

Exploring Code-Mixing among Social Media Influencers in Pakistan: A Content Analysis

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Abstract

Code-mixing within social media is increasingly becoming more widespread, with people using code-mixed language to express themselves in ways that are both meaningful and entertaining. Influencers and content creators, in particular, are particularly adept at creating code-mixed messages that grab attention and engage their audience. This research paper explores the use of code-mixing among social media influencers in Pakistan. It examines motivations behind code-mixing, as well as their frequency of use. Through content analysis of Instagram accounts belonging to Pakistani influencers, this paper seeks to understand why they choose to mix codes, and how their followers interpret this language. The results suggest that almost one third of the posts of the selected social media influencers had employed code-mixing. Further analysis reveals that the primary motivations for code-mixing include making communication natural, adding humour, and making endorsements more relatable. The implications for further research are discussed.

Keywords: Code Mixing, Social Media Influencers, Content Analysis, Communication

1. Introduction

The increasing use of social media has had a huge impact on how people communicate, both online and offline (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020). One notable way this has manifested is in the form of code-mixing, which refers to the usage of two or more languages or dialects in a single sentence or conversation. This phenomenon can most often be seen among young adults and adolescents, who use code-mixing to express their cultural identity and sense of belonging (Thara & Poornachandran, 2018). Social media influencers, who often have a large following of younger audiences, have been known to engage in code-mixing (Sutrisno & Ariesta, 2019). This has led to an increase in the popularity of code-mixing among young people, as well as increasing its normalcy within social networks (Ersani et al., 2020). Additionally, some languages and forms of communication that were previously considered too informal or “uncool” are now seen as acceptable, or even desirable in certain contexts (Bohra et al., 2018). Sweet (2007) highlighted the importance of language, which is seen as a means of expressing ideas through the combination of speech sounds into sentences. Bloch & Trager (1942) expanded on this definition, stating that language is essentially a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used by social groups to cooperate. Accordingly, Lehmann (2013) suggested that sound combinations form words, such as the combination of "b-o-o-k", which forms a meaningful word. Similarly, sentences are formed by combining words together, in an accepted order; for example, "A football is a game of wonderful entertainments" is acceptable but not

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"A game is of a football wonderful entertainment". Hence, language is perceived as a system of systems.

Leech (2016) recognised five primary uses of language. These are to convey information, express emotion or opinion, direct others and create a pleasing linguistic artefact. Additionally, language can be employed for the purpose of maintaining social relationships. Leech noted that many of these functions overlap with one another, particularly in everyday communication. Another key point made by Leech is that language can also be used phatically - for the purpose of creating a pleasant atmosphere or keeping social relationships in good repair, rather than to impart information or direct others. This serves as an important reminder that language plays a far greater role in our lives than merely conveying meaning.

It is clear that most people possess the skill to speak more than one language, also known as bilingualism or multilingualism (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2008). In each language, there is a code; a collection of words, symbols and figures which are used in place of their literal meanings. One particular type of coding system is known as 'code-mixing', which involves the combining of language varieties in an individual's speech. For example, a phrase such as "I mean agar aap ko help chahiye toh you can let me know" is an example of code-mixing between English and Urdu.

Moyer (2002) categorized code mixing into the following forms:

1. Word insertion - This involves inserting words from another language into a dominant language that is used in conversation.
2. Phrase insertion - A phrase is a group of words without a verb which functions as one unit and can be inserted into speech.
3. Idiom or expression insertion - Idioms are phrases or sentences whose meaning is not clear from the meaning of its individual words and must be learnt as a whole unit. Expressions are words, phrases, or terms from a particular field which can also be inserted into a conversation.
4. Hybrid insertion - This refers to combining native and foreign forms such as intermixing a prefix from one language with a word from another.
5. Reduplication insertion - This is the repetition of words.

People often use code-mixing in their communication without being aware of it (Tay, 1989). This could be due to the influence of social media, as people nowadays spend more time on these platforms and can find a lot of enjoyment from them (Luke, 2015). Furthermore, influencers on Instagram, one of the most popular social media sites, have a major role to play in promoting code-mixing to their followers (Hardini et al., 2019). The use of code mixing in Instagram by influencers has attracted attention and needs to be studied. Instagram was chosen as the source of data due to its large user base.

