Code-switching tendency among Bangladeshi undergraduate students: Reasons and results

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Abstract

Code-switching has become a habitual practice in everyday communication, particularly among university students. The language of students' interactions is diversely interesting depending on the users' socio-cultural and socio-educational backgrounds. English has become one of the major languages of students' interactions along with the native one. It is observed that university students adopt code-switching in their Facebook communication and regular conversation. This paper aims to investigate Bangladeshi undergraduate students' reasons for adopting code-switching in Facebook and regular conversations and its impacts on their formal language. To conduct the research, the data has been collected through interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and observation of Facebook conversations, and posts of the undergraduate students of a renowned private university in Bangladesh. The results show that most Bangladeshi undergraduate students switch codes for various communication purposes in different contexts, Although most students switch codes subconsciously, they believe that code-switching helps them express their thoughts comfortably. Recommendations have been made as well for further studies in this area.

Keywords: Code-switching, Facebook interactions, University students

1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, switching codes has obtained much popularity almost all over the world including in Bangladesh. In spite of residing in a global village, difficulties in communication arise due to language differences. So, the necessity of knowing a foreign language to develop communicative competence has evolved with the phase of globalization. And in this process of bilingualism, speakers tend to switch codes between different languages. However, the practice of switching codes while failing to determine the appropriate word for a specific expression in one's native language as an easier medium of expression refers to their native language incompetency. While studying the motivations for code-switching,

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Kim (2006) found that the speaker's inability to find the exact word often leads to code-switching. As Wong (2000) put it, bilingualism enables speakers to utilize their linguistic treasures to give proper meaning to their expressions and thoughts (as cited in Iqbal, 2011, p. 189). However, Hamers and Blanc (2000) connected code-mixing and code-switching with the incompetence of the speakers. Tasnim (2018) argues that,

... university students as active FB users often switch codes in their status updates and private conversations. It has been found that all three types of code-switching namely inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching occur but intra-sentential switching occurs most in their status updates and conversations. (pp. 709-725)

Social media, especially Facebook, has become one of the most frequent means of communication in this age of globalization. Noticeably, the entire international and some of the local computer-mediated communication language is English. Therefore, users automatically tend to switch codes and develop bilingual competency by using different codes.

In Bangladesh, people normally switch codes between English and Bangla though the choice of codes depends on one's personal interest and skills. Facebook is one of the most actively used social media platforms in Bangladesh. Bangladeshis being very active on Facebook, have been found to switch codes from English to Bangla and/or vice-versa. Mostly, the students, teachers, and employees tend to switch codes in their respective areas of communication. Not long before, the personal profile of a Facebook account was only for sharing status, pictures with a caption, and any other writing. But now there are so many groups and pages that increase the use of Facebook activity, resulting in the direct or indirect promotion of bilingualism.

Code-switching is nowadays a well-accepted tendency among undergraduate students, notably from private universities in Bangladesh. Though many Bangladeshi students are scared of the language English, they are bound to study English from the first day of their learning. From primary to higher secondary levels of education English is one of the most emphasized subjects in Bangladesh. Therefore, the student's familiarity with the bilingual situation gets enhanced though most of the students are uninterested in learning and using English. Most of the private and public universities in Bangladesh conduct education in English and all the private sectors maintain an English environment in their offices. Such special

emphasis on English helps to develop a bilingual community. Gradually, code-switching has started to occur more frequently in both the education and professional spheres of Bangladesh. Even the faculty members of the universities switch codes in their classes to ensure a better understanding. Though using only one language at a time is considered more formal, code-switching normalizes the inclusion of competent use of bilingualism in formal language. This paper seeks to answer why students switch codes when they communicate through Facebook and other platforms and how it impacts their formal language. Though numerous studies have been carried out about code-switching, this research particularly focuses on the code-switching tendencies of a Bangladeshi private university students in their Facebook posts, comments, and regular conversations. The findings of this paper are to unveil why people frequently switch codes and how this affects their formal language.

