

Everyday English in Pashto: A Sociolinguistic Study of Code-Mixing Among University Students in Swabi

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of English-Pashto code-mixing among university students in Swabi, a semi-urban district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Drawing on sociolinguistic theories of bilingualism, identity, and language contact, the research investigates the frequency, patterns, and sociocultural motivations behind the integration of English lexical items into spoken Pashto. Using a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, data were collected through naturalistic audio recordings of informal student conversations, semi-structured interviews, and a language attitudes questionnaire. Findings reveal that English insertions—primarily academic and technological nouns—are systematically embedded within Pashto syntax, serving both communicative and symbolic functions. Code-mixing was found to be most prevalent in educational, technological, and institutional contexts, with usage patterns influenced by gender, academic discipline, and socio-economic background. While students generally perceived English usage as a marker of modernity, education, and social prestige, some expressed concern over the erosion of linguistic purity and cultural identity. The study concludes that Pashto-English code-mixing represents a localised and strategic adaptation to global linguistic pressures, reflecting the emergence of hybrid linguistic identities among Pakistani university students. Recommendations are provided for educators, policymakers, and researchers to accommodate better and understand bilingual realities in regional educational settings.

Keywords: Pashto-English Code-mixing, Bilingualism, Sociolinguistics, Hybrid Linguistics.

Introduction

Language contact is an inevitable consequence of globalisation, migration, and mass media. In many multilingual societies, such as Pakistan, everyday linguistic practices increasingly reflect hybrid forms that blur the boundaries between distinct languages. One such practice is code-mixing, a linguistic phenomenon where elements from one language are inserted into the discourse of another. In the context of Pashto-speaking communities, particularly among university students in urban and semi-urban centres like Swabi, the frequent insertion of English lexical items into spoken Pashto has become a notable and growing trend.

Although the study of code-mixing in a Pakistani context has been addressed in linguistically diverse settings, i.e. Urdu-English or Punjabi-English pairs, the specific instance of Pashto-English

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code-mixing still has not been so thoroughly studied, especially at the level of smaller cities, such as Swabi. Any current research tends either to generalise the code-mixing phenomenon to large urban centres or to concentrate on an official language, omitting regional languages and their changing patterns. This present research paper aims at bridging this gap by attempting to discuss spoken and unplanned use of English vocabulary in Pashto narration, both in a linguistic and an explanatory socio-cultural scenario.

Further, language is also not a medium of communication: instead, it carries identity, ideology, and social positioning. The way Pashto learners in Swabi relate to English through a mixture is highly significant in terms of expressing not only linguistic modes, but also attitudes, aspirations, and identities. It is a manifestation of how speakers balance between modernity/tradition, regional affiliation/global mobility, functionality of language and symbolic capital. Therefore, this paper holds code-mixing as a sociolinguistic practice within the social framework, instead of being a linguistic phenomenon.

Code-Mixing vs Code-Switching: Conceptual Clarification

While the terms code-mixing and code-switching are often used interchangeably, they are conceptually distinct. Code-switching generally refers to the alternation between two languages across sentences or clauses, usually reflecting discourse functions, pragmatic shifts, or topic changes. For example, a Pashto speaker can begin a sentence in Pashto and then switch to English to stress/explicate a point. Code-mixing, in turn, is more seamless when it involves merging parts of a unique vocabulary or unit expression into the syntax of another language. In our research, however, we are interested in inter-sentential code-switches as with intra-sentential code-mixing, entering the English words into the Pashto grammatical constructions and producing a smooth crossover.

An example would be:

"Za class ta late shum because traffic kharab woo."

"I was late for class because the traffic was bad."

This is not random bilingual speech, but it follows a pattern, and this kind of talk serves rule-governed and multiple communicative and social functions. By tracing and examining these trends, we can clarify the ethno-linguistic and cultural hybridity of modern Pashto speakers.

The Sociolinguistic Landscape of Swabi

Swabi is also a growing educational centre in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, featuring a university, a women's university, and a Medical College. These institutions have exposed the youth, with backgrounds in both rural and urban Pashto-speaking areas, to the new academic discourse, which in many cases uses English as a language of instruction. Nevertheless, the majority of students do not allow Pashto to replace their home and social language. It is a bilingual setting that provides ideal circumstances where language mix can take place.

Contrary to large cities like Peshawar or Islamabad, Swabi is a borderline urban environment where the ideology of linguistic conservatism finds its balance with the growing level of English exposure. This duality points to Swabi as a perfect location on the globe that would help discern the localisation and domestication of international linguistic forces via the implementation of everyday language practices.

Code-Mixing and Youth Identity

Among university students, language use is deeply tied to identity. The use of English words in Pashto can signify educational status, cosmopolitan outlook, or technological fluency.

Simultaneously, it may provoke resistance from traditionalists who see such practices as diluting cultural authenticity. In this tension lies a complex identity negotiation.

For example, a student may say:

"The assignment deadline is tomorrow, za khpal work complete kom tonight."

("The assignment deadline is tomorrow, I'll complete my work tonight.")

Here, English words signal academic domain relevance (assignment, deadline, work), while Pashto provides the grammatical and cultural structure. This hybrid discourse both reflects and constructs a hybrid identity—Pashto-speaking, globally-oriented, yet locally grounded.