The purpose of this research paper is to identify the reasons behind code-mixing by social media influencers, and its impact on younger generations and females in Pakistan. Furthermore, it seeks to understand when influencers make use of code mixing and what motivates them to do so. Seargeant & Tagg (2014) suggest that social media can have a strong influence over the youth. Therefore, this paper will assess how influencers' code-mixing affects Pakistani followers in terms of their English.

2. Literature Review

Studies have produced ample evidence for code mixing, which is defined as situations where words and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence (Jiang et al., 2014). According to Herman et al. (2022), this type of mixing is generally only seen in informal settings. In more formal contexts, the speaker may resort to phrases or terms from another language when there is not an appropriate expression in their native language. Bokamba (1989)

explains code mixing as a phenomenon which occurs when two languages are combined during the same utterance, resulting in a shift from one language to another. This type of speech does not involve any change in topic and can consist of elements such as morphology and lexical items. Code mixing is the incorporation of pieces of one language into another language without completely abandoning the other (Gumperz, 1977). Therefore, one speaker may start off in one language but then continue their speech in a different language.

Moyer (2002) and Hoffmann (2014) argue that code mixing involves the use of words and grammar from two different languages in one sentence. This type of language switching is commonly seen in informal conversations and happens when a speaker combines both languages. The result is a mixture of lexical and grammatical features from both languages. Hoffman identifies three kinds of code mixing based on the range or the extent to which languages are interchanged. These include intra-sentential code mixing, intra lexical code mixing, and pronunciation variation. Each type will be discussed in detail below.

2.1 Intra-sentential code

Intra-sentential code mixing is a phenomenon that occurs when two or more languages are combined within the same sentence (Gosselin & Sabourin, 2021). It involves switching between different language systems, often for pragmatic reasons. This type of code mixing could include using words from one language in another, borrowing phrases, and even switching between dialects within a single language. Intra-sentential code mixing is most commonly seen in bilingual or multilingual speech and writing, though it also occurs in monolingual contexts. The linguistics of code-mixing are complex; it can be used to create a sense of identity or evoke an emotional response from the reader or listener. Intra-sentential code mixing has been used for centuries in literature, poetry and everyday conversations. In recent years, it has become increasingly popular on social media platforms as a way of conveying personal identity (Fernandez et al., 2019). For example:

- Main bohat ziyada is masle par confused hoon. (Confused as code mixing of word in the sentence) - Mujhe aik important meeting main jaana hai. (I have important meeting as code mixing of clause).

Declarative

In declarative sentences, the subject comes before the predicate, and a period is used in writing or a drop in pitch when speaking. "I love this place. Yeh mjhe sab se achi lagti hai."

Interrogative

These include yes-or-no queries, WH (what, when, why, where, when) questions and subject inquiries. "Kaisi rahi mulaakaat? Did it go well?"

Imperative

The use of imperative verbs can vary depending on the situation, ranging from strong orders to polite requests. The tone used typically reflects the intended message. "Hurry up! Humaare paas waqt nai bacha hai"

The examples mentioned demonstrate the use of code-mixing in sentences with single words, clauses and phrases.

2.2 Intra-lexical code mixing

Intra-lexical code mixing is a form of language mixing which occurs within individual words. This type of code switching involves the incorporation of elements from different languages into a single lexeme, resulting in a hybrid word. Intra-lexical code mixing is especially common among bilingual speakers who's native and second languages have similar phonological systems, and who often mix elements of both languages in their everyday speech. For example,

a Spanish-English bilingual speaker may say "cariñoso" instead of "amoroso", which is the Spanish equivalent of the English word "loving". Intra-lexical code mixing has been studied by linguists for decades, and its implications for language acquisition and development have been explored in numerous research papers.

Intra-lexical code mixing is also common among speakers of English and Urdu. Speakers of these two languages often mix elements from both languages in order to communicate more effectively, especially in informal contexts. A speaker may use the English word "book" with the Urdu suffix "ain" to form the hybrid word "bookain", meaning plural of book.

