# Code-Switching in Television Talk Shows and its Impact on Viewers

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## *Abstract*

*This study is an attempt to explore the public opinion about code switching in TV talk shows. Satellite TV channels are the most effective and successful source of mass communication in the era. They can be used for motivation or demotivation, guidance or misguidance, education or propaganda as well as making the public opinion. And the language or the medium of communication is very much important in this regard. It would be absolutely right to say that language is the "soul" of communication.*

*Code switching is nowadays very common in radio and TV programs, especially talk shows. This research work is meant to address the public opinion especially of the educated class in this regard. A particular class from the general public is selected as respondents for this purpose. The data is collected through questionnaire. It is analysed with respect to positive and negative effects of code switching. And it is further concluded in the findings.*

## Introduction

Code switching is a very important aspect of bilingualism, and is considered a natural occurrence when two bilingual speakers engage in discourse. Mostly, such speakers are not consciously aware that they are code switching. Nonetheless, it serves an important social function. Whenever there is more than one language spoken in a community, its population code-switches for effective and impressive communication. Code switching is the blending, of two or more languages in discourse, often with no change in context and contents. The advantages and disadvantages of code switching are discussed by linguists/ researchers with an aim of educating or raising the level of awareness of the common folk.

Some linguists view code-switching as inevitable, and feel that it helps to express meanings more precisely, while others believe that code-switching basically pollutes a language, rather than enhancing the effectiveness of communication. Professionals in speech-language pathology have viewed the use of the amount and types of code-switching as indicators for relative language proficiency.

Code-switching is used to maximize communication and to strengthen not only the content but the essence of the message; it can be considered an asset, not a deficiency. However when used in great abundance, and to the degree that it interferes with communication, it can be considered a deficit.

The present study is an attempt to highlight the impact of code-switching, which exists in TV talk shows. Speaker may switch to any language; he or she is capable to speak. The choice of language depends upon speakers, setting, topic, etc. The objective of the research is to highlight the use of code switching in television talk shows.

In the beginning, this research work presents the background information, identifies the specific area of investigation and the questions to be answered. It also outlines the objectives, hypotheses, scope, and significance of the inquiry.

Secondly, efforts were made to introduce the works of all those sociolinguists, who provided the contemporary as well as the succeeding generations with sound knowledge of bilingualism and code-switching. Their work is beacon for the students of sociolinguistics. Because of their research, one can easily peep into the complicated world of Code-switching. It was intended to cover all those terms, concepts and ideas, which are essential to understand the role of a language and language choice in TV talk shows.

Third step deals with methodology. In this section the techniques and strategies, which were adopted to gather reliable and authentic data, has also been discussed.  Finally, in the perspective of sociolinguistics/ code switching, the collected data has been analyzed to address the basic question on which the research was based.

## Rationale

The incentive behind the selection of this topic for research is to explore the impact of code-switching on general public. The research also investigates the role of code-switching in the speech of the respondents. Most of the aspects related to code-switching in TV talk shows have been discussed in this research, in order to bring about awareness among audience that whether it is necessary for the present generation to frequently switch into foreign language or not.

## Research Questions

The research is the reflection of the following questions.

(i)     How does code-switching affect the process of communication especially in mass communication?

(ii)    What is the public opinion about code-switching?

(iii)   What is the impact of code switching on communication in the opinion of educated class?

## Literature Review

Code-switching is a common phenomenon in multilingual and bilingual societies. Pakistan is also among those countries, where multilingualism and bilingualism exist. There are number of indigenous languages which are spoken in Pakistan. Urdu is being used as "lingua franca". The influence of English as a foreign language is quite conspicuous. Majority of the educated class is almost bilingual in formal as well informal interaction. Code-switching from English to Urdu and vise versa is extensively in practice. And the most authentic and obvious examples are TV talk shows. In almost all the Urdu TV channels code-switching of English and Urdu is frequently exercised. It is bilingualism of English and Urdu which is commonally noticed in the TV talk shows of Urdu TV channels.