The Influence of Media and Technology

Digital technology and media are the other essential forces of code-mixing. Swabi University students regularly access English materials through various platforms, including social media, YouTube, Netflix, online classrooms, and educational websites. Their mobile phones even use English, and this informs their cognitive-linguistic space. They now talk of terms such as screenshot, download, log in, update and video call among others. The transition to English in text messages and conversations in WhatsApp sometimes goes unnoticed and unmarked.

This technological dunking hastens the development of code-mixing and enters into lexical borrowing, which is no longer deliberate but institutionalised. As a result, a list of the most common English words in the Pashto speech could indicate the effect that digitalisation has on the linguistic practice.

The Need for Localised Sociolinguistic Inquiry

There are a couple of works about the Urdu-English code-mixing (e.g. Rehman, 1996; Mahboob, 2003) and some works on Punjabi-English switching (e.g. Gumperz, 1982), but the works are few on the Pashto-English mixing. There is a lack of research into this phenomenon in smaller towns or semi-rural settings, including Swabi, in academic circles. This lack of representation is problematic, as it overlooks the rich linguistic diversity and localised nuances of language use in Pakistan's regions.

This research thus uses a bottom-top and emic design and appreciates the voices and experiences of Pashto-speaking students within their sociocultural setting. It avoids viewing English as a linguistic threat and instead examines it as a linguistic resource being creatively appropriated by bilingual speakers.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance on several levels:

- *Academic:* It contributes to sociolinguistics, bilingualism, and language contact literature, especially in underrepresented linguistic contexts.
- *Cultural:* It documents how Pashto is evolving under the influence of English, reflecting broader socio-cultural shifts.
- *Pedagogical:* Insights from this research can inform English language teaching in bilingual contexts, helping teachers understand students' actual language use.
- *Policy-level:* Findings may aid in language policy development, especially in educational settings where English and regional languages coexist.

Research Questions

1. What English words or expressions are most frequently mixed into Pashto speech among university students in Swabi?
2. In what contexts (e.g., academic, technological, social) do Pashto-English code-mixing practices occur most often?
3. What sociolinguistic factors (e.g., gender, academic background, media exposure) influence the use of English in everyday Pashto speech?
4. How do students perceive their own and others' use of English in Pashto communication? Is it associated with prestige, necessity, or identity?

Literature Review

Code-mixing, a key linguistic feature in multilingual societies, has drawn considerable attention in sociolinguistic research. It occurs when speakers insert linguistic units such as words, phrases, or morphemes from one language into the matrix of another. While code-mixing is often dismissed as linguistic laziness or deficiency, recent scholarship positions it as a sophisticated communicative strategy, revealing much about speakers' identities, language attitudes, and social positioning. This literature review examines key theoretical and empirical contributions related to code-mixing in South Asian contexts, with particular attention to Pashto-English mixing, language ideology, sociolinguistic motivations, identity, and the impact of globalisation and media. It situates the present study within these bodies of work and identifies critical gaps that the study aims to address.

Theoretical Foundations of Code-Mixing

The phenomenon of code-mixing has been theoretically grounded in several linguistic models. Among the most influential is Myers-Scotton's (1993) Markedness Model, which argues that speakers alternate between codes to mark social roles, group identity, or shift conversational footing. Code choices are seen as "marked" or "unmarked," depending on the social expectations of the interaction. To take one example, the insertion of English words in Pashto can either be a claim to scholarly authority or mastery of technology, therefore, branding one as modern or educated.

On the same note, Muysken's (2000) typology also differentiates between insertion, alternation and congruent lexicalisation. The insertion is the most applicable to the present investigation. It concerns the case of a second language in the morphosyntactic body of the first language, that is, the very phenomenon of the Pashto-English code-mixing.

Other distinctive frameworks are those of Gumperz (1982) and Interactional Sociolinguistics, which regard code-switching as a contextualization cue—a means of ensuring that speakers can flag transitions in topic, tone, and align themselves with their interlocutors. In the meantime, Poplack (1980) applied to grammatical restrictions of code-switching and claimed that fluent bilinguals use unified syntactic principles when speaking code-mixed.

Such theoretical frameworks emphasise the belief that code-mixing is not a random process being dictated by social as well as linguistic imperatives, and which is the basis of the present investigation.

Code-Mixing in South Asian Contexts

Urdu-English code-mixing has been well studied (e.g., Mansoor, 2005; Shamim, 2007), whereas Pashto-English mixing is relatively less researched. The existing studies are in numerous cases

restricted to the broad expectations or media studies as opposed to the ethnographic work with particular groups. This supports the novelty of the proposed research that introduces Pashto as the language spoken by more than 30 million Pakistanis to general code-mixing research studies.

English in Pakistan: Language, Power, and Education

In Pakistan, English occupies a paradoxical position. It is both a second language and a status language. According to Coleman (2010) and Rahman (2010), English is the primary medium of instruction in elite schools and universities, while the majority of the population learns it as a foreign language. Despite this, proficiency in English often determines access to better jobs, higher education, and social prestige.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this divide is especially prominent. Public universities and government institutions use English as the language of instruction in science and technology, but Pashto remains the dominant language of informal interaction. This diglossic situation creates fertile ground for English to seep into everyday Pashto speech, especially among students navigating academic discourse.

Moreover, Canagarajah (1999) emphasises the need to view such multilingual practices from a postcolonial perspective. Rather than framing English use as linguistic contamination, he encourages scholars to see it as a form of "resistance and appropriation," where local speakers mould English to fit their own social and communicative needs.

