

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE MECHANISMS AND CRITERIA UNDERLYING CODE-SWITCHING

Majitova Amirabonu Turakulzoda

PhD student at Uzbekistan World languages university

amiraturakulovna@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8250-0521>

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22805004>

Qabul qilindi: 9-sentabr 2026-yil • Ma’qullandi: 16-sentabr 2026-yil • Nashr qilindi: 17-sentabr 2026-yil

Abstract:

Code-switching is a complex linguistic phenomenon in which bilingual or multilingual speakers alternate between two or more languages or language varieties within a communicative interaction, sentence, or discourse segment. It is particularly prevalent in multilingual communities, where it occurs naturally in both spoken and written communication. Beyond reflecting speakers’ multilingual competence, code-switching may serve as a marker of social identity, cultural affiliation, and group membership. The phenomenon has been extensively investigated across various fields, including linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics, with particular attention to its structural, social, and pragmatic dimensions. Code-switching may perform a range of communicative functions, such as compensating for lexical gaps, expressing emotions and attitudes, emphasizing particular ideas, signaling interpersonal relationships, and adapting speech to specific social and communicative contexts. In contemporary mass media and digital communication, code-switching is frequently employed in films, television programs, music, and online content to engage linguistically diverse audiences and to represent authentic multilingual interaction. The present study focuses on the mechanisms and criteria underlying code-switching and considers its major structural and functional types within multilingual discourse.

Keywords:

code-switching; Matrix Language Frame Model; inter-sentential switching; intra-sentential switching; tag-switching; situational code-switching; metaphorical code-switching; multilingual discourse.

Introduction.

Code-switching is a complex and multidimensional linguistic phenomenon that has attracted considerable scholarly attention in contemporary linguistic research. It has been investigated from a range of interdisciplinary perspectives, including sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and contact linguistics. These approaches examine code-switching not only as a structural feature of bilingual and multilingual speech but also as a socially and cognitively motivated form of language use.

The concept of code-switching extends beyond the boundaries of linguistics and has also been addressed in related fields, including literary and cultural studies. American linguist Lourdes Torres, for instance, notes that the term “code-switching” can be applied beyond strictly linguistic contexts, where it may describe a stylistic practice involving the simultaneous or alternating use of two or more languages. [1] From this perspective, code-switching represents not merely a transition between linguistic codes but also a meaningful communicative and stylistic resource through which speakers

negotiate identity, express social and cultural affiliations, and adapt their language to particular contexts and audiences.

The significance of research on code-switching continues to increase as multilingual language practices become increasingly embedded in different domains of contemporary life, particularly in digital and online environments. The intensification of language contact has resulted in widespread instances of code-switching across global digital communication, where linguistic boundaries are becoming increasingly fluid. Such practices facilitate intercultural communication while simultaneously reflecting the complex linguistic repertoires and identities of multilingual speakers.

Janet M. Fuller, a prominent sociolinguist and discourse analyst, conceptualizes code-switching as the use of more than one linguistic code by bilingual speakers within a communicative interaction. [6] From this perspective, code-switching should not be regarded merely as an alternation between languages but as a communicative practice shaped by linguistic, social, and contextual factors. Similarly, discussions of code-switching in applied linguistics have emphasized the incorporation of elements from another language into ongoing discourse. These perspectives highlight the multifunctional nature of code-switching and its close relationship with bilingual and multilingual language practices.

Methodology. The term code-switching emerged as a linguistic concept in twentieth-century linguistics, although the phenomenon itself had been observed and discussed considerably earlier. Early approaches to language and communication emphasized the inherently heterogeneous nature of linguistic systems. Roman Jakobson, for example, viewed language as a multidimensional system comprising a range of codes, while speech involves an even broader repertoire of linguistic resources shaped by communicative intentions, functions, and relationships between interlocutors.

During the first half of the twentieth century, scholars increasingly began to recognize switching between languages as a natural manifestation of multilingualism. However, until the development of modern language-contact research, many instances of interaction between linguistic systems were predominantly interpreted as forms of linguistic interference or deviation from monolingual norms. From the 1960s onward, researchers increasingly approached code-switching as a distinct and systematic phenomenon within bilingual discourse and language-contact theory.