2. Literature Review

People are more communicative and active these days in social media, particularly on Facebook. Especially, university students are more likely to switch codes when they are communicating. 'Code-switching', the linguistic term, refers to the frequent use of multiple languages in a conversation. Several studies have explored the methods and types of code-switching. The followings are several of the ways that people use while switching codes.

a. Inter-sentential

This clause or sentence-level switching can be noticed between sentences. No clause or sentence contains one singular language. The users need to be fluent in the used languages as the sentences maintain the linguistic and grammatical rules of all the used languages. For example, "Ami khabo nah, what about you?" (Ami khabo nah, meaning: I will not eat).

b. Intra-sentential

Intra-sentential switching is another clause or sentence-level switching that occurs amidst a sentence. For example, "Ami eto tried chilam j, I had to take a rickshaw" (meaning: I was so tired that I had to take a rickshaw). The use of this complex way comes with a high probability of violating the syntactic rules (Jalil, 2009, p.4).

Tag Switching: Tag switching occurs when a single word or phrase is switched

This is a type of switching where either a single word or a tag phrase is switched from one language to another. According to Kanakri and Ionescu (2010),

in tag switching, the tag and set of phrases in one language are added with another language (p.183). This type is common in intra-sentential switches. For example, "You thought that if you don't help me, I can't get passed, tai na?" (Here 'tai na' means is not it?).

According to Wardhaugh (2010), people can select a particular code, switch from one code to another, combine codes, and replace codes during a conversation. Wardhaugh (2010) added -

Code-switching (also called code-mixing) can occur in a conversation between speakers' turns or within one speaker's turn. Code-switching can arise from individual choice or be used as a serious identity marker for a gaggle of speakers who must affect quite one language for his or her common pursuits. (p.98)

Research by Fong (2011) found that code-switching would occur in online communication mainly to serve referential, expressive and metalinguistic functions. Code-switching, according to Skbia (1997) is the alternation between two codes (language and/or dialects), between people who share those particular codes. So, it can be said that code-switching is another denotation of bilingualism. In the view of Fong (2011), bilingualism is related to code-switching because a speaker's ability to use more than one language is a must for switching codes. Codes refer to the languages that are uttered by communicators in their way of communication. Whenever they switch the code, maybe for easy communication or expression, they become bilingual. Moreover, code-switching and bilingualism are interrelated in this type of communication. Tasnim (2018) identified the code-switching types and frequencies among public and private university graduate and undergraduate students in Bangladesh. She discovers the fact that the students use the following three types of code-switching: inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag switching. The intra-sentential switching is mostly used, as she noticed.

Rahman and Mohiuddin (2020) explored the reasons and the ratio of switching codes between Bangla and English among a Bangladeshi public university students of the three faculties- Science, Arts and Business. The results show that students frequently switch codes to display their identity and also in an attempt to develop their English language competence. The study also reveals that the students in the Business faculty make the most use of Bangla-English mixed expressions. Arts faculty students switch codes more than the students of Science faculty. Haugen (1953) asserted that bilingualism's existence is ensured when a speaker establishes meaningful communication in more than one language. Effective code-switching and bilingualism directly promote the communicative competence of the speaker. It creates a stage for the speaker to develop his language competen

cy. Therefore, many of the students switch codes to have a unique expression which is accepted and understood by the opposite communicators as well.

Poplack (2000) explained how the bilingual level influences the intensity of conversational code-switching (as cited in Tsiplakou, 2009, p.363). As previously mentioned, code-switching and bilingualism are interconnected and a higher degree of bilingual interaction has a higher contact with code-switching. Code-switching is most appreciated to have a great interaction with the opposite speakers.

In this response, several researchers like Gumperz (1982); Heller (1988); Myers-Scotton (1993); Li & Milroy (1995); Auer (1998) and Shin & Milroy (2000) believed code-switching can help attain certain goals while interacting with peers (as cited in Shin, 2010, p.91). However, Bollinger (1975) concluded that many bilingual speakers often switch codes to minimize any possible conversational confusion (as cited in Inuwa, Christopher, and Bakrin, 2014, p. 44). It has been noticed that especially the youth switch codes to lessen possible communication difficulties. Easily they switch codes to complete the meaning of their respective ideas. For example, in Bangladesh, people mostly request like, "Please, amar ei kaj ta kore din" rather than saying, "Please do this work for me." Mostly to ensure easier and smoother communication, often two codes such as English and Bangla get mixed. Gumperz (1982) explained that speakers often switch codes to ensure the precision and proper meaning of their conversations. Code-switching often includes references, quotations, and interjections depending on the needs of the speakers during a conversation. Thus, code-switching can significantly refer to and then encourage the participation of people who are not part of the current conversation. Through code-switching, a message of one language can also be repeated to another one, where the words are translated and duplicated for clarification. Code-switching is additionally employed to qualify a message, during which a subject is introduced in one language and explicated in another. Code-switching also determines the speaker's involvement in and the individualisation of the message (i.e. personal or popular opinion, individual or common factor, etc.).