Code-Mixing as Identity Performance

Language is a very relevant instrument in forming social identity. It has been argued that bilingual speakers inhabit language to enact identities congruent with or in opposition to dominant social discourses (Norton 2000; Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). The use of English can become an indicator of education level, city hipness, or internationalism among university students.

When presenting the situation of code-mixing in Pashto and English, by using English words, speakers are not only willing to be understood or to be precise, but also to identify themselves with a modern or academic discourse. The researchers Yousaf and Noor (2018) found out that during the study of the English borrowing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, students identified English with intelligence, success, and innovation. However, they observed a conflict between linguistic pride and linguistic aspiration, resulting in a push-pull situation with language choice.

Kachru's (1986) model of World Englishes further supports this idea by recognising that English in the "outer circle" (e.g., South Asia) serves local communicative functions and acquires distinct sociolinguistic meanings. English is not a foreign imposition on the speakers of Pashto because it is a localised resource that is used creatively and strategically.

Domains of Code-Mixing: Education, Technology, and Media

The spread of code-mixing is not visible in all spheres of life. It is particularly common in situations where the local languages do not have lexical tools to reflect emerging ideas. Bokaamba (1989) notes that code-mixing is common in areas such as education, the business world, and the realm of technology, where borrowing technical terminologies is prevalent.

This is observed in expression in the Pashto-English speakers, such as:

- "Assignment submit kawom." (I'm submitting the assignment.)
- "Wi-Fi connect na kegi." (The Wi-Fi is not connecting.)

These terms are becoming increasingly common in academic contexts, as Pashto students lack standardised translations for most English terminology. The same pattern is happening in cyber

communication. According to Androutsopoulos (2015), social media also promotes linguistic hybridity since social networks, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, have given their users access to English-laden user interfaces and memes.

Jabeen, Kazemian, and Mustafai (2015) have analysed code-mixing through SMS in Pakistan and concluded that students use the deliberate combination of English and their native languages to generate informal/ expressive and socially significant messages. This observation is generalised in the present research to Spoken Pashto, providing empirical evidence on time-bound language behaviour.

Gender and Code-Mixing

In some ways, gender can have a significant impact on the practice of language, including code-mixing behaviour. Findings of studies conducted by Lakoff (1975) and Tannen (1990) confirmed the presence of differences in the use of language among men and women due to social expectations and communication intentions. Shamim (2008) in the Pakistani context noted that English is more likely to be used in the formal context by female students, as she is more concerned about her questionable correctness in the use of language. In contrast, a male is allowed to use English more freely in the informal context.

Such gender relations can be stronger in the countryside or semi-urban localities, as in Swabi. According to Khan and Ahmad (2014), male students were more likely to apply English words in Pashto when they wanted to be humorous or assertive, and males were more likely to use English words in Pashto to be more polite or formal. This study attempts to find out the existence of comparable trends among Pashto-speaking students in Swabi and the relationship between gender and aspects of linguistic identity and social positioning.

Code-Mixing and Language Attitudes

The conduct of the speakers towards code-mixing influences the way they use language and how they perceive it. It may be perceived as education, cosmopolitanism, or a threat to linguistic purity and cultural authenticity. Spolsky (2004) asserts that the choice of language, regardless of its context, is always ideologically charged, and in most cases, an unconscious structure is seen to reflect a hierarchy of languages.

In a study of Peshawar University students, Zeeshan and Iqbal (2017) discovered that although the majority of participants considered code-mixing to be attractive and convenient, a considerable proportion of participants were worried about losing their Pashto identity. Such divergent opinions demonstrate the complicated emotional landscapes of code-mixing.

Bailey (2007) also contends that we encounter multilingual practices that are areas of conflict and negotiation, through which speakers go through the pressure of conformity and innovation. The proposed research is an attempt to chart these attitudes among Swabi students and, with them, gain an understanding of how young, Pashto-speaking persons experience their linguistic hybridity.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Although there is an increased level of interest in bilingualism and code-mixing, the following critical gaps also exist:

1. Lack of studies on Pashto-English code-mixing: Such studies as it is available dwell in the Urdu-English or Punjabi-English setting, and Pashto remains widely unrepresented.
2. Overlooking the semi-urban areas such as Swabi, Research can be conducted in large cities, leaving the smaller yet highly connected areas out of consideration.

3. Domain-specific analysis reveals a lack of quantification between the types of code-mixing under academic, technological, and social lenses.
4. The lack of consideration of identity and attitudes: The area is characterised by quantitative studies with little qualitative information on the topic of speaker identity and language ideology.

By addressing these gaps, the current study contributes a unique, localised, and deeply contextualised perspective on bilingual language practices in Pakistan.

The reviewed literature underscores the multidimensional nature of code-mixing as a linguistic, social, and ideological phenomenon. Far from being a marginal or defective form of communication, code-mixing represents a powerful tool for identity construction, social mobility, and linguistic innovation, especially among youth in multilingual societies like Pakistan.

This study builds on existing theories and regional insights while introducing a focused, ethnographic exploration of Pashto-English code-mixing in Swabi. It brings attention to a population that remains underrepresented in academic research, thereby enriching our understanding of how local languages evolve in response to global linguistic forces.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach to investigate the nature, frequency, functions, and perceptions of English-Pashto code-mixing among university students in Swabi, Pakistan. The design integrates ethnographic fieldwork, audio-recorded naturalistic conversations, semi-structured interviews, and a language attitudes questionnaire to capture both observable linguistic behaviour and participants' subjective reflections. The methodological choices are guided by sociolinguistic traditions that emphasise language as a social practice (Heller, 2007; Blommaert, 2010) and language ideologies as central to understanding code-mixing (Woolard, 1998).