2.3 Pronunciation

Pronunciation variation is a type of code-mixing which involves changing the pronunciation of words to make them more familiar. This type of code switching often occurs between languages that are closely related, such as English and Spanish or French and German. Pronunciation variation can involve the addition or subtraction of sounds, vowel shifts, accentuations, and other changes. For example, a French speaker may pronounce the Spanish word "casa" as "ka-sa", or an English speaker may pronounce the German word "Haus" as "hows". Pronunciation variation is often used to bridge gaps between two languages and make communication easier for bilingual speakers. For example, "Doctor" is often pronounced as "Daactar" or "brand" as "braand" in Pakistan.

2.4 Social Media Influencers and Code-mixing

Social media influencers have become a major force in the communication landscape (Luttrell & Wallace, 2021), and they are leading the conversation in terms of code mixing. Influencers have been able to reach large audiences on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, where they often make use of code-mixing strategies to engage with their followers (Al-Oraibi & Himood, 2022). This can be seen through the use of slang, abbreviations, and other forms of informal language that are usually associated with code-mixing. Furthermore, influencers often represent a variety of cultural backgrounds and languages, making their conversations even more diverse. As a result, they have become key players in the normalization of code-mixing and its acceptance within society (Tarihoran & Sumirat, 2022).

Moreover, influencers have been able to increase the usage of code-mixing as a tool for communication; by using it in their content, they encourage others to do the same. For example, some may post videos on YouTube speaking in a mix of multiple languages or show pictures that include text written in both English and Spanish. By doing so, they are helping to create an atmosphere where code-mixing is seen as normal and accepted. This has given rise to a new generation of people who use code-mixing in their everyday lives, with no shame or stigma associated with it (Meliani et al., 2021).

Therefore, influencers have played an important role in popularizing code-mixing and helping it to become more accepted in the mainstream. They have opened people's eyes to its benefits, and helped to create a space where diverse forms of communication can be enjoyed without fear of judgement. It is clear that social media influencers are leading the conversation when it comes to code-mixing, and their influence will only grow in the coming years (Afryanti et al., 2021).

3. Research Method

This investigation employed qualitative research methodology. A case study approach was utilized in which 5 influencers from Pakistan who used code switching in their posts were selected. The collected data was then analysed through the content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 2013). Content analysis is a method for analyzing text which involves

quantitatively organizing information into categories based on its content. It also involves reading and interpreting the text in a systematic manner. For this research, the content analysis involved coding each post or video for its linguistic characteristics (e.g., code mixing, dialects/words used, context of use).

The selection of influencers for this study was based on the criteria of having a large following and regularly incorporating code mixing in their posts/videos. We first identified five popular influencers that were using code mixing; English-Urdu. We then analysed their Instagram posts which contained code mixing. These were then analysed for their linguistic characteristics. The results of this research can be used to better understand the motivations behind code mixing.

4. Results

The analysis revealed three primary motivators for using code switching in the posts/videos of influencers. They were: 1) Making a post more relatable and natural; 2) Creating humorous or entertaining content; 3) Endorsing brands.

The table above summarizes the code-mixing percentages and motivations of five influencers on social media platforms. Irfan Junejo had 36 posts, with 8 (33%) of those containing code mixing; Junaid Akram had 63 posts, with 19 (30%) of those containing code mixing; Laraib Rahim had 105 posts, with 41 (39%) of those containing code mixing; Romaisa Khan had 83 posts, with 27 (32%) of those containing code mixing; and Ramish Safa had 65 posts, with 22 (34%) of those containing code mixing. The findings suggest that almost one third of the posts by these social media influencers on Instagram were using code mixing.

In terms of motivators for the influencers to use code-mixing, Natural Communication was the most popular, with 62%, 42%, 36%, 27% and 68% of the influencers using it in their posts respectively. Humour was also quite popular, being used by 38%, 26%, 17%, 34% and 23% of the influencers respectively. Endorsements was also a significant motivator, with 0%, 31%, 46%, 42% and 10% of the influencers using it in their posts respectively.

