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UHB2207: Language, Cognition and Culture

Codeswitching Project

Through analysis of my transcribed data, I observe that in my recorded conversations codeswitching serves the following functions: (a) discourse management of distinct threads of conversation, (b) calling for attention and marking a transition to something important, (c) bringing a sense of familiarity and light-heartedness between interlocutors and (d) accessing a wider set of emotions. The rest of the essay will analyze the data and provide support for the above claims. It must be clarified that all the claims about codeswitching being made here are applicable only to the data given in the appendices and may not be generalizable.

This essay will be analyzing two different speech events. The first speech event (Appendix A) is a conversation I had with my elder brother ('Brother') over video call. Both of us are Indian and have been conversing with each other primarily in Hindi all our lives. In addition to our strong familial relationship, we also share the common background of being university students studying computer science. In the conversation, I update my brother with what is going on in my life, before we move into more academic discussions related to computer science. We end the conversation by speaking about how his recent 6-month stay with our parents was. The second speech event (Appendix B) is with my girlfriend ('Girlfriend') over video call too. Girlfriend's mother tongue is not Hindi so we primarily communicate in English. The conversation is a regular call between us, where we tell each other how our day went.

What especially stood out in the conversation with my brother (Appendix B) is that we used different codes when talking about academic matters and when talking about our personal lives. While we start talking in the unmarked code of Hindi (lines 1-6), I soon start switching to English (line 12), where the conversation's content is quite technical and academic. As the conversation continues and more academic matters are discussed, we can see that both of us have largely switched to English (lines 16-30), to the point that English seems to have become the unmarked code instead of Hindi. An example highlighting this transition is the initial use of "Haan samajh raha hoon" (line 6) to the later "Okay okay makes sense" (line 22). Whenever the conversation moves away from academics and more about personal lives, we switch back to Hindi, as seen in line 32 and lines 35-40. Thus, codeswitching into English is helping mark two "threads" of conversations, one about academic discussions and the other about personal lives and family.

A possible discrepancy is the use of Hindi even in technical conversations at the initial parts (lines 10 and 12). However, this might be simply because my brother is waiting for sufficient data before concluding that talking in English is indeed the norm (an instance of situational codeswitching), thus making the change gradual. In this case, codeswitching would also be an instrument to enforce language ideologies – by switching to English when talking about technical topics, I am (unconsciously) indicating to my brother that I consider English to be more normal for technical discussions.

Switching to English for technical conversations, beyond the ease of using technical terms, is also an instance of metaphorical codeswitching. Both of us might have switched to English for an academic conversation because the language used throughout their formal education has been English. Switching to English thus brings to the conversation the meanings of a school or university environment, which is more commonly suited for academic discussion. As a result, me and my brother start sharing multiple relationships with each other – that of brothers and also fellow academics discussing a technical idea in detail.

Another function codeswitching serves, which is separate from the content of the switch and is based on its occurrence itself, is calling for the other party's attention to what is being spoken. This is seen right from the start when I switch from Hindi to English (line 5). What follows the switch is the advice from an experienced acquaintance, and it is crucial to the present discussion on why I am continuing to interview despite having received an offer from elsewhere. While it is possible that the switch occurs to more accurately 'voice' the acquaintance who communicated with me in English, that does not seem to be the case because the second half of the advice is narrated in Hindi ("fulltime ke liye zyaada consideration denge"). The codeswitches in line 15 and line 17 can be explained in a similar manner. The first occurs to draw attention to my uncertainty on something, the second to a class on swearing which is unconventional and worthy of being made salient. In both cases, as soon as the important part has been spoken, I switch back to the unmarked code. Interestingly, there is a switch to Hindi in line 34, when I say that "network bohot zyaada change hota hai yah bohot catastrophic event aa jata hai". Even though the content is technical here, I perform a switch to Hindi from English, which was being used for the majority of the sentence. This switch can also be explained by the need to draw attention, also supported by the heavy emphasis accompanying the switch.

A similar function of codeswitching to introduce light-heartedness and familiarity, and reduce seriousness was seen in the conversations with Girlfriend (Appendix C). It must be noted that Hindi is the language with more emotional warmth for me, since it is the language I use with my family and Indian friends, and it was the language I first learned. In line 29, I codeswitch completely to Hindi, calling my girlfriend "paagal" instead of the English word "stupid". My girlfriend recognizes that Hindi usually signifies more emotional

warmth to me. Using the word "paagal" instead of "stupid" thus indicates to her that I find what she is doing as strange, but in a more light-hearted and affectionate manner than one that is to be taken seriously. Another instance where the same function of codeswitching is seen is at line 20. The conversation is about my girlfriend being unhappy with the lack of efforts I am taking towards getting to know her parents. A conversation of such a subject can be quite serious, but by using Hindi, my girlfriend brings in more emotional warmth and light-heartedness so as to make sure that she does not appear genuinely upset.