Subsequent research has demonstrated that code-switching is neither random nor linguistically deficient.[1] Rather, it may be governed by structural constraints and motivated by a variety of sociolinguistic, pragmatic, discourse-related, and identity-related factors. The growing body of research on different language combinations and multilingual settings has consequently contributed to the continuous refinement of the concept.

Despite this development, there is still no universally accepted framework for defining and classifying code-switching. Different scholars employ varying terminology and analytical criteria, and the boundaries between code-switching, borrowing, code-mixing, and language interference remain subject to theoretical debate. This terminological diversity presents an important methodological challenge for empirical research, particularly when analyzing naturally occurring multilingual discourse.[5]

Code-switching is also closely associated with bilingual communicative competence. As Lipski argues, the incorporation of foreign-language units into everyday speech may provide evidence of speakers' bilingual linguistic resources, particularly when such elements are used systematically rather than as isolated lexical borrowings.[3] Nevertheless, the presence of a foreign-language element alone cannot automatically be treated as evidence of bilingualism. Its classification requires consideration of the linguistic form, degree of integration, frequency of use, communicative context, and speakers' broader linguistic repertoire.

Results and Discussion

In sociolinguistic research, code-switching generally refers to the alternation between two or more languages or language varieties within a communicative interaction. Depending on the social and communicative context, switching may also involve changes in dialect, register, or speech style. Such practices are not always evaluated positively. In public discourse, for example, code-switching by public figures and politicians may sometimes be interpreted negatively and associated with perceived inauthenticity, inconsistency, or strategic self-presentation. However, from a sociolinguistic

perspective, such interpretations depend heavily on the communicative context, the interlocutors, and the prevailing language ideologies.

Code-switching can also occur when speakers adapt their linguistic choices to changes in context, audience, or communicative purpose. For instance, speakers may shift between informal and formal varieties of English depending on the interlocutor or social situation. In multilingual communities, the sustained and recurrent integration of lexical and grammatical elements from different languages may contribute to the emergence or stabilization of hybrid linguistic practices and varieties. Examples frequently discussed in the literature include forms such as Chinglish and Hinglish, although their linguistic status and relationship to code-switching remain subjects of scholarly debate.

Code-switching may therefore encompass a broad range of linguistic practices, from alternation between languages to switching between dialects, registers, and styles. This multidimensional nature of the phenomenon has encouraged scholars to employ different methodological approaches in its investigation. Researchers such as R. Köpke, J. Meisel, and G. N. Chirsheva have examined structural and bilingual dimensions of language alternation, while other scholars have emphasized its sociopragmatic and multilingual aspects. Psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic approaches, including those associated with T. V. Chernigovskaya, have further contributed to understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying bilingual language selection and switching.[2]

A particularly influential framework for analysing the structural organization of code-switching is Carol Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame (MLF) Model. The model provides a systematic account of how elements from a guest language can be incorporated into discourse structured primarily by a matrix language.[4] According to the MLF Model, the matrix language provides the principal morphosyntactic frame within which elements of the embedded or guest language are incorporated. Consequently, code-switching is not viewed as an arbitrary juxtaposition of linguistic elements but as a structured process governed by grammatical and sociolinguistic constraints.

Myers-Scotton's framework is particularly useful for examining individual instances of code-switching because it makes it possible to distinguish between the structural roles of the languages involved. Within a mixed constituent or sentence, the matrix language generally supplies the grammatical framework, while elements from the embedded language may be incorporated into this structure. This approach enables researchers to analyse code-switching at different linguistic levels, including morphemes, lexical items, phrases, and larger discourse units.

At the same time, the MLF Model should not be considered sufficient for explaining all dimensions of code-switching. While it provides a strong account of morphosyntactic organization, the social and pragmatic motivations for switching require complementary sociolinguistic approaches.[5] Factors such as ethnic identity, interpersonal relations, communicative accommodation, topic, social status, language attitudes, and audience design may influence speakers' choices between linguistic codes. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of code-switching benefits from integrating structural, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and psycholinguistic perspectives.

