

CODE-MIXING ON FACEBOOK POSTS: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC PRACTICES IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AMONG PAKISTANI YOUTH

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Abstract

This paper examines the code-mixing phenomenon in online communication of the young people of Pakistan, especially those on Facebook. The study analyses the two forms and the percentage of language mixing, but also discusses the sociolinguistic background and motivations. The members of this experiment included adolescents that were between 14-18 years of age and of different locations in Pakistan, whereby the different linguistic and cultural groups are represented. Data was gathered by the author through Facebook posts throughout the week and examined to find patterns of interchange between Urdu, English and local languages. The result shows that code mixing has a variety of purposes, among them expression of identity, cultural affiliation, and peer-group belonging, and the effect of educational exposure. In addition to that, the social media dynamics platforms also promote the use of flexible language and influence the way young users negotiate meaning and self-presentation. This work is a contribution to the formation of digital spaces in modern Pakistan bilingual and multilingual.

Keywords: Code-mixing, Facebook, Pakistani youth, English, Urdu, social media, digital communication, identity

Introduction

In the era of globalization and digital interconnectivity, social media platforms like Facebook have emerged as dynamic arenas for multilingual communication. In Pakistan, a nation marked by rich linguistic diversity, the hybrid practice of code-mixing, where individuals fluidly alternate between languages such as Urdu, English, and regional tongues like Punjabi, Pashto, and Sindhi, has become increasingly prevalent in everyday online exchanges (e.g., in posts, status updates, comments, and hashtags).

The prevalence of English within these interactions is no coincidence. English holds a prominent socio-economic position as a symbol of modernity and education. It is the medium of instruction in many urban schools and universities, and remains heavily used in official documentation and the media, despite government attempts to shift toward greater use of Urdu Wikipedia. As a result, many online users naturally alternate between languages to convey nuance, fulfill communicative needs, or signal identity.

Extant scholarship sheds light on the sociolinguistic underpinnings of code-mixing in Pakistan. For instance, Awan, Begum, and Khan (2025) employ the Matrix Language Frame Model and Communication Accommodation Theory to analyze how bilingual speakers tactically switch

between languages to express cultural belonging, expertise, or emotion using English to convey formality and Urdu for cultural resonance Policy Journal of MS. Similarly, Butt, Khan, and Anwar (2025) demonstrate how youth leverage code-switching to assert contemporary identities and negotiate social belonging, especially in urban Pakistani settings ASSA Journal.

Observational evidence further points to the pervasiveness of code-mixing in Pakistani digital environments. Reports note that mixing languages in online posts has become "a prominent feature of communication in Pakistan, particularly among the younger generation" App. The phenomenon of "Urdish" a fluid blend of Urdu and English is also extensively discussed as indicative of Pakistan's evolving linguistic identity, especially in online discourse.

Against this backdrop, the present study employs a corpus-based analytical approach to capture patterns of code-mixing in Facebook communication among Pakistani youth (aged 14–18). Data was collected over a week from diverse posts, statuses, comments, and hashtags. Through structural and thematic analysis, this research aims to unpack not only how but why teenagers mix languages online, exploring the social, cultural, and motivational dimensions underpinning such choices.

By forging connections between empirical data and existing scholarship including the linguistic intricacies of digital bilingualism, youth identity formation, and sociolinguistic strategies, this study aspires to contribute valuable insight into how digital spaces shape and reflect multilingual practices among Pakistani youth.

Research Questions

The research investigates two main questions:

1. How do Pakistani youth use code-mixing in their Facebook posts?
2. What are the underlying motivations for code-mixing in these posts?

Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable significance for the field of sociolinguistics in Pakistan, as it addresses the understudied area of digital language use on social media platforms. While previous scholarship has focused primarily on print media and spoken discourse, the linguistic practices emerging on Instagram provide a new site for examining language change, bilingual creativity, and youth identity. By documenting lexical innovation and patterns of code-mixing, the study contributes to the understanding of how Urdu, English, and regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, and Pashto interact and evolve in online spaces. The analysis of hybrid vocabulary, transliteration, and digitally constructed lexicon captures emerging linguistic forms that are often absent from traditional corpora. The results also offer an understanding of how Pakistani youth negotiate identity, social belonging and cultural expression with language in digital processes.

