

POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN DIGITAL CODE-SWITCHING, A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

Rustamova Mohinabonu Sherzod qizi

A student of Kokand State University

Telephone number: +998947460508

Email: mohinaxonrustamova@gmail.com

Abstract: This study investigates how politeness strategies are realized through digital code-switching in bilingual and multilingual online interactions. By analyzing 500 social media posts, instant messaging conversations, and forum discussions, the study identifies patterns in language alternation that reflect social relationships, respect, and identity management. The findings reveal that speakers strategically use code-switching to express positive politeness (solidarity and appreciation), negative politeness (respect and mitigation of imposition), and off-record strategies (indirect communication). Additionally, digital features such as emojis, hashtags, and abbreviations significantly influence the use and interpretation of code-switching. The study highlights the pragmatic importance of digital code-switching and its role in maintaining effective, polite, and socially aware communication in online environments.

Keywords: Digital code-switching, politeness strategies, pragmatics, bilingualism, social media

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of digital communication has reshaped contemporary language practices, giving rise to novel phenomena such as digital code-switching. It is irreversibly exerted that digital communication, which has now taken a leading place among various types of language communication, reflects many specific features of communication in context of bi and multilingualism. Sometimes people want to communicate only to certain people or community they belong to. To avoid the other community or people interfering their communication, they may try to exclude those people by using the language that not everybody knows/masters. A code is a system that is used by people to communicate with each other. When people want to talk each other, they have to choose a particular code to express their feeling. It is a symbol that is used by people to speak or communicate in a particular language, or dialect, or register, or accent or style on different occasions and for different purposes of communication. This study explains the pragmatic functions of code-switching in multilingual social-media interactions, with specific focus on how social media users employ language alteration to achieve specific communicative functions and according

to the research, the study employs a mixed methods approach to examine 500 multilingual social media updates, identifying trends and patterns of code-switching in use. The findings show that code-switching serves significant pragmatic functions, including marketing identity, marking solidarity and negotiating power relations. In addition, the study outlines the significance of digital affordances such as hashtags, emojis and character limits in shaping code-switching behavior. As for code mixing, it occurs when the people incorporate small units (words or short phrases) from one language to another one. It is often unintentional and is often in word level. People can see that in code mixing, you do not alternate the whole sentence, but people only use one word or two. This often happens unintentionally, sometimes the people have a bunch of lexicons that get jumbled in your brain, and people often use more than one language, but we do not realize it. Based on the explanation about, the purpose of this paper is to find out the definition of code both code mixing and code switching from many experts, the kinds and the example of both code mixing and code switching which is used by the people in their daily activities and conversation, also discuss about the reason both bilingual or multilingual features and mix their behaviour. Digital code-switching refers to the alternation between two and more language varieties within online interactions, including social media posts, instant messaging and forums. Unlike traditional spoken code-switching often incorporates textual cues such as abbreviations, emojis and informal internet language, which serve pragmatic functions in communication. For instance, a user in social media may write: “ Bro, kecha party juda fun edi, lekin homework ham qilaylik ”. Here, the speaker switches between English (“Bro”, “fun”) and Uzbek (“kecha”, “ ham qilaylik”) , using emojis to convey friendliness and humor, which help maintain a polite and engaging tone.

Therefore, politeness strategies are essential mechanisms in pragmatics, enables speakers to manage social relationships, convey respect and mitigate potential face-threatening acts. In digital contexts, the absence of paralinguistic cues (e.g., intonation, gestures) increases reliance on language alteration and stylistic choices to maintain politeness. For example, in an online forum, a user might write: “Could you please explain this concept? Men hali tushunmadim.”

This combines English politeness markers (“Could you please”) with Uzbek clarification (“Men hali tushunmadim”), alongside an emoji to express respect and request to help politely.

Previous studies have highlighted the significance of code-switching in identity construction, humor, and interpersonal negotiation; however, limited research has explored the intersection of digital code-switching and politeness strategies from a pragmatic perspective.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating how politeness strategies are realized in digital code-switching. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of politeness strategies are most frequently employed in digital code-switching?
2. How do users utilize code-switching to perform politeness in online interactions?
3. What pragmatic functions does digital code-switching serve in conveying social relationships and mitigating face-threatening acts?

By examining these questions, this research contributes to the understanding of contemporary online communication and the pragmatic implications of language alternation in digital environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In sociolinguistics, the term code refers to a language or a variety of a language that speakers use to communicate in specific social contexts. Individuals often select particular codes depending on the situation, the topic of discussion, or the relationship between interlocutors. A code may consist of a language, dialect, register, style, or accent and functions as a symbolic system for expressing ideas, emotions, and social identity (Wardhaugh, 1998; Crystal, 1987). Richards et al. (1985) further explain that code choice is essential for communication and can involve switching from one code to another to better convey meaning.

