

LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF UZBEK-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: *This paper examines the linguistic mechanisms and sociocultural motivations underlying Uzbek–English code-switching among university students in Uzbekistan. With the growing impact of globalization and the expanding role of English as a language of science, technology, and higher education, bilingual practices have become increasingly visible in academic and informal communication. Using qualitative analysis of naturally occurring speech, online discourse, and semi-structured interviews, this study identifies lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic patterns of code-switching. The findings suggest that English insertions often serve academic or prestige-related functions, while Uzbek provides emotional grounding and socio-cultural identity. The research highlights how bilingual language use reflects broader transformations in education, identity, and digital communication in contemporary Uzbekistan.*

Keywords: *code-switching, bilingualism, Uzbek, English, sociolinguistics, identity, youth language*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Uzbekistan has experienced a significant rise in multilingual communication due to educational reforms, internationalization, and the widespread adoption of digital technologies. English has gained the status of a global lingua franca, influencing youth culture, academic discourse, and professional communication. As a result, Uzbek–English code-switching has become a common linguistic phenomenon, particularly among university students who frequently navigate between the two languages.

Although linguists in Central Asia have explored bilingualism, relatively little attention has been paid to the micro-level linguistic mechanisms and sociocultural motivations behind code-switching practices among the younger generation. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how and why students alternate between Uzbek and English in spoken and digital communication. The research also seeks to identify what these linguistic practices reveal about shifting identities, social aspirations, and attitudes toward globalization.

2. Literature Review



Code-switching has been defined as the alternation between two or more languages within a single conversation or utterance (Myers-Scotton, 1993). The structural and functional aspects of code-switching have been widely studied in multilingual contexts such as Spanish–English, Arabic–French, and Malay–English communities. Scholars have shown that code-switching is not merely a sign of linguistic deficiency but a strategic, meaningful, and identity-driven act (Gumperz, 1982; Auer, 1998).

In the context of post-Soviet states, bilingualism often intersects with political, educational, and cultural shifts. Previous studies on Uzbek–Russian bilingualism demonstrate that language choice can signal formality, status, or cultural orientation. However, as English gains symbolic capital in Uzbekistan, especially among youth, a new bilingual dynamic is emerging. English is increasingly associated with modernity, global mobility, and intellectual prestige, while Uzbek remains a marker of national identity, emotional closeness, and cultural belonging.

Existing research notes a rise in English borrowings in Uzbek social media, advertising, and academic environments. Yet, there is a lack of detailed linguistic analysis exploring which grammatical structures are most prone to switching, which discourse functions English fulfills, and how youth perceive their bilingual practices. This study builds upon global and regional findings while offering new empirical insights from an Uzbek context.

3. Methodology

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method, combining linguistic observation with sociolinguistic interviews. Data were collected from three main sources:

Naturally occurring conversations among students in university settings (hallways, classrooms, group study spaces).

Online discourse, including Telegram chats, Instagram captions, and student group discussions.

Semi-structured interviews with 25 undergraduate students aged 18–23 from various academic majors.

Participants were asked about their language preferences, communication habits, and attitudes toward English. All data were transcribed and coded according to established frameworks for code-switching analysis (Poplack, 1980; Myers-Scotton, 1993). The study focuses on identifying lexical insertions, intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and pragmatic functions.

4. Analysis of Linguistic Features

4.1 Lexical Borrowing and Insertions

The most frequent pattern observed was single-word English insertions into otherwise Uzbek sentences. These words often belonged to academic or technological domains:



deadline, presentation, project, feedback, update. Students reported that these terms “sound more precise” or are easier to use because the English versions are dominant in their academic materials.

4.2 Intra-sentential Code-Switching

Students frequently switched between languages within a single clause. For example:

Bugun assignmentni submit qilishim kerak.

This pattern shows how English verbs become embedded in Uzbek morphology, receiving Uzbek case markers and conjugations.

4.3 Inter-sentential Code-Switching

Students occasionally used full English sentences, especially when quoting teachers, reading academic guidelines, or communicating with international peers: Men bugun juda charchadim. By the way, did you finish the report?

4.4 Phonological Adaptation

Borrowed English words often underwent phonological adjustment, such as:

manager → menedjer

computer → kompyuter

These adaptations reflect attempts to align English vocabulary with Uzbek phonotactics.

5. Sociocultural Motivations

5.1 Academic and Professional Prestige

Students often used English to signal academic competence or familiarity with global terminology. English served as a marker of intellectual aspiration and membership in an educated, modern community.

5.2 Identity Construction

For many youths, English represents openness, progress, and global citizenship. Switching to English helps them construct an identity that aligns with international norms while maintaining Uzbek for cultural grounding.

5.3 Group Solidarity

Within peer groups, code-switching creates a shared linguistic style and strengthens social bonds. Students reported that speaking a blend of Uzbek and English feels “natural,” “friendly,” or “more expressive.”

5.4 Digital Influence

Social media platforms—where English dominates—reinforce code-switching patterns. Online messages often reflect hybrid linguistic identities shaped by global digital culture.

6. Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that Uzbek–English code-switching is influenced by both linguistic and sociocultural factors. Structurally, English words easily integrate into Uzbek syntax, suggesting a flexible and adaptive bilingual environment.



Socioculturally, code-switching reflects the aspirations of a generation navigating between national identity and global interconnectedness.

The findings align with global research showing that bilingual youth strategically use language to express identity, negotiate status, and participate in modern information networks. However, the situation in Uzbekistan is unique due to the country's rapid shift from Russian-dominant bilingualism to an English-oriented educational landscape. Students' linguistic practices provide insight into broader changes in society, including evolving language ideologies, modernization policies, and the digital transformation of communication.

7. Conclusion

Uzbek–English code-switching among university students is a dynamic linguistic phenomenon shaped by globalization, academic demands, and generational identity. English functions as a resource for academic precision, social status, and digital fluency, while Uzbek remains central for cultural identity and emotional expression. The integration of English into everyday Uzbek discourse illustrates how language practices evolve in response to educational reforms and global cultural flows.

Further research may explore regional differences, longitudinal changes, or comparisons with Uzbek-Russian bilingualism. Understanding these patterns is crucial for educators, policymakers, and linguists interested in the future of multilingual communication in Uzbekistan.

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