Bilingualism is a thriving discipline in contemporary academia, but there is no clear-cut definition of the term. Bloomfield (1933:56) terms it to be native-like control of two languages, however some other linguists such as Haughen (1953:7) consider that bilingualism is

when the speaker of one language can produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language. Franco Fabbro (1999:103) writes that bilinguals are individuals who master, understand, and speak (a) two languages, (b) two dialects, (c) a language and a dialect. Suzanne Romaine (1995:39) calls bilingualism a type of 'transition' to a new language.

Ogechi (2002) states that there is language contact with a large number of native languages and a language policy in a multilingual country. Some of the consequences of language contact include: language change, borrowing, interference, language mixing, language shift, language loss, code-switching, and pidginization and creolization.

Cummins, J. (1979) defines bilingual competence in terms of some ideal bilingual speaker with perfect knowledge of both the languages; in fact bilingual speakers characteristically use each of their languages in different social context and would not be expected to use either of them in all contexts.

Actually, bilingual individuals have different needs for their two languages which ascribe to them different social/emotional functions: what a language is used for, with whom, where; thus they do not necessarily have to develop a perfect knowledge, nor the same level of competence or performance in both languages. Bilingualism and multilingualism play an important social and cultural role in society since they are accessible to the vast majority of the population.

One of the earliest American studies in linguistic anthropology to deal with issues of language choice and code switching was George Barker's (1947) description of language use among Mexican Americans in Tucson, Arizona. In addition to his analysis of the economic relations, social networks, and social geography of Tucson residents, Barker sought to answer the question, "How does it happen, for example, that among bilinguals, the ancestral language will be used on one occasion and English on another, and that on certain occasions bilinguals will alternate, without apparent cause, from one language to another?" (Barker 1947:185-86)

Weinreich's description of code switching suggests that bilingual individuals possess two separate linguistic varieties, which (ideally) they employ on separate occasions. The ideal bilinguist switches from one language to another language according to the appropriate changes in the context (interlocutors, topics, etc.), but not in an unchanged situation and certainly not within a single sentence. If he does include expressions from another language, he may mark them off explicitly as 'quotations' by quotation marks in writing and by special voice modifications (slight pause, change in tempo, and the like) in speech. (Weinreich 1953: 73-74)

Poplack (1980) discusses two grammatical constraints on code-switching: (a) a free-morpheme constraint which states that a switch cannot occur between a lexical form and a bound morpheme unless the former has been phonologically integrated into the language of the latter and (b) the equivalence constraint rule which states that the word order immediately before and immediately after a switching point should exist in the two languages to make it possible for a switch to take place. The two languages involved can then be interchanged freely.

The Free Morpheme Constraint claims that code switching is present between a bound and a lexical form unless the latter has been phonologically integrated into the language of the bound morpheme (Sankoff and Poplack 1981: 5).

Blom and Gumperz (1972) were the founders of the modern perspective of Code switching, which accepts that Code switching is a sign of fluency rather than a sign of verbal deficiency. The present section aims at demonstrating that Code switching is not a naive phenomenon because it requires fluency in both languages involved in the process.

There are several factors crucial to the understanding of code switching like the community in which it takes place or mode of the bilingual speaker. Some communities accept code switching within a single context as the norm for communicative interactions whereas others maintain a strict distinction between the languages. It is thus

imperative to study code switching in a proper linguistic and cultural context.

Chana and Romaine (1984) considers that code-switching often occurs in communities under going rapid social and linguistic change, group boundaries may be diffusing, and norms and standards of evaluation may vary.

Code switching frequently takes place in bilinguals' discourse (Domingue, 1990; Myers-Scotton, 1993). Many linguists consider code switching a very critical issue in bilingualism (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Romaine, 1994), and it has a significant impact on bilingualism both at the societal level and at individual level (Romaine, 1994).

Code switching in adult conversations has been widely studied by researchers using sociolinguistic, grammatical, and psycholinguistic approaches. Among them, the sociolinguistic approach has been most influential. This approach focuses on bilinguals' communicative competence and motivation for code switching and code choice. Sociolinguists argue that one should investigate bilinguals' language use and code switching not only in terms of linguistic rules, but more importantly, the rules of language use that are shared by the members of the community to accomplish communicative functions (Romaine, 1989).