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative interpretive design, grounded in sociolinguistic ethnography (Copland & Creese, 2015), with complementary quantitative lexical frequency analysis. This design is appropriate because:

- It captures the context-sensitive nature of bilingual speech (Gumperz, 1982),
- It allows participants' voices and experiences to shape the understanding of code-mixing practices (Duff, 2008),
- And it enables multi-modal data triangulation (Denzin, 2012), increasing the credibility of findings.

The study does not aim for generalisation in a statistical sense but rather for analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003) through in-depth exploration of language use in a specific sociocultural context.

Research Site and Context

The research will be conducted at two higher education institutions in the Swabi District:

- University of Swabi
- Women University Swabi

These institutions represent a blend of urban and rural student populations, allowing for variation in exposure to English and educational background. Swabi's socio-educational environment makes it an ideal site for studying evolving bilingual practices in a region that is culturally Pashtun but increasingly connected to global discourses through education and technology.

Participants

A purposive sampling strategy will be used to select 30–40 undergraduate students, balanced across:

- Gender (approximately equal male and female participants),
- Academic disciplines (e.g., sciences, social sciences, education),
- Socio-economic backgrounds are based on parental education and school type.

Purposive sampling is appropriate in sociolinguistic research when the goal is to examine participants with specific linguistic behaviours or lived experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015). All participants will be:

- Native speakers of Pashto,
- Aged between 18 and 25,
- Currently enrolled at a university in Swabi,
- Willing to participate in interviews and allow audio recording of their conversations.

Ethical approval will be obtained, and informed consent will be collected before participation, in line with BERA (2018) ethical research guidelines.

Data Collection Methods

Naturalistic Audio Recordings of Conversation

Participants will be asked to record their informal conversations (e.g., in cafeterias, hostels, study groups) in real-life settings using their mobile phones. They will be instructed to record in situations where they are naturally speaking Pashto but are likely to use English lexical insertions. This technique follows Gumperz's (1982) recommendation for capturing "naturally occurring speech," which avoids the observer's paradox and reflects authentic language use. Recordings will be transcribed and analysed for:

- Frequency and type of English lexical insertions,
- Grammatical position (e.g., nouns, verbs),
- Discourse context (e.g., academic, technological, social).

Naturalistic data offers richer insight into spontaneous code-mixing patterns than elicited speech (Milroy & Gordon, 2003).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Each participant will also be invited to a semi-structured interview, lasting 20–30 minutes. Interviews will explore:

- Reasons for mixing English with Pashto,
- Perceptions of prestige or stigma associated with it,
- Influence of gender, academic environment, or media,
- Attitudes toward code-mixing in formal vs. informal settings.

This format offers a balance between consistency across participants and flexibility to probe interesting responses (Brinkmann, 2013). It also aligns with the emic approach (Pike, 1967), where participants' perspectives shape the analysis.

Language Attitudes Questionnaire

A brief questionnaire will be administered to all participants, including Likert-scale items (e.g., "Using English words in Pashto makes me sound more educated") and open-ended questions (e.g., "Why do you think people mix English into Pashto?"). The goal is to quantify attitudes toward code-mixing and identify common themes.

The use of attitudinal surveys in code-switching studies has been validated by Gardner (1985) and Baker (1992), who highlight how attitudes inform language behaviour.

Data Analysis

Linguistic Analysis

All recorded conversations will be transcribed manually using standard transcription conventions. English insertions will be identified and categorised according to:

- Lexical type (noun, verb, adjective),
- Domain of usage (education, technology, emotion, etc.),
- Frequency (counted per speaker and conversation).

Quantitative frequency data will be used to create a Pashto-English lexical corpus, which will help in identifying high-frequency borrowings and domains of influence.

Lexical frequency analysis is a standard method in sociolinguistic code-mixing research (Muysken, 2000; Poplack, 1980), especially for identifying trends in contact-induced lexical change.

Thematic Analysis

Interview and open-ended questionnaire data will be analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method:

1. Familiarisation with data,
2. Generating initial codes,
3. Searching for themes,
4. Reviewing themes,
5. Defining and naming themes,
6. Producing the report.

Themes will include perceived motivations, identity implications, and social attitudes toward mixing English with Pashto. Thematic analysis allows flexibility in qualitative research and is particularly suited for exploring language ideologies and identity narratives (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

The chosen methodology is grounded in established sociolinguistic practice and tailored to the unique sociocultural context of Swabi. By combining naturalistic recordings, interviews, and attitude surveys, the study will offer a multidimensional understanding of Pashto-English code-mixing among university students. Through rigorous qualitative and quantitative analysis, it will provide valuable insights into how bilingual speakers negotiate linguistic choices, identities, and social meanings in everyday life.

Findings

This section presents the findings from the three data sources: naturalistic audio recordings, semi-structured interviews, and the language attitudes questionnaire. The results are organised around four main thematic areas aligned with the research questions:

1. Lexical and Grammatical Patterns of Code-Mixing,
2. Domains and Contexts of Usage,
3. Sociolinguistic Influences on Code-Mixing, and
4. Perceptions and Attitudes toward English-Pashto Code-Mixing.