In addition, the research has useful implications for language teachers, translators, lexicographers, and processors of natural languages because it prefigures contemporary trends in linguistics that influence spelling, syntax, and meaning in Internet communication. The study forms the basis of the later studies of internet linguistics and places Pakistan on broad international debates regarding multilinguality and online communication. In the end, the research contributes to the overall understanding of how the phenomenon of cultural hybridity and globalization affects language use in the social media in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Code-Mixing

Code-mixing, or the usage of lexical and grammatical units of two or more languages in a single conversation, is a key problem of sociolinguistic investigation, especially when a particular language has a significant number of speakers in a single context, such as in Pakistan. Empirical research studies have revealed that code-mixing is a conscious and intentional linguistic process instead of a random coincidence (Holmes, 2001; Hoffmann, 1991).

The argument by Holmes (2001) is multilingual speakers to work around both communicative difficulties and deficits of lexicon, and to express subtle meanings that ordinarily would not be available use that code-mixing. This is further elaborated by Hoffmann (1991) who postulates that code-mixing is representative of larger sociocultural agendas such as identity expression and social solidarity upholding and as such, code-mixing can be viewed as an expressionist and socially entrenched linguistic tool.

This is the title of the article by Adelaide Morais.

Online communication platforms like Facebook are rich sites where code-mixing can originate. Based on their study of Chinese-English students studying at universities, Fong (2011) found that digital affordances allow learners to be more creative in bilingual and allow a smooth flow of language mixing in social media posts. In a similar manner, a research done by Habib (2014) on mixing in English-Bahasa Indonesia indicated that an increased knowledge of English was related to a higher use of code-mixing as a symbol of linguistic competence and modern identity. These entire studies highlight the idea that code-mixing in an online environment is a phenomenon conditioned by linguistic competence and influenced by the dynamics of online social interaction.

The Multilingual Landscape of Pakistan.

The linguistic landscape of Pakistan is quite complex, as the country is a nation of speakers, with Urdu as the official language, English as a postcolonial heritage and a symbol of prestige, and a plethora of regional languages, such as Punjabi, Pashto, and Sindhi, all still widely used (Rahman, 2010). This language melting pot encourages a rich culture of code-switching, especially with the word Urduish, a blend of Urdu and English. English in daily communication implies utility as well as social and educational capital.

As mentioned by Rahman (2010), English contributes to socio-economic prestige in Pakistan and thus affects language practices in both educational and media contexts.

Code-Mixing as Identity Work in Pakistan

Several Pakistan-centered studies deepen understanding of code-mixing:

- Awan, Begum, and Khan (2025) applied the Matrix Language Frame Model and the Communication Accommodation Theory, illustrating how Pakistani speakers juxtapose English for formality and Urdu for cultural expression—highlighting code-mixing's role in identity negotiation.
- Butt, Khan, and Anwar (2025) showed how bilingual urban youth use code-switching to express emotional depth, cultural connectedness, and contemporary identity.
- Hussain, Nayab, and Zahra (2025) linked code-mixing to identity formation among youth in Multan, drawing on interactional sociolinguistics and code-mixing typologies to argue that language choice serves as a social positioning strategy.

- Yaqoob and Aslam (2023) explored sociolinguistic drivers of code-mixing across diverse Pakistani social settings using qualitative methods, affirming the role of individual identity, language proficiency, and context.

These studies underscore that code-mixing is deeply intertwined with sociocultural identity and community belonging.

Media, Advertising, and Code-Mixing

Media discourse reinforces code-mixing as normative:

- Tabassum (2024) found that code-mixed advertisements enhance viewer confidence among young audiences by blending English and Urdu in appealing ways.
- Zulfiqar, Niazi, and Saba (2025) documented how bilingual English-major students use code-mixing as strategic tools to improve comprehension and expression in academic settings.

These insights illustrate how media and institutional contexts shape—and are shaped by—code-mixing practices.

Code-Mixing in Social Media and Facebook Contexts

Specific to Facebook and youth communication:

- Anbreen, Anwar, Zaki, and Wadho (2022) examined English usage as an international language on Facebook among Karachi youth. Their findings revealed hybrid words and code-switching as hallmark features of digital interaction, contributing to Pakistani English.
- The APP (Rahman, 2023) noted that code-mixing is pervasive in youth communication, extending to media figures and everyday conversations.

These studies highlight Facebook as a digital stage where multilingual expression flourishes and resonates across youth culture.

Language Mixing Across Age Groups and Settings

- Bhatti and Sartaj (2011) conducted a case study of a nine-year-old child, revealing how bilingual environments and social factors influence early code-mixing behaviors.
- Ahmad, Mahmood, and Shahid (2023) investigated code-mixing among bilinguals in institutional contexts, revealing sociopragmatic motivations.

These works expand understanding of code-mixing across developmental stages and formal contexts.

