

Code-Switching as a Social Mirror: Attitudes and Stereotypes in Uzbekistan

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the perceptions and stereotypes about code-switching in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is a country with many languages, including Uzbek, Russian, and English, which mix in different social settings. The study is based on a survey of 27 participants from various age groups which explores when code-switching happens, how often it occurs, and how people interpret it socially. The results show that code-switching is particularly common in work and online environments and it is often linked to modernity, education, and global involvement. However, many respondents also expressed criticism and mixed feelings about this practice. This suggests that there are complex interactions between national language identity and multilingual experiences. The study provides insights into how speakers make language choices and deal with social expectations in today's Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Code-switching, stereotypes, language ideology, Uzbekistan, sociolinguistics, bilingualism, multilingualism, identity, language attitudes, social perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

In multilingual societies, code-switching is the practice of switching between two or more languages or language varieties during a conversation. In Uzbekistan, where Uzbek is the state language and Russian and English have different levels of prestige and practical utility, code-switching has become a visible and active part of daily communication, especially among

urban speakers. However, even though it serves a linguistic purpose, code-switching often faces social judgment, misunderstanding, and stereotypes.

This study explores the social attitudes and stereotypes surrounding code-switching in Uzbekistan. By surveying 27 respondents from various age groups and backgrounds, this article investigates how people perceive code-switching in different situations, how frequently they engage in it, and the meanings they associate with it. Specifically, the study investigates whether languages like Russian and English provoke different social judgments when mixed with Uzbek, and whether speakers are viewed differently based on their language use.

Through this exploration, the study aims to provide a better understanding of how language behavior relates to identity and social beliefs in modern Uzbek society. The findings also reveal the hidden language hierarchies and cultural views that shape public attitudes toward multilingualism in Uzbekistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Code-switching, as a result of language contact, has been examined widely through sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and pragmatic perspectives. It is generally defined as the practice of switching between two or more languages or varieties in a single interaction. In multilingual communities like Uzbekistan, code-switching often reflects not only language skills but also complex social meanings related to identity, power dynamics, and group affiliation.

One of the key models in code-switching research is Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model. This model differentiates the "matrix" (dominant) language from the "embedded" language in bilingual expressions [5]. According to this model, code-switching follows specific grammatical and social rules, not randomness. This framework is particularly important for analyzing the structural aspects of Uzbek-Russian and Uzbek-English code-switching, where Uzbek often serves as the matrix language.

From a sociopragmatic perspective, Gumperz's Contextualization Theory emphasizes how code-switching can indicate shifts in tone, social role, or power distance [2]. In Uzbekistan, speakers might use English to convey prestige or modernity, while Russian may suggest intellectualism or urban sophistication. These language choices are not just stylistic; they reflect broader cultural beliefs and social judgments.

Importantly, code-switching serves as a ground for stereotyping. Research shows that bilingual speakers are often stereotyped based on which language they use, when, and with whom. Giles and Coupland's Communication Accommodation Theory argues that speakers adjust their language to seek approval or lessen social distance [3]. Such adjustments can result in judgments about authenticity, intelligence, or loyalty.

Despite these comprehensive theoretical frameworks, there is a noticeable lack of empirical research on code-switching within the Uzbek sociolinguistic context. Most existing studies focus on grammatical or teaching aspects, leaving the social and stereotype-related issues underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by examining how Uzbek speakers view code-switching and the stereotypes they connect to it.

METHODS

Participants

The study involved 27 participants from various age groups and professional backgrounds. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, ensuring a range of bilingual and trilingual language users, primarily in Uzbek, Russian, and English. The age distribution was: 18-25 years (18%), 26-35 years (44%), and 36-50 years (37%).

Instrument

A structured questionnaire with 15 multiple-choice questions was created to explore key aspects of code-switching. The questionnaire had five thematic sections: (1) code-switching behavior, (2) attitudes, (3) stereotypes, (4) language ideology, and (5) general beliefs. The questions aimed to gather both

factual language use and personal views on code-switching in different contexts. (Appendix 1)

Procedure

The survey was distributed and completed using Google Docs, allowing participants to fill out the form directly and return it via shared links. This method offered flexibility in participation while keeping response collection clear. To promote honest feedback, responses were kept anonymous.