An aspect which follows from the idea of familiarity and emotional importance is using codeswitching as a means to in-groups (using a 'we' code) and an out group (using a 'they' code). Although my girlfriend's mother tongue is not Hindi, and she is way more comfortable using English, she frequently uses Hindi in the transcribed conversation. In line 6, she switches to the phrase "kuch interesting cheez bolo, wink wink". The "wink wink" indicates furtiveness and secrecy. Saying "kuch interesting cheez bolo" instead of "tell me something interesting" places her in the same in-group as me, thereby promoting intimacy and making it more likely for me to share information with her I otherwise would not. The other switches at lines 4, 8 and 34 also help in promoting intimacy, thereby having a greater emotional effect on me, which is probably the intention.

Finally, codeswitching is also used to access a wider set of cognitive domains than is accessible in the unmarked code. In the conversation with my girlfriend, this is especially seen in lines 17 and 38. In line 17, it is possible that I codeswitch to Hindi to access words like "sharmaana", "bulaiye", "bulayenge" and "bhaiya", whose equivalents are not so readily available in English. "Sharmaana" denotes a mix of blushing and hesitation, and a perfect equivalent is not so readily available in English. Similarly, the words "bulaiye/bulayenge" are verbs to denote calling someone out with respect, while "bhaiya" means "brother" with an added dimension of respect too. My extended family is relatively patriarchal in terms of traditions, and cousins' wives would show respect to me even when I am younger, simply because I am their husband's brother. Although words for "calling someone out with respect" or "respectful brother" might exist in the English language, they are not so readily accessible, motivating the switch to Hindi. In line 38, my girlfriend switches to "tussi na jao" as a way of saying "please do not go", which is a Punjabi expression. It was made popular in a Bollywood movie scene which depicts a small child who is extremely sad that someone is leaving. Using "tussi na jao" is a metaphorical codeswitch which brings in the same emotion of child-like sadness, otherwise maybe not so readily accessible in English.

In conclusion, based on the data, this essay has proposed that codeswitching can be used for discourse management, as a call for attention, introducing familiarity and light-heartedness among the interlocutors, and also accessing cognitive resources like some emotions which are otherwise not readily accessible.

Appendix A - Transcription Conventions

- Parts spoken in the marked code are in **bold**. Parts in the marked language which are there because of lexical gaps/borrowings into the unmarked code are not bolded.
- Parts spoken in the unmarked code are unformatted.
- Sections that are not in English are followed by *blue, italicized* translations within *()*.
- Text inside [ ] are to provide additional information about the story or context.
- Speaker names are underlined.

Appendix B

Marked Code: English; **Unmarked code: Hindi** (*translation in English*)

1. Me: Aaj final interview round tha *(Today was the final interview round)*.
2. Brother: Tumhara toh Stripe mein ho gaya na, tumne bola tha ki Stripe mein ho gaya toh le lunga kuch aur nahi dekhunga *(Didn't you get into Stripe? You said that if you got into Stripe then you'll take it and won't look for anything else).*
3. Me: Haan Stripe hi le raha hoon *(Yeah I am taking Stripe only)*.
4. Brother: Toh fir kyun baith rahe ho interviews mein *(Then again, why are you sitting for the interviews)*?
5. Me: Senior se baat ki *(Talked to a senior)*, senior ne bola ki *(senior said that)* **passing the interview gives higher chances** ki aapko *(that)* fulltime ke liye zyaada consideration denge *(they will give more consideration for full time)*.
6. Brother: Haan samajh raha hoon, okay *(True, I understand, okay)*.

[…Discussing how a particular computer science course in college is going…]

7. Me: Theory of computation bohot theoretical hai *(Theory of computation is too theoretical)*
8. Brother: Abhi toh NFA, DFA chal raha hoga. Stack pe aaye hoge, PDA… *(Now you must be going through NFA, DFA. Must have come to stack, PDA…)*
9. Me: [interrupts loudly] Turing machine start ho gaya *(has started)* **hero**
10. Brother: Turing machine start ho gaya kya *(has started)*? Bohot jaldi khatam kar diya yaar *(finished really soon)*, yeh PDA NPDA mein time lagta hai *(it takes time in PDA NPDA)*. Non-deterministic thoda complicated hota hai *(is a little complicated)*.
11. […]
12. Me: So last class end hui yeh bol ke ki *(so the last class ended by saying that)* **everything you can do on your laptop, you can do using a Turing machine**. Yeh **bomb drop** kar diya phir class khatam *(they dropped this bomb and then class ends)*.
13. Brother: **True,** poora algorithm ka concept hi Turing machine se derived hai *(True, the entire concepts of algorithms is derived from Turing machine)*. Aisa bol sakte hain Turing Machine ne human thought ko formalize kar diya hai, kind of *(We can say that Turing Machines have formalized human thought, kind of)*.
14. Brother: Complexity mein kya, P vs NP cover karenge kya *(In complexity, will they cover P vs NP)*?
15. Me: **I am not sure**. Ruko dekhne do *(Let me see)*.