Kabir and Mohiuddin (2017) explored how and why the students of public and private universities in Bangladesh switch codes between Bangla and English. The findings show that the students have strong tendencies to Bangla-English code switching in public and private universities. Students mix and switch codes to be impressive and also to develop their language skills. The students in a private university switch codes more than the students of a public university. Begum and Haque (2013) while investigating code mixing in English-Arabic in terms of the socio-professional phenomenon in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), addressed

the functions of code-mixing among the non-native teachers and other native Arabian speakers at King Khalid University. The study shows that code-mixing is commonly used as it significantly assures the Bengali and Indian teachers in the context of KSA of meaningful professional communication. Auer (1998) identified eight conversational loci in which code-switching is frequent: a) reported speech, b) change of participant constellation (address selection and the use of code-switching to include/exclude/marginalize participants or bystanders), c) Parentheses or side comments, d) reiterations (quasi-translations into the other language for the purpose of putting emphasis on demands, requests, for clarification, attracting attention and the regulation of turn-taking), e) change of activity type (also referred to as mode shift or role shift), f) topic shift, g) puns, language play and shift of key, h) topicalization and topic/comment structure (as cited in Lowi, 2005, p. 1394).

Although a number of studies have focused on the various areas related to code-switching, the present paper offers a fresh yet significant perspective. Tasnim (2018) worked on the students of both public and private universities and identified the types and frequencies of code switching; Rahman and Mohiuddin (2020) exposed the frequencies of code switching among the students of Arts, Science and Business faculty students of a public university whereas Kabir and Mohiuddin (2017) conducted a comparative study in the options and occurrences of code switching between the students of a public and a private universities. Begum and Haque (2013) uncovered the importance of Arabic-English code mixing as a linguistic tool for the Bengali and Indian expatriate teachers in the campus of King Khalid University, KSA. Previous studies mainly observed the reasons, types and frequencies of code-switching of the diverse respondents but this paper particularly focuses on how code-switching affects the formal language of a Bangladeshi undergraduate private university students and also why they switch codes.

3. Methodology

In this research, the qualitative method has been followed. This chapter includes the participants and the process of data collection. For the qualitative data collection, the researchers have adopted Focus Group Discussion (FGD), interview, and observation.

3.1. Participants

To complete the study, twenty Facebook users have been selected. Eight female and twelve male Bangladeshi undergraduate students belonging to the age group of 19 to 25 years have participated here. Their Facebook status, comments, and conversations have thoroughly been observed to determine how often they

switch codes. Ten of them have also been interviewed about their code-switching tendency. Participants' privacy has been secured as Facebook is a confidential media of communication. All the participants have been notified beforehand about the purpose of the study.

3.2 Data Collection

Observation

The researchers have chosen participants with whom they are already familiar. So, they have been able to closely observe each participant's Facebook wall for a significant period of time. They have consistently monitored the participants' writing styles and live videos. Live video is one of the newest editions done by the Facebook official. Based on this observation, important features of their language usage in a bilingual environment have been noted. Moreover, they have instigated frequent conversations with the participants to watch more closely how they approach code-switching.

Interview

The researchers have conducted an interview session using Facebook Live to know why and how often the participants switch codes even in their oral Facebook communication. Each of the participants has faced five questions regarding code-switching.

Focused Group Discussion (FGD)

An FGD of two groups has also been arranged to collect the data. Each group had eight members. The groups have been provided with a situation to carry out a conversation and then the researchers have carefully observed and noted their usage of formal language and frequency of code-switching.

4. Findings

Upon the analysis of the received data, the preference for using English words in most of the students' day-to-day Bangla conversations is evident. They sometimes switch codes for just a word and sometimes for a whole sentence. Based on the observation and interview, it is seen that they switch codes on a regular mode to communicate more easily and comfortably. Many of them have agreed that the use of different codes has unintentionally started but it has gradually become more frequent and permanent in communication.

4.1 Findings of Facebook Conversation

While collecting data, it has been noticed that code-switching mostly occurs while conversing with the near and dear ones, such as friends and family. The ease to talk with their close fellow ensures an advantage of speaking more comfortably. In their code-switching, intra-sentential code-switching, tag switching, and intra-word switching occur most. Sometimes people face difficulties in pronouncing or remembering some Bangla words, like they never say 'Alokchitra', rather they say 'Camera'. So, many English words are frequently used even though their Bangla meaning is still unknown to many. The following conversations include more examples.

a) A conversation between two friends about smokers

Ata: Ei birikhurder jalay dukane bosay jaina, mane khub e annoying akta obostha.