Data analysis

The collected responses were manually compiled and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics, such as percentages and frequencies, were calculated to find patterns across questions. The data were shown using bar and pie charts to illustrate trends in code-switching behavior, attitudes, and social stereotypes.

RESULTS

The survey responses from 27 participants showed complex patterns in the usage, perception, and social evaluation of code-switching practices in Uzbekistan.

When asked about the context of their code-switching, 29% reported switching at work or school, and another 29% on social media, making these the most common places for bilingual mixing. 22% said they mainly code-switched with friends, while 15% reported doing so at home. Only 5% of respondents said they never code-switch.

In terms of frequency, a significant 55% indicated that they code-switch very often, 29% sometimes, and only 1.5% never do it. This suggests that code-switching is a common practice among the surveyed group.

The age distribution showed a concentration of respondents in the 26-35 age group (44%), followed by 36-50 (37%) and 18-25 (18%).

When asked how they feel about someone mixing Uzbek with Russian or English, 33% said it sounds modern and

educated. Another 33% felt it is okay in informal situations. Only 11% found it confusing or unnecessary, while 7% viewed it as disrespectful to the Uzbek language. 16% said they did not notice or care.

The idea that code-switching is more accepted among younger people was supported by 48% of participants who answered “Yes, definitely,” and 18% said “Somewhat.” Only 7% said “No.”

Participants associated different stereotypes with the languages used in code-switching. For those mixing Russian into Uzbek, 40% believed it showed intelligence or elite status, while 30% saw it as pretentious. 11% described it as trendy or fashionable, and 15% saw no stereotype at all.

In contrast, those using English in conversation were mostly seen as modern or global-minded (41%) or well-educated (26%). A smaller number (11%) viewed it as arrogant, while 15% believed it reflected a copying of Western culture. (Chart 1)

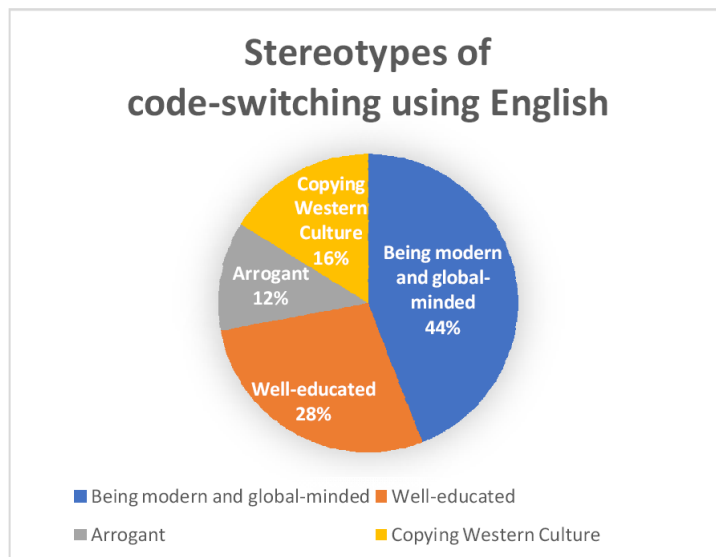


Chart 1. *Stereotypes of code-switching*

Respondents also shared their views on monolingual Uzbek speakers: 41% described them as nationalistic or traditional, 26% as respectable, and 19% believed they are isolated from global trends.

Regarding whether they had ever been criticized or mocked for code-switching, a significant number had experienced it: 26% said “Yes, often,” 33% said “Yes, sometimes,” and 22% said “rarely.” Only 15% said they had never faced criticism. This indicates that over 80% of participants had encountered some form of negative feedback for code-switching. (Chart 2)

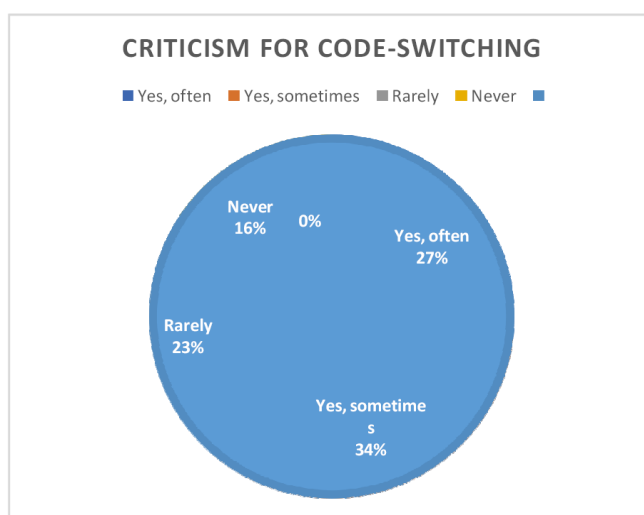


Chart 2. Criticisms for code-switching

77% of respondents (44% always, 33% often) believed people change their language to align with the status or expectations of their audience, supporting theories of strategic language adjustment.

