

CODE-SWITCHING BETWEEN UZBEK, RUSSIAN, AND ENGLISH AS A REFLECTION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' IDENTITIES IN TASHKENT

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Abstract: Code-switching, or the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation or communicative situation, is a significant feature of multilingual societies. In Tashkent, university students frequently encounter and use Uzbek, Russian, and English across educational, social, professional, and digital contexts. This article examines how code-switching among university students in Tashkent may function as a resource for constructing and expressing identity. Drawing on sociolinguistic theories of code-switching, multilingual identity, and language ideology, the study explores the symbolic and social meanings associated with the three languages. The article proposes a qualitative research design involving semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and analysis of naturally occurring multilingual interactions among university students.

Keywords: code-switching; multilingualism; identity; university students; sociolinguistics

Introduction

Language is one of the most important resources through which individuals communicate, construct social relationships, and express their identities. In multilingual societies, however, identity cannot always be associated with a single language. Multilingual individuals frequently draw on different linguistic resources depending on their interlocutors, social environments, educational experiences, and communicative purposes. One important manifestation of multilingual communication is code-switching, the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation or communicative interaction.

The linguistic environment of Uzbekistan provides a particularly relevant context for examining this phenomenon. Uzbek occupies a central position as the state language and as an important symbol of national and cultural identity. At the same time, Russian continues to play a significant role in education, urban communication, and interactions among different linguistic communities. English has also gained increasing importance through globalization, international education, technology, science, and professional mobility. Historical and sociopolitical developments have

therefore contributed to a linguistic landscape in which Uzbek, Russian, and English occupy different but interconnected social positions.

Tashkent, as the capital and largest urban center of Uzbekistan, represents a particularly dynamic multilingual environment. Recent discussions of the city's sociolinguistic landscape emphasize the continued interaction between Uzbek and Russian alongside the growing influence of English in education, media, and professional life. University students are especially important participants in this linguistic environment because they regularly move between different social and institutional spaces. They may use Uzbek with family members, Russian with particular groups of friends, and English in academic or professional contexts. Their language choices may therefore reveal different dimensions of their identities.

The central argument of this article is that code-switching among university students in Tashkent should not be viewed simply as a practical linguistic strategy. It can also be understood as a form of identity construction. By moving between Uzbek, Russian, and English, students may position themselves in relation to national culture, urban social networks, educational communities, and global aspirations.

Literature Review

2.1. Code-Switching as a Sociolinguistic Phenomenon

Code-switching has been widely studied as a central feature of bilingual and multilingual communication. Poplack (1980) identified several structural types of code-switching, including inter-sentential switching, intra-sentential switching, and tag switching. Inter-sentential switching occurs when a speaker changes languages between sentences, while intra-sentential switching takes place within a single sentence. However, later research demonstrated that code-switching cannot be understood solely through grammatical structures. Gumperz (1982) emphasized its communicative and social functions, arguing that language alternation can signal changes in social relationships, conversational meaning, and group membership. Similarly, Auer (1998) examined code-switching as an interactional practice through which speakers negotiate meaning and identity during conversation.

From this perspective, code-switching is not necessarily evidence of linguistic deficiency. Multilingual speakers may switch languages strategically and creatively. They may do so to clarify meaning, express emotions, quote another person, establish solidarity, create humour, or signal membership in a particular social group.

Recent research in Uzbekistan similarly indicates that code-switching among students is a dynamic feature of multilingual communication. Studies of Uzbek university students have identified educational, social, and technological contexts as important factors influencing language alternation.

2.2. Language and Identity

The relationship between language and identity has been widely explored within sociolinguistics. Identity is increasingly understood not as a fixed personal characteristic but as something that is continuously constructed and negotiated through social interaction.

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity emerges through interaction and social positioning. From this perspective, speakers actively use linguistic resources to present themselves in particular ways and to establish relationships with others.

For multilingual speakers, different languages may represent different communities, experiences, and social possibilities. A person may identify strongly with a heritage language while also using another language to participate in professional or international communities. These identities are not necessarily contradictory. Instead, multilingual speakers may possess complex and overlapping identities.

Norton (2013) further emphasizes the relationship between language learning and imagined identities. Individuals may invest in learning a language because it provides access to imagined future communities and opportunities. This perspective is particularly relevant to the growing importance of English among university students. English may represent not only a language of communication but also access to international education, professional development, and global mobility.