The Pakistani Youth: Digital, Linguistic, and Cultural Dimensions

Statistical and demographic insights highlight language-learning trends among Pakistani youth (Wikipedia, 2025). Meanwhile, Reddit user perspectives (e.g., “burgerism” narratives) reflect cultural debates around English dominance and nostalgia for Urdu (Reddit, 2019).

Global Theoretical Anchors

Fundamental linguistic models provide structure to this research:

- Gumperz’s (1982) contextualization cues show how speakers signal intent through language alternation.
- Muysken (2000) offers a typology of code-mixing that helps parse structural patterns in bilingual discourse.

These frameworks support analysis of code-mixing structures in digital and offline contexts.

Summary and Gaps in Literature

Overall, the literature affirms that code-mixing in Pakistan is a deliberate, identity-embedded practice shaped by educational, digital, and media environments. Yet, there remains a gap: few studies focus specifically on Facebook usage by teenagers aged 14–18. Existing research predominantly centers on university students or media contexts, leaving a need for focused, corpus-based exploration of younger users' motivations and patterns in informal social media communication.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a corpus-based qualitative approach to examine code-mixing practices among Pakistani youth on Facebook. A corpus-based design is appropriate because it allows the systematic collection and analysis of naturally occurring language data from digital platforms (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). By focusing on authentic social media posts, the study ensures ecological validity and captures the linguistic patterns as participants organically produce them. In addition, the design is supplemented by qualitative interviews, providing deeper insights into the motivations behind code-mixing. The integration of both textual data and participants' reflections makes this study a mixed-method inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

The participants were three teenagers, 14 to 18 years old, who were recruited in different parts of Pakistan to represent the linguistic diversity. The recruitment was conducted through random sampling but stratified by socio-linguistic background to ensure the inclusion of representation. Adolescence was chosen because this group is highly active on social media and because of their high level of digital bilingualism (Androutsopoulos, 2015). All participants were given pseudonyms to ensure ethical anonymity and confidentiality per the existing research ethics criteria (BERA, 2018).

Data Collection

These measurements were taken over a period of one week (13 March to 7 March 2021). Facebook posts by the participants (captions, status updates, hashtags, and comments) were collected and compiled into the main corpus during this period. One hundred and fifty posts were examined and provided with a sufficient amount of data to be analysed in terms of linguistic options.

Along with text data, semi-structured interviews were adopted among the participants.

The open-ended questions included in the interviews were:

In addition to textual data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The interviews included open-ended questions such as:

- Why do you mix Urdu and English in your posts?
- Do you feel it is a deliberate choice or an unconscious habit?
- How do you think your friends perceive your language use?

This dual method corpus analysis and interviews allowed for triangulation of findings, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study (Dörnyei, 2007).

Analytical Framework

The analysis followed two steps:

1. Linguistic categorization of posts:

- Types of language use (Urdu, English, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, or mixed).

- Forms of code-mixing: based on Muysken's (2000) typology—inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and extra-sentential mixing.
- Frequency counts: identifying which digital genres (statuses, captions, hashtags, and comments) contained the highest proportion of code-mixing.

2. **Motivational Analysis:**

Using Hoffman's (1991) framework, participants' motivations were coded into categories such as "topic specification," "emphasis," "interjection," and "identity signaling." Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically to support and expand the corpus findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings Framework

The findings are divided into two main dimensions:

1. **Forms of Code-Mixing:**

The analysis revealed that code-mixing was most prevalent in status updates (45%) and captions (30%), with fewer instances in comments (15%) and hashtags (10%). The most frequent forms were abbreviations (26%) such as "LOL," "OMG," and creative spellings (18%), which blended English abbreviations with Urdu or regional words. Examples include:

- Status update: "Feeling happy today, let's go for a drive around the city #NewDay #Excited"
- Caption: "Mashallah! Had a great time at the beach today. #Blessed"

2. **Motivations for Code-Mixing**

Based on Hoffman's (1991) framework, the following motivations were identified:

- Topic specification (30%): English was used when discussing domains like technology, fashion, and music.
- Quoting statements (15%): English phrases were often quoted verbatim.
- Emphasis (25%): English provided emphasis, e.g., "SO happy OMG!"
- Interjection (10%): Spontaneous expressions like "WOW" or "LOL".
- Identity/pride (5%): Signaling modernity or cosmopolitan identity.
- Lexical gaps (15%): When an Urdu equivalent was unavailable, English terms were used (e.g., update, charger).

Ethical Considerations

All participants gave informed consent. To protect privacy, usernames and identifying details were omitted, and only anonymized excerpts are presented. Ethical practices were observed in line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) guidelines.