Gumperz (1982) suggests that code switching has important discourse functions for bilinguals. They constantly make choices about what language to be used during interactions. Bilingual speakers jointly construct social meanings situated in the interactions.

Code-switching within a sentence tends to occur more often at points where the syntax of the two languages align; It is, however , often the case that even unrelated languages can be "aligned" at the boundary of a relative clause or other sentence sub-structure.

A speaker of a language uses codes of other languages for more than a single reason.

1.  Code-switching a word or phrase from L2 into L1 facilitates conversation.

2.  Speaker to impress addressee uses it as a tool.

3.  It is used as a symbol of an educated society.

The distinction between intra-sentential and inter-sentential Code-Switching came as a solution to three other terms that were used earlier to distinguish various types of code switching, namely code changing, code mixing and code switching (McLure :1977).

One of the more complete theories of code switching within sociolinguistics is the Markedness Model, developed by Carol Myers-Scotten (1993). According to the Markedness model, language users are rational, and choose a language that marks their rights and obligations relative to others in the conversational setting. When there is no clear unmarked choice, code switching is used to explore possible choices.

Speakers select the appropriate language and stick with it as much as they are able. Based on the knowledge of Sociolinguistics, bilingualism, Multilingualism, code switching and other related terms, I have attempted to highlight the issues of code switching in TV talk shows.

**Methodology**

The sample includes the respondents with not less than Masters Qualification. A qualitative research approach has been adopted. A questionnaire has been designed in the perspective of research questions for the collection of data. Ninety percent respondents are students of M Phil Social Sciences/ Education at Hamdard University Karachi. Most of them are interested in TV talk shows. They have been briefed about the concept and meanings of code-switching. The purpose of this research work is properly discussed with them. Questionnaire is only distributed among those who are willing to participate. The collected data is consequently analyzed in response to research questions and findings have been mentioned at the end.    The respondents are both males and females.

**Data Collection**

For the collection of data a questionnaire consisting of eleven questions was prepared, which contains the following features:

      i)   It defines the code-switching in very simple words.

      ii)  It briefs about the context in a few sentences.

      iii) It is meant to collect the information in the perspective of research questions.

      iv) It asks about the favourite talk shows of the respondents.

      v)  It asks about the name and qualification of the respondents for easy reference.

All the respondents are well matured and highly educated. They have master degrees in different disciplines like English Literature, English Linguistics, Islamic Studies, MBA, Philosophy etc. The objective behind their selection was to collect the matured and educated opinion to address the matter of code-switching in TV talk shows. Thirty questionnaires were distributed and twenty five were collected from the respondents. Almost all the respondents were quite co-operative because of their matured level of understanding. That's why I did not face any hurdle in the process of data collection. All the respondents are above 25 years of age. Some of them are even above fifty.

**Data Analysis**

There were supposed to be four responses to nine questions and two to one question. All the responses have been tabulated in the form of percentage with respect to 25 respondents. The highest percentage is highlighted in responses of each question to help understand the collected data in an overview. The questions from the questionnaire are also mentioned against each response of the question for ready reference and comprehension of the data. The answers to question number seven are quite interesting, therefore, original words of the respondents are quoted.

## Detailed Analysis

The collected data is analysed in detail in the following lines in accordance with the under mentioned table.