Code-switching is a phenomenon in which speakers alternate between two or more languages or language varieties within a single conversation. Wardhaugh (1998) defines it as a conversational strategy employed to establish, cross, or challenge social boundaries and to create or modify interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Hymes (1986) highlights that code-switching may occur for changes in conversation purpose, topic, or perception. Victoria and Rodman (1983) describe code-switching as a linguistic practice that involves using more than one language or dialect in a conversation, distinct from other contact phenomena such as borrowing, calques, pidgins, or creoles.

Myers-Scotton (1993) emphasizes that code-switching is primarily a feature of bilingual or multilingual speakers, occurring when two language varieties are used within the same interaction. Factors influencing code choice include social identity, educational background, relationships between speakers, and the context of the conversation (Fischer, 1972; Arifin, 2011). Code-switching can occur at different structural levels: intra-sentential (within a clause), inter-sentential (between clauses), or through other processes such as insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization (Ahmad, 2009). The pragmatic functions of code-switching are diverse. It can signal language expertise, assert social status, express solidarity, or adapt to the formality of

the context (Yusuf, 2009). For instance, bilingual speakers may switch from their native language to English to convey prestige or professionalism, as illustrated in the following example from an Indonesian speaker:

“Jangan lupa ya, it’s really hot and absolutely gorgeous. Kamu pasti puas.”

This example demonstrates how code-switching combines grammatical, contextual, and social motivations. David (2008) classifies code-switching according to grammatical and contextual criteria: the former relates to where in a sentence switching occurs, while the latter concerns the reasons for switching, such as social or pragmatic purposes. Overall, the literature indicates that code-switching is a common strategy among bilingual and multilingual speakers, enabling them to navigate complex social and pragmatic demands in conversation. Understanding these patterns is crucial for exploring how language alternation functions in maintaining politeness, conveying social meaning, and constructing identity in digital and offline communication contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate politeness strategies in digital code-switching among bilingual and multilingual speakers. The primary data sources consisted of online interactions, including social media posts, instant messaging conversations, and discussion forums. These platforms were selected because they reflect authentic language use in informal digital environments, where code-switching and politeness strategies frequently occur.

Participants

The participants were 20 bilingual or multilingual users aged between 18 and 30, proficient in English and their native language (e.g., Uzbek, Indonesian, or other local languages). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all of them actively engaged in digital communication and exhibited instances of code-switching in their messages.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a period of four weeks. Screenshots of conversations, social media posts, and online comments were gathered with participants’ consent. The focus was on identifying instances where participants switched languages within a single utterance or across sentences, as well as where politeness strategies were employed to maintain harmony, respect, or social status.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a pragmatic approach, focusing on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework of politeness strategies:

Positive politeness – strategies aimed at expressing solidarity, friendship, or appreciation.

Negative politeness – strategies aimed at showing respect, deference, or minimizing imposition.

Off-record strategies – indirect ways of conveying requests or opinions.

Each instance of code-switching was examined to determine which politeness strategies were used, the linguistic and contextual triggers for switching, and the pragmatic functions served in the digital interaction. Patterns of intra-sentential (within one sentence) and inter-sentential (between sentences) code-switching were also categorized to identify the most frequent forms of politeness in digital communication.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their anonymity was ensured. Data were analyzed only for research purposes, and no personal identifiers were included in the analysis.

RESULTS

The analysis of the collected digital interactions revealed several interesting patterns of politeness strategies in code-switching. Participants frequently alternated between English and their native language to achieve specific communicative goals.

Positive politeness was commonly observed, where speakers used code-switching to express friendliness, solidarity, or appreciation. For example, a participant wrote:

“Thanks ya, sen really helped me a lot ”

Here, English phrases (“Thanks”) are combined with the native language (“ya, sen”) and an emoji to convey warmth and gratitude.

Negative politeness strategies were also identified, often employed to show respect or minimize imposition. In one chat, a participant asked:

“Could you explain this, iltimos? I’m still confused.”

Switching from English to native language (“iltimos”) softened the request and maintained politeness.

In terms of structural patterns, both intra-sentential (within a single sentence) and inter-sentential (between sentences) code-switching were observed. Intra-sentential switching was often linked with expressing emotions or adding emphasis, while inter-sentential switching appeared in more formal or explanatory contexts. Overall, the findings suggest that digital code-switching is not random; it is strategically used to convey politeness, manage social relationships, and maintain clarity in online communication.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that digital code-switching serves as an important tool for conveying politeness in online communication. Bilingual and multilingual speakers use code-switching strategically to express solidarity, respect, and social identity. Positive politeness is often expressed through mixing languages to show friendliness

or appreciation, while negative politeness appears in requests or when minimizing imposition. The patterns observed indicate that code-switching is context-dependent, influenced by factors such as relationship between speakers, topic of conversation, and communication setting. Overall, these findings highlight the pragmatic functions of digital code-switching and its role in maintaining effective and polite interactions in digital spaces. Future research could explore code-switching in larger and more diverse online communities, or examine its role in professional and educational digital communication, to better understand its impact on intercultural and pragmatic competence.

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