Research conducted in Uzbekistan has increasingly examined the connection between multilingualism and identity. Recent studies suggest that Uzbek, Russian, and English may carry different symbolic meanings for young multilingual speakers and may be associated with cultural belonging, educational experience, prestige, and future aspirations.

2.3. Uzbek, Russian, and English in the Linguistic Landscape of Uzbekistan

The contemporary linguistic situation in Uzbekistan has been shaped by historical, political, educational, and social transformations. Uzbek functions as the state language and occupies an important symbolic position in national identity. Its role is particularly significant in discussions of cultural heritage and statehood.

Russian, despite changes in its institutional position following Uzbekistan's independence, remains an important language in many educational, professional, and urban contexts. Historical research on Uzbekistan's linguistic landscape demonstrates that Russian continues to influence communication patterns and remains relevant in multilingual environments.

English occupies a different position. Its growing importance is closely connected to globalization, international communication, higher education, technology, and professional development. Research on language education in Uzbekistan has identified English as an increasingly valuable linguistic resource among young people.

The coexistence of these three languages creates conditions in which multilingual students may assign different meanings to each language. Uzbek may be associated

with cultural belonging, Russian with particular social and educational networks, and English with international opportunities. Nevertheless, these associations should not be treated as universal. Individual language practices are influenced by personal background, family history, educational experience, and social environment.

2.4. Code-Switching Among University Students

University students represent a particularly important group for the study of multilingual identity. Higher education brings together students from diverse linguistic and social backgrounds while also exposing them to international knowledge and professional discourses.

Recent studies of multilingual students in Uzbekistan suggest that code-switching is common in both academic and informal contexts. Uzbek-Russian switching has been associated with everyday communication and urban multilingual interaction, while Uzbek-English switching frequently appears in academic, technological, and digital contexts.

Furthermore, research specifically addressing students in Tashkent suggests that code-switching has become a resource for social identification. English, in particular, may appear in discussions of technology, education, social media, and future careers.

These findings indicate that language switching should be examined not only as a linguistic process but also as a social practice connected to identity, belonging, and aspiration.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study proposes a qualitative research design because the main objective is to explore how university students understand and experience code-switching in relation to their identities.

A qualitative approach is appropriate because identity is complex and context-dependent. Numerical data alone cannot fully explain why students select particular languages or what those choices mean to them. Therefore, the study focuses on students' experiences, perceptions, and naturally occurring linguistic practices.

The research would employ a small-scale case study approach focusing on multilingual university students in Tashkent.

The study would aim to include students with different linguistic backgrounds, including students who primarily use Uzbek, Russian, or a combination of the two in everyday life.

3.2. Data Analysis

The collected data would be analyzed through thematic analysis. The researcher would identify recurring patterns and organize them into major themes.

Possible themes might include:

1. Uzbek and cultural belonging

2. Russian and urban social identity
3. English and global aspirations
4. Code-switching and friendship
5. Language and educational identity
6. Multilingualism and social prestige
7. Language switching in digital communication

Examples of actual code-switching would also be analyzed to identify whether particular types of switching are associated with specific contexts or functions.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

Participation would be voluntary, and participants would be informed about the purpose of the research. Personal information would remain confidential, and pseudonyms would be used when presenting interview excerpts.

Participants would also have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Because language and identity can involve personal experiences, researchers should avoid making assumptions about participants based solely on the languages they speak.

4. Discussion: Code-Switching as Identity Construction

For many university students, Uzbek may represent an important connection to national identity, cultural heritage, and family relationships. Students may prefer Uzbek when discussing personal experiences, cultural traditions, or emotionally significant topics. Using Uzbek can therefore function as a form of cultural positioning. It allows speakers to demonstrate their connection to local traditions and to communities in which Uzbek serves as a central linguistic resource.

At the same time, the use of Uzbek should not be interpreted as evidence of a single or exclusive identity. A student may strongly identify with Uzbek culture while simultaneously participating in Russian-speaking and English-speaking communities.

Thus, multilingualism can allow students to maintain local identities while also participating in wider social and international networks.

Russian continues to occupy an important position in the multilingual environment of Tashkent. For some students, it is a first language or an important language acquired through family and education. For others, it functions as a language of social interaction and communication within particular urban networks.

Switching into Russian may therefore reflect familiarity, friendship, or membership in a particular social group. It may also be associated with specific cultural influences, including media, literature, and entertainment.

In multilingual friendship groups, Russian can function as a shared communicative resource. Students may move between Uzbek and Russian without treating the two languages as completely separate social worlds.

This flexibility demonstrates that linguistic identity can be hybrid and context-dependent.

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