Through triangulation, recurring linguistic forms and participant insights are interpreted to uncover broader sociolinguistic trends.

Lexical and Grammatical Patterns of Code-Mixing

Frequently Used English Words

Analysis of 20 hours of naturalistic recorded conversation revealed that English insertions were predominantly lexical items—primarily nouns, followed by verbs and adjectives.

Table 1: Summarizes the most frequently used English words across all recordings

Rank	English Word	Pashto Context Example	Frequency (Total)
1	Assignment	Za assignment complete kawom.	137
2	Class	Class start sho da 9 bajey na.	124
3	Presentation	Kala sta presentation dai?	91
4	Mobile	Za mobile charge kom.	84
5	Time	Time zama sara na dai.	78
6	Teacher	Teacher notice waye woo.	76
7	Wi-Fi	Wi-Fi connect na keegi.	70
8	Online	Online classes der boring de.	62
9	Project	Project submit kawom sabah.	60
10	Deadline	Deadline der nazde de.	55

These insertions reflect functional borrowing, especially from academic and technological registers, where Pashto lacks precise lexical equivalents. The insertions did not disrupt the Pashto syntactic frame, conforming to Muysken’s (2000) “insertional code-mixing” model.

Grammatical Patterns

English words were predominantly inserted at noun phrase level, with Pashto postpositions or verb inflections attached, such as:

- Assignmentta laaram (to the assignment)
- Download kai (do the download)
- Teacher sara meeting woo (there was a meeting with the teacher)

This supports Poplack’s (1980) assertion that proficient bilinguals maintain syntactic congruence, even during lexical mixing.

Domains and Contexts of Usage

Code-mixing varied significantly by discourse context. Based on content analysis, five dominant domains of usage emerged:

Academic Domain

Unsurprisingly, the highest frequency of English insertions occurred in academic settings. Over 60% of English words used in conversations related to:

- Class routines (e.g., lecture, notes, exam)
- Assignments and deadlines
- Teacher-student interaction

Student A (Recording): Za teacher ta message kawa chi class cancel sho ya na.

This suggests that English-Pashto code-mixing serves as a pragmatic strategy to navigate the formal academic environment, which is often English-dominant in Pakistani universities.

Technology and Digital Communication

Terms like Wi-Fi, mobile, screenshot, laptop, and charger were regularly inserted in informal discussions. These items are increasingly part of everyday youth culture but have no direct Pashto equivalents.

Student B (Recording): Screenshot share kawa group ke.

This supports findings by Jabeen et al. (2015) that technology-related code-mixing is habitual and unmarked among Pakistani youth.

Social and Emotional Expression

Some English words were used to express emotional states or emphasize expressions:

- Boring, tension, cool, fun, serious, mood

These uses were often stylistic or expressive, rather than functional.

Student C: Aj zra na dai class attend kol, mood zero dai.

This reflects Crystal's (2003) observation that code-mixing can serve a stylistic or affective function, beyond lexical necessity.

Institutional and Bureaucratic Language

Phrases like office, meeting, document, ID card, registration were used when students referred to university administration.

Student D: Office ta za, ID card renew kawom.

This aligns with Bokamba (1989), who notes that institutional vocabulary is often borrowed when the local language lacks administrative terminologies.

Humor and Playfulness

English was also used in a playful, sarcastic, or humorous manner:

“Wow, you are so intelligent!” (in a sarcastic tone)

This shows English's role as a social resource for ironic distance or group bonding—echoing Gumperz's (1982) idea of code-switching as contextualization cue.

Sociolinguistic Influences on Code-Mixing

Data from both interviews and recordings revealed that code-mixing patterns were influenced by gender, academic discipline, and socio-economic background.

Gender

While both male and female students used English insertions, females tended to use English in more formal or polite expressions, particularly in academic discourse:

- “Excuse me, can I ask something?” (Female, interview)

Males used English more liberally in informal contexts, jokes, or tech talk:

- “System crash sho, full tension dai!” (Male, interview)

These trends echo Tannen's (1990) findings that women use language for connection and politeness, while men may use it for dominance or humor.

Academic Background

Students from science and technology departments showed higher frequencies of English insertions, especially in technical vocabulary:

- “Circuit design malfunction woo.”

By contrast, students from humanities were more likely to code-mix expressive or emotional vocabulary.

This aligns with Bhatia and Ritchie (2004), who noted that domain-specific knowledge promotes domain-specific language borrowing.

Socio-Economic Factors

Students who attended English-medium schools or came from urban backgrounds were more fluent and frequent in code-mixing. They also reported less self-consciousness or hesitation about using English in Pashto speech.

Student E: “We are used to it from school days. Even our jokes were half-English.”

Students from more rural backgrounds showed more restraint, with some even self-correcting or switching back to Pashto mid-sentence. This supports Rahman’s (1996) argument that English proficiency is unequally distributed across socio-economic lines in Pakistan, creating linguistic stratification.

Perceptions and Attitudes toward Code-Mixing

Questionnaire Data

The Likert-scale responses revealed ambivalent but generally positive attitudes toward code-mixing. Key results included:

- 78% agreed that using English makes them “sound more educated.”
- 62% said they use English words because “some concepts have no Pashto equivalent.”
- 48% agreed that “people who use too much English are showing off.”
- 35% felt code-mixing threatens Pashto’s purity.