| Responses | | | | Questions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a | b | c | d | 1. Code- Switching is …………..…….activity in TV talks shows. (a) an important  (b) an unimportant (c) a meaningful  (d) a meaningless |
| 20% | 16% | 36% | 28% | |
| a | b | c | d | 2. Code- Switching…………….the effectiveness of communication. (a) enhances (b) corrupts (c) distorts (d) decreases |
| 52% | 08% | 16% | 18% | |
| a | b | c | d | 3. Frequent use of Code- Switching help understand the message …. (a) easily                (b) very easily (c) with some difficulty (d) with great difficulty |
| 40% | 8% | 36% | 16% | |
| a | b | c | d | 4. Code- Switching does have a…...….effect on viewers or audience. (a) Good   (b) bad   (c) better   (d) worse |
| 24% | 24% | 28% | 16% | |
| a | b | c | d | 5. The main cause of Code- Switching is…………. (a) multilingualism (b) bilingualism (c) shortage of vocabulary in one language (d) expertise in more than one language. |
| 16% | 20% | 44% | 24% | |
| a | b | c | d | 6. A person who switches from one language to another alternatively. (a) facilitates the audience (b) does not bother the audience (c) shows himself or herself educated (d) show as lack of expertise in one language |
| 36% | 12% | 40% | 12% | |
| See the note below. | | | | 7. Do you like Code- Switching? Give reasons for your answer.* |
| a | b | c | d | 8. Code- Switching should be……………..….in TV talk shows. (a) continued          (b) seldom used (c) frequently used  (d) avoided |
| 32% | 20% | 8% | 10% | |
| Yes | | No | | 9. TV talk shows should be purely in one language. YES      NO |
| 56% | | 44% | | |

| Responses | | | | Questions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a | b | c | d | 10. I prefer ………………....…... for TV talk shows. |
| 12% | 16% | 68% | 8% | (a) English   (b) Urdu   (c) both English and Urdu (d) Code-Switching of English and Urdu |
| a | b | c | d | 11. A TV channel must be strict to its medium. I…… |
| 60% | 12% | 28% | 0% | (a) agree      (b) strongly agree (c) disagree  (d) strongly disagree |

Total no respondents: 25
Percentage: 25=100%
**Note:** Reasons given by respondents in response to question #7 have been originally
         quoted separately on page#13, 14 & 15.
\*       This question contains the answer in right up.

## Interpretation of Data

(i)    In response to question no.1, twenty percent respondents consider that code-switching is an important activity, sixteen percent  as un important, twenty eight percent as a meaningless while thirty six percent consider that it is a meaningful activity.

(ii)   The collected data in response to question no. 2 mentions that fifty two percent respondents are of the opinion that code-switching enhances the effectiveness of communication, eight percent corrupts, sixteen percent distorts and eighteen percent consider that it minimizes the effectiveness of communication.

(iii)  Majority of the respondents i.e. 40% consider that frequent use of code-switching help understand easily, while eighteen percent are of the opinion that it creates the difficulties in the comprehension of the message. 36% respondents consider that it creates some difficulty to understand the message and eight percent opine that it creates great difficulty to understand the message meaningfully.

(iv)   Code-switching has a bad as well as good effect on the audience according to the twenty four percent respondents. It has better in the opinion of 28% and worse effect on listeners in the opinion of 16% audience.

(v)    There can be multiple causes of code-switching. Among the given options sixteen percent respondents have exercised their opinion in the favour of multilingualism, 20% in the favour of

bilingualism. Forty four percent believes that it is due to the shortage of vocabulary in one language and twenty four percent consider it due to the expertise in more than one language.

(vi) Thirty six percent respondents hold the opinion that code-switching facilitates the audience in the process of comprehension. Forty percent consider that a speaker switches from one language to another to show himself or herself educated and 12% believe that code-switching shows the lack expertise in one language and speaker does not even bother the audience while switching from one code to another.

(vii) Respondents have given multiple reasons for their like and dislike of code-switching, which are mentioned on page#13, 14 & 15.

(viii) Thirty two percent respondents have exercised their opinion in the favour of code-switching in TV talk shows, 10% are against its use, and 20% consider that it should not be used frequently while 8% hold the opinion that it should be frequently used in TV talk shows.

(ix) The use of purely one language in TV talk shows have been favoured by 56% and opposed by 44% respondents.

(x) Replying to the choice of language in TV talk shows, 68% respondents have favuored both English and Urdu, 16% Urdu, 12% English and 8% have favoured the code-switching of English and Urdu.

(xi) Sixty percent respondents agree, 28% disagree, and 12% strongly agree that a TV channel must be strict to its medium.

