students' linguistic identities, teachers are able to develop confidence, authenticity and good forms of communication. In addition to this, teacher preparation programs ought to contain the elements of bilingual pragmatics to prepare teachers to comprehend and negotiate the process of code-switching in schools.

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