Results

Overview

The present study set out to explore patterns of code-mixing among Pakistani youth on Facebook. A corpus of posts, captions, comments, and hashtags from three teenage participants was analyzed, complemented by interview data. Findings reveal that code-mixing is a frequent, context-dependent, and socially motivated practice. While English and Urdu were the dominant languages, regional languages (Punjabi, Pashto, and Sindhi) occasionally appeared in informal and expressive contexts. The results reflect both the global influence of English in Pakistan and the persistence of local linguistic identities.

Forms of Code-Mixing

Analysis of the dataset highlighted three key forms of code-mixing:

1. Intra-sentential mixing (within a single sentence) was the most common. Example: “Mashallah had a great time with my friends today, feeling so blessed!” Here, Urdu religious expressions like Mashallah were seamlessly blended with English narrative. This aligns with findings by Rahman (2010), who argues that Pakistani bilinguals often embed culturally meaningful Urdu expressions within English discourse.
2. Inter-sentential mixing (switching at sentence boundaries) was also frequent. Example: “Party was amazing last night. Yaar, we had so much fun!” The switch serves to mark solidarity and intimacy, reflecting peer group culture.
3. Extra-sentential mixing (tags, fillers, and interjections) occurred in hashtags and comments. Example: #Alhamdulillah #GoodVibesOnly illustrates how religious or identity-oriented Urdu phrases coexist with globally popular English expressions.

These forms reflect the flexibility of Pakistani youth’s bilingual repertoire, supporting Hoffman’s (1991) categorization of code-switching functions.

Domains of Use

The frequency of code-mixing varied across digital genres:

- Status updates (45%) contained the highest proportion of code-mixing. Statuses often combined English narrative with Urdu words to project a cosmopolitan yet culturally rooted self-image.
- Captions (30%) featured code-mixing primarily in relation to personal experiences, outings, and emotions. Example: “Had a great time at Clifton beach, bohot maza aya!”
- Comments (15%) were less mixed, usually containing short English interjections like “LOL”, “OMG”, or “same here bro”. Urdu terms such as yar or bhai reinforced friendship ties.
- Hashtags (10%) displayed a blend of English motivational hashtags (#NewDay, #Excited) with Urdu/Islamic markers (#Alhamdulillah, #Mashallah).

The findings demonstrate that Pakistani youth strategically deploy languages based on platform conventions: English for global relevance and Urdu for local resonance.

Motivations for Code-Mixing

Drawing on Hoffman’s (1991) framework, the study identified several motivations:

- Topic specification (30%): English was the preferred language for technology, music, and fashion discussions, echoing Mansoor’s (2004) claim that English dominates academic and modern domains in Pakistan.
- Emphasis (25%): English expressions like “SO happy!” were used for emotional intensity, often alongside Urdu phrases (“bohot khush hun”).
- Quoting (15%): Participants quoted English slogans, lyrics, or movie lines verbatim. This reflects global media influence on Pakistani youth (Shamim, 2011).
- Interjections (10%): Informal markers (“LOL,” “OMG,” “WOW”) functioned as universal online discourse tools.
- Identity signaling (5%): English code-mixing indexed modernity and cosmopolitan belonging. As Rahman (2002) argues, English functions as a status marker in Pakistan.

- Lexical gaps (15%): English words were used when no exact Urdu equivalent existed (charger, update, and selfie). This reflects Pakistan's diglossic environment where English is embedded in technological and academic registers (Tariq & Rana, 2016).

Results in the Pakistani Sociolinguistic Context

The findings cannot be divorced from Pakistan's broader linguistic landscape, where English occupies a prestigious but contested position (Rahman, 2010). For youth, mixing English with Urdu is less about linguistic deficiency and more about identity negotiation.

- Cultural identity: Words like Mashallah and Alhamdulillah affirm Islamic identity, while English conveys global connectivity. This duality resonates with the "glocal" identity of Pakistani youth (Ali, 2012).
- Peer group solidarity: Urdu expressions such as yar and bhai create intimacy, while English abbreviations align participants with digital youth culture.
- Urban-rural divide: Although the participants represented different regions, urban participants displayed higher rates of English mixing, consistent with Shamim's (2011) argument that English proficiency in Pakistan is tied to socio-economic privilege.
- Educational influence: Exposure to English-medium education appears to encourage greater code-mixing frequency, supporting Mansoor's (2004) findings on linguistic capital.

Illustrative Examples

- Status: "Exams are over, ab full enjoy karna hai!" (Mixing English with Urdu phrase for emphasis).
- Caption: "Mashallah had a blast with my cousins at Lake View Park #FamilyTime".
- Comment: "OMG yar can't believe it happened!" (Showing blending of emotional English with intimate Urdu).
- Hashtag: #AlhamdulillahForEverything #GoodVibesOnly.