The analysis consequently demonstrates that code-switching should be understood not simply as the insertion of foreign-language elements into speech but as a systematic multilingual practice shaped by linguistic structure, communicative context, and social meaning. Its functions may include lexical compensation, emphasis, emotional expression, identity construction, accommodation to interlocutors, and the negotiation of social relationships. The interaction between these factors demonstrates the inherently multidimensional nature of code-switching and highlights the need for context-sensitive approaches to its analysis.

A persistent issue in code-switching research concerns the extent to which speakers' alternation between languages is governed by systematic linguistic constraints. Although there is no single set of universally applicable rules that determines when and how speakers switch from one language to another, code-switching is not entirely arbitrary. In particular, structural constraints associated with the matrix language may play a significant role in determining the grammatical form and organization of mixed utterances. Within the Matrix Language Frame Model, for example, the matrix language provides the principal morphosyntactic framework within which elements of the embedded language are incorporated. Thus, maintaining the structural principles of the matrix language is an important criterion for analyzing intra-sentential code-switching.[4]

Researchers have proposed various classifications of code-switching according to its structural position, communicative context, and pragmatic function. One of the most widely recognized distinctions includes inter-sentential code-switching, which occurs at sentence or clause boundaries; intra-sentential code-switching, which takes place within a sentence or constituent; and tag-switching, which involves the insertion of discourse markers, tags, or short fixed expressions from another language. In addition, sociolinguistic research distinguishes between situational and metaphorical code-switching, based primarily on the relationship between language choice and changes in social situation, topic, participant roles, or communicative meaning.

The occurrence and form of code-switching may therefore be influenced by multiple factors, including the grammatical structure of the languages involved, the communicative context, the relationship between interlocutors, the topic of interaction, and the speaker's pragmatic intentions. Consequently, code-switching should be understood as a dynamic process in which linguistic form and social meaning interact.

Conclusion. Scholarly interpretations of code-switching also differ considerably. Some researchers regard it as evidence of linguistic flexibility and a sophisticated form of multilingual competence, whereas others examine it in relation to social stratification, language prestige, linguistic inequality, and patterns of language dominance. These divergent perspectives demonstrate that code-switching cannot be adequately explained solely through structural analysis; its social and pragmatic dimensions must also be taken into consideration.

A systematic understanding of code-switching is particularly important for research into bilingualism and multilingualism, as it provides insights into how speakers manage multiple linguistic resources in different communicative environments. The growing influence of mass media and digital communication has further expanded the domains in which code-switching occurs. Contemporary advertising, entertainment, online platforms, and social networking sites increasingly provide spaces where speakers combine linguistic codes to construct identity, attract particular audiences, express solidarity, create stylistic effects, and communicate culturally specific meanings. The increasing visibility of such practices in the digital era therefore makes code-switching an important area of investigation within contemporary sociolinguistics.

Adabiyotlar, References, Литературы:

1. Исаева, М. Г. Кодовые переключения в письменных текстах СМИ (на материале русскоязычных журналов) / М.Г. Исаева: Дис... канд. филол. наук. – Череповец: Череповецкий государственный университет, 2009. – 262 с.
2. Якобсон, Р. О. Речевая коммуникация: язык в отношении к другим системам коммуникации / Р. О. Якобсон. – Москва: Прогресс, 1985. – С. 306-330.
3. Lipski, J. M. Code-switching and the problem of bilingual competence / J. M. Lipski // *Aspects of Bilingualism* / M. Paradis (ed.). – Columbia: S.C. Hornbeam Press, 1977. – P. 250-263
4. Myers-Scotton, C. *Contact linguistics* / C. Myers-Scotton. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. – 356 p
5. Myers-Scotton, C. *Multiple voices. An introduction to bilingualism* / C. Myers-Scotton. – Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. – 472 p
6. Schmitt, E. Overt and covert codeswitching in immigrant children from Russia: Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Linguistic Studies of Language Behavior. / E. Schmitt // *The International Journal of Bilingualism*. – Gothenburg: International Sociological Association, 2000. – V. 4. – № 1. – P. 29-44.
7. Torres, L. In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers / L. Torres. // *Melus*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. – 32 (1). – P. 75-96.