Table 1 Summary of Findings

Influencer	Irfan Junejo	Junaid Akram	Laraib Rahim	Romaisa Khan	Ramish Safa
Total Posts	36	63	105	83	65
Posts with Code Mixing	8	19	41	27	22
Code Mixing %age	33%	30%	39%	32%	34%
Motivators					
Natural Communication	5 (62%)	8 (42%)	15 (36%)	7 (27%)	15 (68%)
Humour	3 (38%)	5 (26%)	7 (17%)	9 (34%)	5 (23%)
Endorsements	0 (0%)	6 (31%)	19 (46%)	11 (42%)	2 (10%)

4.1 Making communication natural

The results of our study indicated that the primary reasons for code mixing were to bridge the gap between two languages and to make communication more natural. The primary motivation was to make the conversation more natural while speaking a foreign language. Code mixing can bridge the gap between two languages by adding elements from both languages to create a hybrid language which is easier for bilinguals to understand.

“last week Hyderabad jaane ka ittefaq hua” – Irfan Junejo

“Ajmeri Lassi and a bonus tutorial!” – Irfan Junejo

“Isi liay don't let those sneaky white label home automation product fool you into settling for a basic smart home setup.” – Ramish Safa

“Paisay bananay ka guaranteed cheat code!” – Ramish Safa

“Young generation ke sab say khatarnaak bimari” – Ramish Safa

“Controlling parents and papa ke pariyan 😊 tag someone who needs to hear this” – Ramish Safa

“Itna inactive bhi nahi hona hota Romaisa?” – Romaisa Khan

“Who's the best? Yeh to waqt hi batayega.” - Romaisa Khan

“Soft Eid makeup look inspo. Is se zyada skin friendly makeup nae ho payega mujhse” – Laraib Rahim

“Naaray walay ko diya life lesson” – Junaid Akram

4.2 Humour

The use of code mixing can also add humour to social media posts and videos. By mixing elements from two different languages, it could add an element of surprise and fun to the post/video. Influencers often incorporate humorous phrases in different languages or dialects as a way to break the monotony of their content. This helps them keep their followers engaged and encourages interaction with the audience. Additionally, code mixing can make boring topics more interesting by adding a humorous twist. Humour is a great way of engaging with an audience, and code-mixing gives them the opportunity to use different words from different languages in combination to create humorous effects. This can help boost engagement with their followers and even introduce new followers who might appreciate the comedic value.

“woh cool log kehte hain na dump, wesa wala!” – Irfan Junejo

“Every MARD needs to hear this. Tag all the MARDS” – Ramish Safa

“Yawr, what's life without drip, yawr.” – Ramish Safa

“Johar k paRak mein beth k jo chaat khai thi humne yad tou ai hogi tmhein? :)” – Romaisa Khan

“Hamari yaar ki shadi hai 1 down more to go” – Romaisa Khan

“Bariiii posing shosingggg” – Laraib Rahim

“We’re only getting gol-er baby, But i dont mind as long as its good food” – Laraib Rahim

4.3 Endorsements

Code-mixing can be used to tailor content to a specific audience. Brands have the ability to customize their message and make it relevant to different cultural and linguistic audiences by code-mixing. This helps them reach out to people across language barriers and engage with a larger audience. Additionally, code-mixing gives brands the opportunity to stand out from the competition by adding a unique flavour to their content.

The use of code mixing was also observed in endorsements by influencers. This can help increase the reach and visibility of a product as it is more relatable to their followers who speak multiple languages. By incorporating code switching, the influencer could make the product appear more desirable and organic as they have a better connection with their audience.