[…Discussing a linguistics course I am taking…]

16. Brother: Aur USP ke course mein kya chal raha hai *(and what is happening in your USP course)*?

17. Me: Oh, bataya nahi, picchle class mein *(oh, I didn't tell you, in our last class)*… **last class was on swearing**, toh matlab sab khul ke gaali de rahe the *(meaning everyone was openly swearing in the class)*.

18. Brother: Mere hisaab se toh **most swear words generally feminine targeted** hote hain *(According to me, most swear words are feminine-targeted)*… **at least in a patriarchal society**.

19. Me: Matlab ek paper padha tha, paper ka thesis yeh hai ki *(We read a paper, it had the thesis that)* **most of the swear words in most cultures come from four categories. First category is profanities, like Jesus Fucking Christ, damn you to hell**. India mein jo bhi Hindu log *(All the radical Hindus in India)*…

20. Brother: Lekin India mein mushkil hai na, India mein itna diversity hai ki aap religion focused voh nahi kar sakte, general audience ko cater nahi karega *(But this is difficult in India, India has so much diversity that you cannot use religion focused, it won't cater to the general audience)*.

21. Me: Bilkul bilkul, culture dependent hota hai *(Of course, it is dependent on culture)*. Par *(But)* **second category is related to sexual acts. Third category is bodily fluids and bodily parts.**

22. Brother: **Okay okay makes sense.**

23. Me: **Fourth category is racial slurs**

24. Brother: **But again, racial slurs or religious based profanities** ko aap ek bohot diverse country mein nahi le sakte *(you cannot use racial slurs or religious profanities in a diverse country)*

25. Me: **Exactly exactly**

26. […]

27. Me: Toh **a second paper we were reading** tha ki aapka pain tolerance judge kar rehe the **when you're swearing** *(so a second paper we were reading was that your pain tolerance was being judged when you're swearing)*. **Apparently when you're speaking swear words** pain tolerance badh jaata hai *(yoru pain tolerance increases)*.

28. Brother: Yeh toh maine bhi kahin padha hai *(This even I have read somewhere)*. Interesting. **What about non verbal swear acts?** Jaise *(Like)* **showing the middle finger. Because at least given** itna saara jo communication hai **these are non-verbal** *(Because given so much communication is non-verbal)*. Ek voh dimension bhi aa jata hai *(That dimension also arises)* **when you're trying to bring this swear domain**.

29. Brother: Matlab ab discussion toh yeh bhi hoga ki *(now the discussion also comes that)* **why is there no universal language?**

30. Me: Hmm so yeh hi **underlying question** poore module ka yahi hai *(that is the underlying question of this module)*, **is language universal.**

31. […]

32. Brother: Maine bhi socha tha, ki language mein elective lunga *(even I considered doing a language elective)*. Par slot clash kar raha tha toh maine **ditch** kar diya *(but the slot was clashing so I ditched it).*

[…Discussing about another CS project I am doing…]

33. Brother: Nahi exactly yeh jo cheez hai. Chord mein, jo Google ne Chord release kiya. Node joining mein keval logn nodes hi reconstruct hote hain na *(Not this exact thing… in Chord, which Google released, node joining causes reconstruction of only log(n) nodes)*

34. Me: **Chord is a very specific ring-type** topology. Prof ne jo paper likha *(The paper Prof wrote)* **that's for any general** topology. Toh Prof ka paper *(So Prof's paper)* **does not handle** churn **properly**. Toh vahi **thinking of approaches** ki *(So thinking of approaches that)*, **can handle very slow** churn. **But the second problem** yeh hai ki jab network [heavily accented] bohot zyaada change hota hai yah [heavily emphasized] bohot catastrophic event aa jata hai *(is that when there's a lot of change or a major catastrophic event comes)*, **then you need to restabilize the network. So thinking of detection mechanisms to operationalize** ki bohot bada change hua hai network mein *(that the network has had a big change)*.

[..Coming back to the end of the conversation, talking about stay with parents…]

35. Me: Aur batao *(Tell me more)*. Latest paper toh abhi December mein submit karna hai na *(Latest paper you have to submit in December right)*.

36. Brother: Haan, December mein deadline hai, phir January or February hai *(Yes, there's a deadline in December, then there's January and February)*. Writeup daalna hai jitna bhi discussion, additional experiments hain, kuch additional implementation hai voh sab bacha hai voh sab bhi karna hai *(have to submit a writeup on all the discussion, additional experiments and additional implementation, that's all left and have to do it too)*. Kaafi kam hai, kaafi zyaada kam hai *(have work, have a lot of work)*.