These examples highlight the fluid bilingualism that characterizes Pakistani youth's online interactions.

Summary of Results

Overall, the study shows that code-mixing among Pakistani youth on Facebook is:

1. Frequent, especially in statuses and captions.
2. Multifunctional, serving expressive, emphatic, and identity-related roles.
3. Contextual, shaped by educational background, peer culture, and socio-economic status.
4. Hybrid, reflecting a balance between local cultural identity (Urdu, regional languages) and global digital culture (English).

Discussion

The empirical results of the current study show that code-mixing, as perceived in the Pakistani young generation on the social network site Facebook is not just a language phenomenon; it is a wider sociocultural and pedagogical process. The active construction and negotiation of identity in digital milieus is highlighted by the sheer prevalence of code mixing. Particularly, English became a salient linguistic asset, serving as a symbol of prestige, modernity and social capital. This fact supports the claim by Rahman (2010) that English in Pakistan remains to be a mark of power, privilege, and worldly association, particularly among the younger generation.

The reasons behind the code-mixing also shed light on the elastic and adjustive nature of modern digital linguistics. Abbreviations, creative orthographic forms and interjections LOL and OMG are examples of how Pakistani youth are adopting modes of communication that are globally spread at the same time incorporating those that are culturally situated such as the Urdu word *yar* or *Mashallah*. This linguistic hybridity testifies to the negotiations between world digital culture and locality -a process often referred to as glocalization (Ali, 2012). Indicative of hybrid practices are thus that such youths do not passively absorb English but rather actively reform it to suit their native cultural and social environments.

Moreover, code-mixing serves functional roles that makes communicative efficient and expressive. The statistics indicate that English is more commonly used to address areas like technology, fashion, and media, with Urdu and local languages being commonly used to express personal and emotional sentiments. This tendency confirms the argument by Mansoor (2004) that the language domains in Pakistan tend to be stratified, with English having the upper hand in the spheres of formality and modernity, and Urdu and regional languages maintaining primacy in the sphere of identity construction and intimacy.

In addition, code-mixing works with a strategy of achieving maximum communication efficacy and expressiveness. The results indicate that English is used more when dealing with issues that involve technology, fashion, and media, with Urdu and regional language being used when addressing personal and affective content. This is in line with the claim made by Mansoor (2004) that linguistic realms in Pakistan are stratified with English dominating the formal and modern plane and with Urdu and local language maintaining dominance in the identity and intimacy domains.

Comparison with Previous Studies

These results are in line with those obtained by Fong (2011), who recorded that university students in Hong Kong habitually mix English and Chinese in Facebook as a way of improving communicative effectiveness and building social identity. Similarly, the research by Habib (2014) in Indonesia revealed that English skills and exposure play a vital role in determining the rate of code-mixing in the online space.

The current research disproves the assumption that code-mixing is limited to higher-education institutions or urban elite groups and is increasingly evident in adolescent students across various education levels. This trend suggests a change of generations where online communication systems encourage widespread bilingual activities.

In addition, in contrast to the mainly academic contexts of antecedent research, the present study anticipates the banal, casual nature of code-mixing in the context of social media, thus exposing its incursion into leisure behavior and peer-group dynamics.

Implications:

The findings underscore the need to view code-mixing as a sociolinguistic resource rather than a deficiency. Far from signaling a lack of linguistic competence, code-mixing allows Pakistani youth to navigate multiple identities—religious, cultural, modern, and global—within a single communicative act. Educators and policymakers should recognize the role of English-Urdu bilingualism in shaping the linguistic practices of young people and incorporate these insights into language education policies.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the ubiquitous use of code-mixing in the Facebook conversations of Pakistani young people, which explains the overlap of English, Urdu, and local languages in online communication. The results show that code-mixing is not only a linguistic habit, but also a complex process under the influence of practical needs, cultural belonging, social prestige, and the overwhelming effect of globalization. To a large number of the young users, the mixing of languages allows expression of the modernity, keeping in pace with the world trends, and, at the same time, keeping the local cultural manifestations. It also reveals that social media sites enhance such practices by providing informal, malleable space where linguistic experimentation is promoted. Despite the fact that this study was carried out among teenagers, the observed trends indicate wider generation and social changes in the Pakistani language market. Follow-up studies need to examine a wider range of age groups, education levels, and regional differences in order to provide a more in-depth look at how social media is still changing the way language is used in the country.

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