When asked about their overall opinion of code-switching, 48% had a positive view, seeing it as enriching communication, while 33% were neutral. Notably, 19% viewed it negatively, as a sign of language loss.

A similar pattern emerged regarding code-switching in education: 44% had a positive opinion, 33% remained neutral, and 22% saw it negatively, reflecting mixed feelings even in formal or institutional settings. (Chart 3)

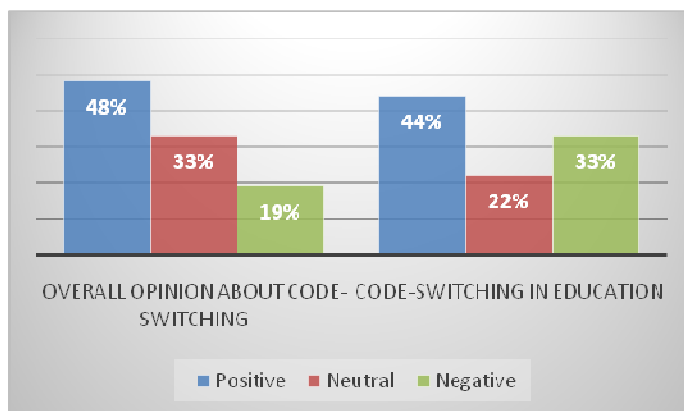


Chart 3. *Opinions about code-switching*

DISCUSSION

The findings show that code-switching is a common and socially important practice in Uzbekistan, especially among younger and middle-aged speakers. It represents not only language behavior but also a social act that reflects and shapes perceptions of identity, status, and modernity.

The data reveal that most respondents code-switch often, particularly in professional and digital spaces like work, school, and social media. This suggests that code-switching in Uzbekistan is mainly driven by practical needs, such as expressing technical ideas, fitting in with modern communication styles, or connecting with multilingual communities. The high percentage of frequent code-switchers (55% “very often”) confirms that this practice is deeply rooted in everyday language use, especially for bilingual or trilingual individuals.

While many respondents expressed a positive view of code-switching, a significant number remained neutral or negative,

particularly when asked if code-switching reflects education or undermines language authenticity. This mixed reaction highlights ongoing language ideological tensions in Uzbek society – between the desire to maintain linguistic purity and the need to engage in global, multilingual conversations. The neutrality shown in many responses may indicate uncertainty: speakers may recognize the social benefits of code-switching but also fear stigma or criticism for doing so.

This aligns with Gumperz's view of code-switching as a cue that reflects shifting social roles and with Woolard's theory of language ideologies that see some languages (like English) as modern and others (like Uzbek) as traditional.

The responses confirm that different languages bring out different social stereotypes. English is linked with modernity and professionalism, while Russian evokes elitism or pretentiousness. These associations fit within post-Soviet language hierarchies, where Russian has long been associated with higher education and urban prestige, and English has gained symbolic power due to globalization.

A notable finding is that over 80% of respondents reported being criticized or mocked for code-switching. This suggests that while code-switching is common and practical, it remains a socially contested behavior. The criticism could stem from ideologies promoting linguistic purity, generational gaps, or beliefs about the appropriate use of language in formal and informal settings.

This tension supports Giles and Coupland's Communication Accommodation Theory, which suggests that speakers adjust their language based on social norms, often dealing with pressure from different audiences [3]. The high proportion of respondents who think people change their language based on status further emphasizes the strategic aspect of code-switching in Uzbekistan.

Despite the prevalence of code-switching, views on its role in education are varied. While many see it as beneficial, nearly a fifth view it as a threat to language growth or national identity. This reflects broader worries in Uzbekistan about keeping Uzbek as the leading national language, especially with the increasing influence of English through technology, business, and education.