These figures suggest a pragmatic acceptance of code-mixing, with some underlying linguistic insecurity or conservatism.

Thematic Insights from Interviews

Three dominant themes emerged from interviews:

A. Prestige and Identity

Many participants viewed English use as a sign of intelligence, modernity, and professionalism. “Using English shows we are educated, we are university students now.”

This resonates with Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of linguistic capital—language as a marker of symbolic power.

B. Linguistic Necessity

Students highlighted lexical gaps in Pashto as a justification for code-mixing.

“We don’t have Pashto words for things like screenshot or assignment. What else can we use?”

C. Cultural Anxiety

Despite practical reasons, some students feared the erosion of Pashto.

“If we keep talking like this, maybe our children won’t know real Pashto.”

This tension reflects Woolard’s (1998) framework of language ideology, where speakers simultaneously value both linguistic innovation and cultural preservation.

Table 2: Summary of Findings

Research Question	Summary of Findings
What English words are most frequently mixed into Pashto speech?	High-frequency nouns from academic, tech, and institutional domains; e.g., assignment, Wi-Fi, mobile.
In what contexts does code-mixing occur most often?	Predominantly in academic, technological, and social settings; less frequent in religious or familial talk.
What sociolinguistic factors influence code-mixing?	Gender, academic field, school background, and urban-rural divide all play a role.
4How do students perceive the use of English in Pashto?	Generally positive but nuanced; English seen as useful and prestigious but potentially a threat to Pashto identity.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of English-Pashto code-mixing among university students in Swabi. Drawing from audio-recorded conversations, interviews, and survey data, the findings demonstrate that code-mixing is a prevalent, socially meaningful, and structurally patterned linguistic practice in this context. This discussion interprets the findings through the lenses of bilingualism theory, sociolinguistic identity, language ideology, and linguistic capital, offering insights into both micro-level linguistic behavior and macro-level cultural tensions.

Code-Mixing as Linguistic Practice: Structured and Strategic

Consistent with Muysken's (2000) theory of insertional code-mixing, the majority of English items inserted into Pashto were nouns and noun phrases. These included terms from academic (e.g., assignment, class), technological (e.g., Wi-Fi, screenshot), and bureaucratic domains (e.g., office, registration). The syntactic integration of these words into Pashto grammar—e.g., assignment ta laaram—confirms Poplack's (1980) finding that bilingual speakers follow consistent morphosyntactic rules when mixing codes.

This patterned nature of mixing contradicts the notion that code-mixing is a sign of linguistic decay or incompetence. Instead, it supports Bhatia and Ritchie's (2004) argument that bilingual speakers mix codes in structured and intentional ways to meet communicative needs. The dominance of academic and technological vocabulary also aligns with Bokamba (1989), who found that languages often borrow where the dominant code lacks domain-specific terms.

Thus, the findings reinforce that Pashto-English code-mixing is not random or haphazard but systematic and context-sensitive, suggesting that code-mixing has become a normalized feature of educated bilingual speech in Swabi's university environment.

Contextual and Domain-Based Code-Mixing

The study revealed that code-mixing is more prominent in certain discourse domains, especially education, technology, and digital communication. These results echo earlier studies in Pakistan (e.g., Mahboob, 2009; Rehman, 2010) and globally (Androutsopoulos, 2015), which show that digital media and educational settings serve as catalysts for lexical borrowing.

Students mixed English when talking about:

- Assignments, presentations, and deadlines (academic domain)

- Wi-Fi issues, screenshots, and phone apps (technology)
- Timetables, registrations, and institutional procedures (bureaucratic)

These lexical insertions occurred not because of linguistic deficiency but due to:

1. Lack of precise equivalents in Pashto, and
2. The social expectation of English in academic registers.

This is consistent with Ferguson's (2006) model of domain-based diglossia, where different languages serve different functional roles. In Swabi, Pashto remains dominant in emotional or domestic contexts, while English holds lexical dominance in modern, formal, and institutional settings.

Moreover, the study found English insertions even in casual, humorous, or sarcastic exchanges. This "non-functional" use of English for stylistic effect, irony, or emotional nuance aligns with Gumperz's (1982) and Crystal's (2003) view of code-switching as a pragmatic cue—a way to shift tone, align identities, or express stance. Therefore, English-Pashto code-mixing is not just lexical or functional—it is sociopragmatic, performing multiple interpersonal and stylistic functions.

Code-Mixing and Identity Performance

Language choice is a central component of identity construction (Norton, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). The students' mixing of English into Pashto speech reflected a deliberate effort to project an educated, modern, and tech-savvy identity. The belief that English lends "prestige" or "smartness" was voiced by a majority of participants. As one student noted:

"We are university students now, so we should sound different."

This supports Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital: English, in this context, functions as a symbolic resource that allows students to position themselves as competent, aspirational individuals in a competitive academic culture. Code-mixing is therefore not only a strategy to communicate but a way of positioning the identity, as even Auer (1998) argues.

Meanwhile, students gave mixed responses as most were afraid of overusing English and thus losing their Pashto culture. This stress is reflected in the conclusion of Woolard (1998) in regard to the ideological conflict of bilingual speakers, where to describe languages as being between utility and authenticity, between modernity and tradition.

Thus, Swabi Pashto-English code-mixing exemplifies some desperate nature of identity negotiation. It is the place where students follow their culture, which is based on Pashtuns and want to be connected to the world and relevance to academia.