**Responses to Question # 7**

- *"Yes only I like it"*
- *"It facilitates the speaker as well as well the listener to communicate and share ideas without any obstruction and discontinuation of rapid flow of thoughts"*
- *"I think code switching should not be made part of ones habit for it brings the basic language under the control of the other language. More over it distorts the infrastructure and melody of the language"*
- *"I do not like code switching because it happens only due to short vocabulary in that specific language. It should only be used when*

*audience are not understanding and they desire to change the language"*

- *"No I don't like code switching now a days it is adopted as a culture and we are going to loose our vocabulary of our Urdu language and most of people using wrong words during code switching only to show himself educated"*
- *"No"*
- *"It demonstrates how one is aware of communication of language usage"*
- *"I don't like code switching"*
- *"In this way we can easily communicate our ideas demands, problems and emotions to other nations and very effective source to reduce communication gap between multi-nations"*
- *"There is no harm in code switching as long as you do not deviate from the topic of the discussion"*
- *"No, I don't like code switching because it distorts the effectiveness of the message" "At time it can be allowed when there is, shortage of vocabulary and to make communication effective"*
- *"There are lots of political terms which are using in present era. These terms are related to English term in the sense of origin that's why it is not worse for communication according to my opinion"*
- *"Code switching enhances the effectiveness of communication and frequent uses of code switching help understand the message easily"*
- *"Yes sometime I do. I think it helps interceptive communication easier and more meaningful"*
- *"Code switching helps listener to have better understanding of the message"*
- *"N/A"*
- *"No, never"*
- *"This is very important to make good participations"*
- *"Yes, I like to improve my knowledge"*
- *"Code switching helps us to understand the particular discourse"*
- *"Code switching is a natural phenomena because the language evolve with time and not every language can be used with its full vocabulary"*
- *"It depends if the casual discussion there switching is fine whereas in formal discussion switching could distort the image"*
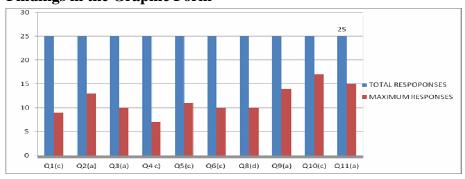
- *"I don't like but due to some reason people are used to frequent use of both languages so it is better to use one language"*
- *"I did not like it because usually it creates difficulty, because some people but most of the people in Pakistan did not understand the difficult words of English so when the representer started speak English in the mid of Urdu. It makes the show interest-less for audience"*

**Conclusion**

In view of the collected data it is concluded that people have a diverse opinion about the use of code-switching in TV talk shows. The findings of this research are concluded on the opinion of majority in the following lines.

1) Code-switching is meaningful activity in TV talk shows.
2) Code-switching helps to understand the message easily.
3) Code-switching enhances the effectiveness of communication.
4) Code-switching does have a better effect on the audience.
5) The main cause of code-switching is shortage of vocabulary in one language.
6) Code-switching is practiced to show himself or herself educated.
7) The practice of code-switching should be continued in TV talk shows.
8) TV talk shows should be purely in one language.
9) English and Urdu should preferably be the language of TV talk shows.
10) A TV channel must be strict to its medium.

**Findings in the Graphic Form**

| QUESTION | TOTAL RESPOPONSE | MAXIMUM RESPONSE |
|----------|------------------|------------------|
| Q1 (c)   | 25               | 9                |
| Q2 (a)   | 25               | 13               |
| Q3 (a)   | 25               | 10               |
| Q4 (c)   | 25               | 7                |
| Q5 (c)   | 25               | 11               |
| Q6 (c)   | 25               | 10               |
| Q8 (d)   | 25               | 10               |
| Q9 (a)   | 25               | 14               |
| Q10 (c)  | 25               | 17               |
| Q11 (a)  | 25               | 15               |

**Note:**  (i)  Figures in the vertical order in the above mentioned graph shows the total number of responses i.e. 25.

(ii) In the horizontal order "Q" shows the number of question and letters in the brackets mention the maximum attempted options.

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