(We cannot sit in the tea stall because of these smokers. What a very annoying situation is this!)

Vir: Thik e bolsis. Jotosob ganjakhur giye bose dukane. Amar to dom nitei problem hoy bhaire bhai ato smoking ashe pashe.

(You are right. Some nonsense drug addicted people get sited in the shop. It becomes hard for me to breathe as smoking is around there.)

Ata: Actually, amader deshe smoking banned kore deya uchit.

(Actually, smoking should be banned in our country.)

Vir: Ta thik bolsis. But amader jei government ta ki korbe.

(That's right. But we have such a government which would not ban it!)

Intra-sentential code-switching can be noticed in the above conversation. This cozy conversation between two friends shows no concern about code-switching. Sometimes, they switch between codes to make the point of conversation emphatic. Usually, mixing Bangla and English in Bangladesh is very frequent. As it has been seen in the dialogue, Ata uses the word 'annoy' rather than using 'Biroktikor'. The second dialogue shows Vir using the word 'smoking' which refers to 'Dhumpan' in Bangla. In the last dialogue, the word 'government' has been used though 'Sarkar' could also have been put there. In Bangladesh, many people assume that the sudden use of English words makes their conversation appear as a bit smarter one. Sometimes, they switch such intra-sentential types to emphasize a specific situation.

b) A conversation between two friends about traveling

Shipon: What's up? *Ki korich*? (What's up? What do you do?)

Nurul: Eito chole. Nothing, just watching a movie.

(As usual. Nothing just watching a movie)

Shipon: Khobor shunsis? We are planning to have a tour.

(Have you come to know? We are planning to have a tour.)

Nurul: Ki bolich. Kobe jabi?

(What are you saying, When will you go?)

Shipon: Let's have a meet. *Tarpor decide kori sob kisu niye*. (Let's have a meet. Then we will decide about everything.)

Nurul: But I am not free nowadays.

Shipon: No problem. *Tor jokhon time hoi tokhon e plan kori, ki bolish*?

(No problem. Let's have the plan when you have free time, what do you think?)

Nurul: Okay, *Tahole ami toke free hoye knock dibo*. (Okay, then I will knock you when I am free.)

Shipon: ok.

In this conversation, code-switching also occurs frequently but in a formal way. The code-switching starts with the inter-sentential switching such as "What' up? *Ki korich*?". The first sentence has been written in English and then Shipon again asked a similar question in Bangla. In the same way, "*Eito chole*. Nothing just watching a movie" is another example of inter-sentential switching. "*Tarpor decide kori sob kisu niye*." In this sentence, Shipon suddenly switches the code from Bangla to English using the word 'decide'. Tag switching occurs when Shipon says, "No problem. *Tor jokhon time hoi tokhon e plan kori, ki bolish?*". So, after the reply, Shipon placed a question too to receive Nurul's consent.

c) A conversation between two friends about the class

Asif: Rojae class korata disguuuuusting!

(It is so disgusting to do the classes during Ramadan.)

Ataur: *Class rule is totally FALTU!* (Class rule is totally useless!) Asif: *Sir der kaji amder pain deya!*

(The job of the Sirs is only to give us pain!)

Ataur: Yeah, as they are SIR vabto aktu nitei hobe, ki bolis?

(Yeah, as they are SIR, they will show teacher like attitude. What do you say?)

It is seen that the speakers, Asif, and Ataur, are talking informally. Asif, in his first Bangla sentence, switches codes while using the English word 'disguuuuusting'. Also, Ataur, while writing in English, all of a sudden switches code and adds the Bangla word 'FALTU'. To emphasize these two words, they switch codes and also extend the word 'disgusting' to 'disguuuuusting' and 'faltu' to 'FALTU'. When it is necessary, we can emphasize our tone; but if we consciously distort spelling, it will grow a tendency to misrepresent the formal language.

d) A conversation between daughter and mother.

Daughter: Ammu, I need money.

(Mom, I need money.)

Mother: *Keno? Akhon taka lagbe keno?* (Why? Why do you need money now?)

Daughter: *Ami shopping korbo*. (I will do my shopping.)