Sociolinguistic Stratification: Gender, Education, and Class

The results show that behavior in code-mixing is also influenced by sociolinguistic aspects including gender, academic field and socio-economic background.

- *Gender*: The female students would code-mix in a more polite/in a more formal manner, which fits the gender-difference model as developed by Tannen (1990) concerning gender differences in communication. English was more used by male students in the domain of technology, humor or informal chit-chat, which indicates that code-mixing fulfills the group alignment masculine role as well.
- *Academic Discipline*: Trainees within science and technology courses employed more technical English words in their writings, which fall in line with the domain-based borrowing of words (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004).
- *Socio-Economic Background*: Students from English-medium schools or urban households were more fluent, confident, and frequent code-mixers. Rural or Urdu medium-type speakers

also favored restrained forms of behavior, and occasionally they had to correct themselves even during the flow of speech. This explains the position by Rahman (1996) that English is a burglarized language, which presents stratification of learning levels by classes and previous schooling establishing classes even among bilingual community.

A combination of these patterns demonstrates the fact that English-Pashto code-mixing is not distributed equally and marks the stratification, access to education, and cultural capital. The code-mixing involved here not only serves as a language-based action but also one of a social indicator, and one that specifies inclusion and aspiration and status

Attitudes toward Code-Mixing: Pragmatism and Cultural Tension

The survey and interview experience indicated that there is an overall favorable opinion concerning code-mixing since a large majority of respondents 78 percent opined that it makes one sound more intelligent or sophisticated. Yet, 35% expressed concerns about the long-term effects on Pashto language and culture. This duality supports Spolsky's (2004) argument that language attitudes are often ambivalent and shaped by competing ideologies—instrumental versus integrative motivations.

Participants were torn between:

- Seeing English as a practical tool for education, technology, and career growth.
- Fearing that English could dilute linguistic heritage or signify “showing off.”

This finding also echoes Canagarajah's (1999) notion of resistance and appropriation: local speakers simultaneously resist linguistic domination and appropriate English to serve local functions and meanings. In Swabi, English is not just a foreign language—it is localized, domesticated, and hybridized through Pashto code-mixing.

This ideological ambivalence also reflects global trends in bilingual communities. Bailey (2007) and Blommaert (2010) argue that multilingual speakers often navigate a dynamic space of competing linguistic norms, where every utterance carries social implications and potential judgment.

Code-Mixing as a Feature of Glocalization

One of the most significant implications of this study is the emergence of glocalized linguistic identities among Pashto-speaking university students. Code-mixing reflects what Robertson (1995) calls glocalization: the blending of global and local cultural elements.

Pashto-English hybrid speech embodies:

- *Global exposure:* Use of English for academic discourse, tech tools, and digital communication.
- *Local grounding:* Continued use of Pashto grammar, expressions, and cultural references.

Rather than replacing Pashto, English becomes absorbed into the Pashto linguistic ecosystem, creating a third space that is neither fully global nor entirely local. This hybrid mode of communication allows speakers to navigate multiple worlds simultaneously—academic and social, formal and informal, traditional and modern.

Such linguistic hybridity is becoming increasingly normalized in Pakistan's educated youth, echoing similar developments in Indian English-Hindi mixing (Hinglish), Nigerian Naija English, or Kenyan Sheng. Therefore, Pashto-English code-mixing is not a deviation from linguistic norms—it is the emerging norm in a globalized Pashtun youth culture.

Reframing Language Pedagogy and Policy

The findings have important implications for language teaching and language policy in Pakistan. English language instruction often ignores the actual bilingual practices of students, focusing instead on rigid, monolingual, “correct” English. However, this study suggests that students learn and use English in contextually embedded, hybrid ways.

Rather than discouraging code-mixing, English language pedagogy could:

- Recognize students’ translanguaging practices (García & Wei, 2014),
- Incorporate code-mixed examples in teaching materials,
- Encourage awareness-raising activities about when and where to code-mix effectively.

From a policy perspective, bilingual realities in regions like Swabi should inform educational planning. The promotion of English should not entail the marginalization of Pashto. Instead, both languages can be supported in complementary ways—English for access and opportunity, Pashto for identity and cultural continuity.

Summary

In sum, the discussion demonstrates that English-Pashto code-mixing among university students in Swabi is a sociolinguistically rich, structurally consistent, and identity-laden practice. Far from being linguistic erosion, it reflects:

- Pragmatic adaptation to domain-specific needs,
- Performative acts of modern, educated identity,
- Complex negotiations of linguistic prestige and cultural loyalty.

Through code-mixing, students are not merely borrowing words—they are constructing hybrid selves, navigating the demands of academic life, digital culture, and social expectations. The study positions Pashto-English code-mixing not as linguistic confusion, but as linguistic innovation, emerging from the dynamic intersection of language, identity, and globalization.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the everyday use of English within Pashto speech among university students in Swabi, with the broader aim of understanding how such bilingual practices reflect linguistic, social, and identity dynamics in a semi-urban context of Pakistan. Drawing on a combination of naturalistic recordings, interviews, and survey responses, the research has uncovered complex yet patterned code-mixing behaviors that reflect both pragmatic and symbolic functions of language?