“Never thought my friend @harrisyusufzai will pull this off. Last week he surprised me by getting this amazing message posted on the @7uppakistan billboard and expressed his #DilKiBaat - yaar aisey hi boldete, ye karne ki kia zaroorat thi? But chalo khair hai” – Irfan Junejo

“Fake aur zehreelay log nay dil tau dukhaya hoga? Aisay he jaisay meinay @mtronicpk k liay @shahzebawan ko kaat dia. Isi liay don't let those sneaky white label home automation product fool you into settling for a basic smart home setup. You deserve better! As an Original Equipment Manufacturers, stick with us and always get the top-quality and innovation you deserve. Don't settle for the ordinary - upgrade your smart home with us and see the difference for yourself!” – Ramish Safa

“Level up kia? Nahi kia tu abhi #ColourfulRamadan khelain aur jeetain dheron rewards. Don't forget to post your scores on social media guys using the hashtags #LevelupWithFreeFire #RamadanWithFreeFire #FreeFirePakistan” – Romaisa Khan

“I am tou done with Karachi ka traffic aur marts ki lambi lines, now that I shop from #plentyspk woh bhi upto 40% off par my shopping has become so easy!” – Romaisa Khan

“Salon se Ariel aise hi thori istemal kar rahe hum. I know ke 1 chakkar mein Ariel hi hai jo hur daagh nikal dega. Nahi mante? Tou khud try karein. Buy your pack using

promo code ARIEL15 and get upto 15% off on Daraz when you buy Ariel original 2kg or more.” – Romaisa Khan

“Eid apnon k sath ho tou aur bhe pyari aur meethi lagti hai. No? @sapphirepakistan ready to wear! Now available in store and online.” – Laraib Rahim

“DARD-E-DIL ke ilawa if you’re suffering from any kind of DARD-E-JISM then this Ayurvedic Pain Relief Oil is ideal for you” – Junaid Akram

“This is what we call “Baal Baal Bachna”. You too can avoid unwanted mishaps and avail fast delivery and upto 40% off on everything” – Junaid Akram

“Education Kay Kharchay Huay Just Solved! Abhi JS Credit Cards se apni sari educational needs puri karo and get instant cashback!” – Junaid Akram

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The most common form of code-mixing observed within Pakistani influencer discourse is the combination of English and Urdu words. This allows them to express nuances that may be missing when speaking or writing in either language. The use of code-mixing by social media influencers can be seen as a form of cultural hybridity and familiarity that makes the content more relatable to their followers, particularly those who hail from Pakistan.

Social media influencers play an important role in providing information and entertainment to their followers. By incorporating code mixing in their posts and videos, they are able to better connect with their audience by creating a more natural form of communication that everyone can understand. This helps them establish stronger relationships with their followers as they are able to communicate on a more personal level. Additionally, using code switching helps influencers to reach a wider audience by being able to talk about topics in different languages and dialects. This allows them to share their ideas with a larger group of people and engage with other cultures more easily.

Based on the analysis, we can identify several reasons why social media influencers use code mixing. Primarily, these influencers are passionate about inspiring others to use English during communication, not out of any desire for prestige but instead to foster personal development. Furthermore, they do not want people to belittle other languages. Some of the sponsors and endorsers of influencers want them to post content in a mix of Urdu and English, as these types of posts are thought to be more appealing to their followers. Additionally, many international brands prefer that content is written in English so it can be understood by people from all over the world. Thus, influencers often use a mix of both languages in order to satisfy their sponsors and increase engagement.

The impact of this type of code-mixing on Pakistani followers is twofold. On one hand, it can help to bridge the gap between English and Urdu, allowing for a deeper understanding of both languages. On the other hand, it could potentially lead to a decrease in the standard of English used by followers as they become more accustomed to code-mixing language. This could potentially have a long-term impact on their ability to communicate effectively in formal and professional contexts. Ultimately, the impact of social media influencers' code-mixing on Pakistani followers in terms of their English is something that needs to be studied further. By

doing so, we can gain a better understanding of the dynamics at play between language, culture and the use of digital platforms within Pakistani society. This will help us to better understand how code-mixing can be used in a positive way and the potential effects it could have on its users.

5.1 Research Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study is that it was limited to a small sample size of Pakistani influencers. Furthermore, the content analysed was limited to Instagram posts and did not analyse the speech of the influencers. Future research should focus on a larger sample size and look further into other digital platforms such as Facebook or YouTube, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of code-mixing within Pakistan. Additionally, further exploration into the effect of code-mixing on Pakistani followers would be beneficial in order to determine its potential impact on their language abilities.

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