Mother: But tumi to last month ei shopping korle!

(But you went shopping last month!)

Daughter: Too ki hoyese?? Amar abar dress kinte hobe. Karon next week a amar presenta-

tion ache.

(So what? I have to buy a new dress again. Because, I have a presentation next week.)

Mother: Okay, rate amar room a ase niye jeo.

(Okay, come to my room tonight to take the money.)

Daughter: Thank you, Ammu.

(Thank you, mom.

In Bangladesh, people commonly use the term 'shopping' instead of 'Kenakata'. The word 'shopping' is more familiar and expressive to its users. The rate of using 'but' instead of 'Kintu' is also high. People hardly thank in Bangla. Almost 90% of people use the English word 'thanks' or 'thank you' while thanking someone. Another very common English word has obtained a permanent place - 'room', as 'Kokkho' is rarely used.

e) A conversation between husband and wife.

Husband: Ei tomar phone a miscall dilo ke?

(Hey! Who has given a missed call in your phone?)

Wife: Amar phone a kee miscall dilo seta jene tumi ki korbe?

(What will you do knowing who has given a missed call in my phone?)

Husband: *Keno amar ki janar right neii?* (Why? Don't I have the right to know?)

Wife: Haa ase, but tumi je jar tar call receive kore ghontar por ghonta kotha bolo, tokhon ki ami kisu boli!

(Yes, you have. But do I say anything when you talk for hours receiving phone calls from anyone!)

Especially, mobile related conversations tend to mix Bangla and English and vice-versa. There are certain expressions for which Bangla is never used; such as 'miscall', 'receive call', 'message', 'notifications', etc.

4.2 Findings of Facebook Posts

Post 1: "Ei bochor R Corona jabe bole mone hoina, Dhur! Pura year tai lose hoye gelo." (I don't think corona will go away this year. Damn! The whole year was a loss.) In the above post, word for word code-switching occurs - 'year' for 'bochor' and

'lose' for 'lukshan'.

Post 2: "Bercelona je winner hote parbe na taa ami age thekei sure silam."

(I was sure beforehand that Barcelona will not be winner.)

In the above post, 'winner' is used instead of 'Joyi' and 'sure' instead of 'Nishchit'.

Post 3: "Facebook open korlei biye R biye, kire bhai sobay dekhi Couple pic er bonna boyai dicche. Mone to hocche R kisudin avabe cholle bou e pabo na"

(Whenever I open Facebook, only wedding and wedding is there. Bro! Couple photos float like flood. I feel like I won't get a wife if situation goes like this for a few days.)

In the above post, 'Facebook open' refers to 'Facebook *Khullei*' and 'couple pic' refers to 'dompotider chobi'. Both expressions containing English words are very common in Bangla speech.

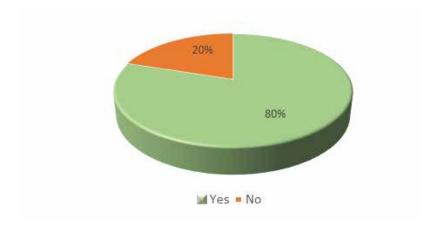
Post 4: "Finally graduation Sesh holo ajke. Ajke last viva silo ebong er maddhomei graduation done."

(Finally graduation has been completed today. Today was the last viva and through it graduation is done.)

In the above post, 'finally graduation' means 'oboshese porashuna sesh holo' and 'graduation done' is also a very common word choice for Bangladeshi students.

4.3 Findings of the Interview

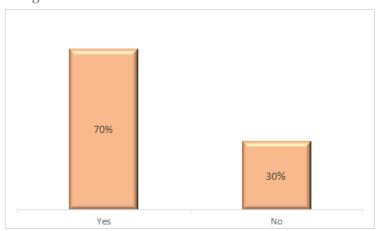
Several important and authentic data have been found from the interview session. In the interview, ten undergraduate students have been asked questions individually through Facebook Live. This interview session has helped the outcome of the study in two ways. Firstly, it has helped to observe how the participants switch codes on Facebook Live. And secondly, as the questions have been asked face-to-face, it has helped everyone to comprehend the questions' actual concepts. The data based on the answers to the asked three questions are shown below.



Question 1: Do you understand code-switching?