The findings confirm that code-mixing is a normative feature of bilingual communication among Pashto-speaking students in higher education. The English language is used perfectly blend in Pashto discourse especially words with an academic, technological, and institutional register. Such insertions are not random, as they follow the rules of syntax, and are determined by specific communicative demands of a given sphere. Nor do students merely engage in a kind of borrowing English because they lack the expertise in Pashto: they are assembling a mixed communicative inventory enabling them to move in different social and educational worlds.

One of the major contributions of this research is on the fact that code-mixing is a preservation of a language other than erosion. English is not replacing Pashto but coevolving it in complicated, innovative and situation-specific methods. At that, Pashto-English code-mixing is to be interpreted as a demonstration of bilingual proficiency and linguistic creativity, rather than its lack, or a cause of concern.

In parallel, the analysis shows a certain level of cultural anxiety and language insecurity. Although English usages are perceived by many of the students as a sign of modernity, social attachment to all nations, and intellectual worthiness, some feel afraid that too much mixing will blur the cultural and linguistic distinction of Pashto. It is these ambivalences that illustrate some of the ideological struggles being faced by the young bilinguals who stand amidst tradition and change.

Moreover, the findings identified the sociolinguistic influence of code-mixing practices by the effect of gender, educational background, and access to English-medium schooling. Students who are males, science major, or urban and semi-urban students are more inclined towards code-mixings and mixing more confidently than students educated in rural background with humanities background or Urdu-medium. These results indicate that language activities are stratified on similar lines according to social capital and cultural access reinforcing larger social disparities. Importantly, this study contributes to the broader literature on bilingualism and language contact by:

- Placing Pashto-English bilingualism at the center of analysis,
- Demonstrating how code-mixing reflects linguistic creativity and identity negotiation, and
- Grounding the analysis in a semi-urban, underrepresented context like Swabi.

The findings challenge essentialist views of language purity and propose a dynamic, localized, and globalized view of linguistic practice in Pakistan. For the youth in Swabi, English is not a foreign imposition—it is a localized resource, absorbed into Pashto through daily interaction, media, and education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and insights of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders, including educators, curriculum developers, language policymakers, and researchers.

For Language Instructors and TESOL Practitioners

1. Recognize and Validate Bilingual Practices

Teachers should acknowledge students' existing bilingual practices, including code-mixing, as a legitimate starting point for language development. Rather than punishing or mocking mixed usage, instructors should build awareness around purposeful and audience-sensitive use.

2. Encourage Contextual Code-Awareness

Instead of imposing strict “English-only” policies; educators should help students distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate contexts for code-mixing. This includes discussions on register, genre, and formality.

3. Use Code-Mixing as a Teaching Resource

Classroom activities can include:

- Translanguaging tasks,
- Contrastive analysis between Pashto and English,
- Role-plays involving natural code-mixed scenarios (e.g., at the university office, or during group study).

Such strategies align with García and Wei's (2014) translanguaging pedagogy, which supports multilingual learners by utilizing all their linguistic resources.

4. Train Teachers in Sociolinguistic Sensitivity

Pre-service and in-service teacher training programs should include modules on language ideologies, bilingual identity, and code-mixing, helping teachers understand the social meanings behind students' language choices.

For Curriculum Developers and Policymakers

1. Incorporate Bilingual Realities into Materials

ELT materials and university textbooks should reflect the actual linguistic environments of students, including code-mixed examples, bilingual glossaries, and activities that tap into students' hybrid language use.

2. Bridge the Urban–Rural Language Divide

Educational authorities must address inequalities in access to English proficiency, particularly in rural schools. This can include:

- Mobile-based English learning tools,
- Community English programs,
- Bilingual teacher recruitment from rural backgrounds.

3. Promote Pluralistic Language Ideologies

National and provincial education policies should promote bilingual and multilingual competence rather than idealizing monolingualism. A revised language-in-education policy for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for instance, should:

- Support Pashto as a medium of instruction in early education,
- Treat English as an additive, not a replacement,
- Encourage culturally relevant pedagogy.

4. Fund Research on Regional Language Contact

Research funding bodies (like HEC or provincial education boards) should support studies on bilingual practices in regional languages, such as Pashto, Balochi, Sindhi, and Saraiki, which are often sidelined in national-level language planning.

For University Administrators and Student Support Services

1. Encourage Bilingual Peer Mentoring

Initiatives where senior students support juniors in navigating university systems (registration, assignments, e-learning portals) through bilingual guidance could help bridge knowledge gaps and ease linguistic pressure on students with less English exposure.

2. Establish Language Support Centers

Universities in Swabi and similar areas should establish language labs or support centers offering resources in both English and Pashto, allowing students to learn through parallel language exposure.

3. Create Awareness Campaigns around Language and Identity

Organize seminars, workshops, and panel discussions on language, identity, and code-mixing, helping students critically reflect on their language choices and the cultural implications.

For Future Researchers

1. Expand to Other Regions and Languages

Future studies could replicate this design in other regional linguistic contexts (e.g., Sindhi-English, Balochi-English, or Saraiki-English code-mixing) to develop a comparative understanding of bilingualism across Pakistan.

2. Use Corpus Linguistics and Conversation Analysis

Building a Pashto-English spoken corpus, or applying conversation analysis techniques, would provide deeper insights into discourse functions, turn-taking, and pragmatic effects of code-mixing.

3. Use Digital Ethnography

Since much of the code-mixing occurs in digital spaces (WhatsApp, Instagram), researchers could employ digital ethnography to analyze how online communication shapes linguistic practices and identities.

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