37. Me: Ghar pe maza aaya *(Did you enjoy time at home)*?

38. Brother: Maza karne gaya tha main *(Did I go there to enjoy)*?

39. Me: Accha nahi laga *(Didn't you feel good)*?

40. Brother: Haan accha laga para maza karne thodi gaya tha *(Yeah I felt good but I did not go there to enjoy)*.

<u>Appendix C</u>

Marked Code: Hindi (*translation in English*); **Unmarked code: English**

1. Me: He looked very sad, but I feel like it is because he has not gotten any internship. But he got into Google next round.

2. Girlfriend: That's good.

3. Me: So he looked very sad, so I went to his room after talking to you. And I asked him like "Bro, are you okay?"

4. Girlfriend: **[Indian accent] Waah waah waah waah, waah waah waah waah. Kya bola usne?** *(Wow wow wow wow, wow wow wow wow. What did he say?)*

5. Me: He said I am okay, he wasn't feeling bad, just a bit stressed.

[…]

6. Girlfriend: **Kuch interesting cheez bolo** *(tell me something interesting)*, **wink wink**
7. Me: [laughter] What the hell [laughter] This is being recorded!

[…]

8. Girlfriend: I am still catching up on my ML lecture, and that's very time consuming. So after that is done, I will have a little more time. I have a lecture on artificial networks, and it is [emphasized] so complicated. **Kuch bhi samajh mein nahi aa raha hai, kuch bhi samajh mein nahi aa raha hai** *(Not understanding anything at all, not understanding anything at all)*.
9. Me: **Main help karunga na tumhe** *(I will help you out)*, what is it?
10. Girlfriend: **Are yaar** *(Oh my, dude)*, do you know weights and batches and online learning?
11. Me: I do.
12. Girlfriend: For once, you know something.

[…]

13. Me: Some of my cousins' wives who are clearly much older than me call me Ashu [family nickname] **bhaiya** *(elder brother)*, because [mockingly] **'ohh'** I'm the brother of their husband. I'm like bro, just call me Ashu.
14. Girlfriend: You said that?
15. Me: Yeah, I said [accented] **'Ashu bulaiye aap'** *("call me Ashu")*.
16. Girlfriend: **Phir kya bola** *(Then what did she say)*?
17. Me: **Pehle toh paanch minute sharmaana hai** *(First they have to hesitate for five minutes)*, [imitating how sisters-in-law speak to A] **'nahi nahi kyun aise'** *(no why like this)*, [imitating A's response to sisters-in-law] **'are ashu hi bulaiye aap'** *(just call me Ashu)*. **Tab phir bolte hain ki, tab phir bolte hain accha theek hai ab ashu hi bulayenge** *(Then they say, then they say that okay we will call you Ashu)*. **Phir next time miloge toh 'are ashu bhaiya kaise hain aap'** *(then if you meet them next time they will say 'are ashu elder brother how are you')* [sisters-in-law to A].

[…]

18. Girlfriend: My mom went now, but she's gonna come back again, do you really wanna talk to her?
19. Me: I will say hi, but what should I talk to her about?
20. Girlfriend: **Yaar** *(Dude)* when I came here, **tune bola ki, tune bola ki** *(you said that, you said that)*, you will talk to my parents sometime, but [accented] **kab** *(when)*.
21. Me: I will talk to them, but send me a list of questions first.
22. Girlfriend: [laughter] What the hell!
23. Me: It's a bit intimidating.
24. Me: My mom asked about you also.
25. Girlfriend: Today? What did she say?

[…]

26. Girlfriend: I have an urge to stick this pen up my nose, but I probably shouldn't.

27. Me: No don't do it!
28. Girlfriend: [laughter]
29. Me: **Paagal…. Aunty dekhiye aapki beti kya kar rahi hai** *(Stupid… aunty look what your daughter is doing)***!**

[…]

30. Girlfriend: I miss you
31. Me: Miss me too
32. Girlfriend: Did you just say miss me too?
33. Me: No I said…
34. Girlfriend: [interrupting] Good for you, good for you, **nahi khush raho theek hai apne aap ke saath, khush raho, khush khush khush** *(no be happy with yourself alright, be happy, happy happy happy)*. Bye!
35. Me: I wanted to say miss ya too. But I also said me too, so it got mixed up [laughter]
36. Girlfriend: [with exaggerated emotion] **Tussi mat jao** *(Don't go away)***!**
37. Me: I'm hanging up!
38. Girlfriend: [with exaggerated emotion] **Tussi na jao** *(Don't go away)***! Tussi** please **na jao** *(Don't go away)***!**
39. Me: [laughter] Okay I won't go, I'm just going to sleep like this.