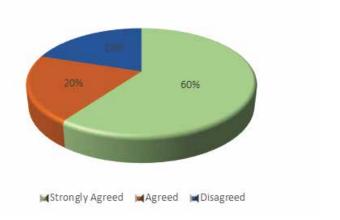
Eight of the ten students have replied positively to this question, besides confessing their utmost tendency to switch codes mostly during written Facebook interactions. It has been clarified from their answer that consciously or subconsciously, they frequently switch codes. Two students replied that code-switching may exist in their Facebook activities but they have no prior knowledge of the term.

Question 2: Why do you adopt code-switching in Facebook interactions? Seven of the ten students said that code-switching has positively influenced the overall improvement of their foreign language competency. They have also reported that normally the students of Bangladesh get scared of learning English. In such scenarios, code-switching assists them in their gradual language development besides ensuring a comfort zone. Moreover, it has also been noticed that 70% of the students switch codes to communicate better which means they prefer code-switching to express their ideas in a smooth and comprehensive way. Thus, they agree that code-switching establishes more effortless communication.



Question 3: Does code-switching impact your formal language?

Six students find code-switching to be very positively impactful on their usage of formal language. Two of them agree on its having several impacts but not of a formal standard, as code-switching itself is an informal practice. Most of them believe that code-switching promotes proper communication, avoids any gap or pause, and emphasizes on a particular situation. Moreover, they believe that if code-switching can be practiced smartly, it may influence the formal language in a very positive way which again may lead to effective communication.



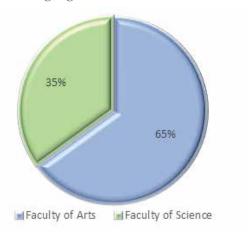
4.4 Findings of the Interview and FGD

Several significant and authentic data have been collected from the FGD session. First of all, most of the respondents frequently switch codes either consciously or subconsciously. After monitoring the FGD carefully, the researchers have received the same result as the interview session analyzed above. Students have participated in two separate groups, one from the Department of English and another from the Faculty of Science. Interestingly, the students of the Department of English have shown more spontaneity in switching codes from Bangla to English than the group from the Faculty of Science.

5. Discussion and Recommendation

Through the studies, it is clear that the rate of switching codes among the Bangladeshi undergraduate students at a private university is high. Code-switching is a common tendency through which they make their conversations lucid and brief. One of the primary purposes of using this technique is to properly express their thoughts in a friendly and smart way. However, many might do so to show off their English language competency as they sometimes recognize it to be smarter to mix English words with Bangla. As most of the Bangladeshi universities conduct their academic sessions in English, students get the perfect ambience to improve and practice their English language skills. Moreover, English, being one of the most commonly used languages around the world has the unprecedented significance of its proper and correct usage. Having all these factors in mind, the students switch codes which ultimately help them improve their English communication, even if it is to emphasize a particular word, phrase, or sentence.

Code-switching, used as a common tool, improves communication sometimes covering the incompetency of a speaker. However, one concerning issue is its acceleration of ignorance of the native language among users. In Bangladesh, code-switching occurs mostly between English and Bangla. Therefore, English often alarmingly receives more acclamation over the native one. To avoid this, the users should switch codes in a manner that also enables them to acknowledge the proper expression in native their language.



The paper has collected a very small amount of data from a few participants and their activities on one social media site. So, if a large number of participants could be attached here with more exposure to other social media applications and practical life conversations, that might have been more insightful for the analysis. However, the researchers have also observed that most undergraduate Bangladeshi students switch codes to show off, hide their lack of native language competency, seek attention, sound smarter, and also to express their thoughts effortlessly. Their use of code-switching impacts their formal language as well. Undoubtedly, code-switching helps to improve a foreign language competency. But excessive use of it should be discouraged to preserve the authenticity of any native language. So, in Bangladesh, code-switching should be practiced by upholding an unparalleled attention to Bangla.

6. Conclusion

This paper aims at exploring the code-switching practice of the undergraduate students of a Bangladeshi private university. The researchers attempt to find out why students switch codes and how it impacts their formal language. Throughout the data collection and findings, it has been apparent that users switch codes to express their thoughts in an easy and unhindered way, especially when it gets

tougher for them to find a proper L1 word to express something particular. The students, belonging to an era of social media, communicate through Facebook by mixing English words into Bangla conversations. Code-switching through Facebook communication can be considered one of the effective measures for the L2 learners as it aids them to sharpen their foreign language competency in numerous ways. But the researchers, in the light of their data analysis, suggest ensuring a measured and monitored usage of code-switching with deserved attention to the native language.

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