Thus, even as code-switching becomes more widespread, it continues to be shaped by ideological conflicts that affect how speakers see themselves and others. These findings highlight the need for more public discussions and education about multilingualism – not just as a skill but as a normal and valuable part of linguistic life in modern Uzbekistan.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed social perceptions, stereotypes, and attitudes toward code-switching in Uzbekistan through a small survey. The findings show that code-switching is a common behavior, especially among younger and middle-aged speakers. It often occurs in professional, social, and digital environments.

The data showed a mix of positive, neutral, and negative feelings about code-switching. Many respondents linked it to modernity, education, and a global outlook, particularly when English was used. However, a considerable number expressed mixed feelings or discomfort, seeing code-switching as a sign of language loss or cultural inauthenticity. These varied attitudes highlight deeper beliefs about language that favor certain ways of speaking while sidelining others.

The criticism and social judgment reported by participants point to the need to tackle linguistic stigma and encourage a better understanding of multilingual practices as normal and based on context. Code-switching is not just a careless or lazy practice; it's often a purposeful way to communicate that reflects speakers' social standing, identity, and communication goals.

This study adds to the growing field of sociolinguistics in Central Asia by shedding light on the stereotypes and meanings linked to language choice in Uzbekistan. It also stresses the importance of seeing code-switching as both a language practice and a social and ideological issue.

Limitations and future research

While this study provides helpful insights, it is limited by its small sample size and the reliance on self-reported data. Future research should include a broader range of participants and use

qualitative interviews or discourse analysis to understand better the practical roles and emotional experiences of code-switching. Comparing studies across regions, age groups, and professional situations could further clarify the social and cultural aspects of bilingual and trilingual communication in Uzbekistan.

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APPENDIX 1 – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: code-switching behavior

1. In which context do you most often code-switch?
a) At home b) At work or school c) On social media
d) With friends e) I do not code-switch
2. How often do you code-switch between Uzbek and another language?
a) Very often b) Sometimes c) Rarely d) Never
3. What is your age group?
a) Under 18 b) 18-25 c) 26-35 d) 36-50 e) Over 50

Section 2: Attitudes toward code-switching

4. Do you think people who code-switch sound more educated?
a) Strongly agree b) Agree c) Neutral d) Disagree
e) Strongly disagree
5. How do you feel when someone mixes Uzbek with Russian or English?
a) It sounds modern and educated
b) It's confusing or unnecessary
c) It's acceptable in informal situations
d) It's disrespectful to Uzbek
e) I don't notice or care
6. Is code-switching more accepted among younger people in Uzbekistan?
a) Yes, definitely b) Somewhat c) Not really d) No e) Not sure

Section 3: Stereotypes and social perception

7. What stereotype is most associated with people who mix Russian into their Uzbek speech?
a) Intelligent or elite b) Pretentious or showing off
c) Lazy or careless d) Trendy or fashionable e) No stereotype
8. What stereotype is most associated with people who mix English into their Uzbek or Russian speech?
a) Modern or global-minded b) Arrogant c) Well-educated
d) Copying Western culture e) No stereotype
9. If someone speaks only Uzbek without mixing, how are they usually perceived?
a) Nationalistic or traditional b) Less educated c) Respectable
d) Isolated from global trends e) No specific image

10. Do you think code-switching makes a person sound 'less authentic' in their Uzbek identity?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
11. When someone uses English words in casual Uzbek conversation, what is your impression?
 - a) They are educated or professional
 - b) They are showing off
 - c) They are confused about identity
 - d) It's normal and unremarkable
 - e) I find it irritating

Section 4: Language ideologies and social pressure

12. Have you ever been criticized or mocked for code-switching?
 - a) Yes, often
 - b) Yes, sometimes
 - c) Rarely
 - d) Never
 - e) I don't code-switch
13. Do people change their language use to match the status or expectations of their audience?
 - a) Always
 - b) Often
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Rarely
 - e) Never

Section 5: General beliefs

14. What is your overall opinion of code-switching?
 - a) Positive – it enriches communication
 - b) Neutral – it depends on the situation
 - c) Negative – it's a sign of language loss
 - d) I've never thought about it
15. What is your opinion of code-switching in education?
 - a) Positive – it enriches communication
 - b) Neutral – it depends on the situation
 - c) Negative – it's a sign of language loss
 - d) I've never thought about it

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