

TRANSCULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS: EXPLORING SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC SHIFTS IN ENGLISH TO URDU LEXICAL BORROWINGS WITHIN SOCIAL CONTEXTS

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Abstract

The relationship between English and Urdu, two languages which belong to two different language families, has been the topic of research by scholars for a long period of time. This paper aims to identify English words in Urdu that have changed meaning or shifted from their original denotations, delving into the reasons behind these shifts. The study emphasizes that these changes reflect the sociocultural dynamics within Pakistani society. Using a mixed-method research approach, this paper employs qualitative and quantitative analyses to explore how these semantic and pragmatic shifts manifest in everyday Urdu conversations. It highlights twenty borrowed English words in Urdu, showcasing areas where contextual variation becomes evident. Utilizing Speech Act Theory, the paper reveals how these borrowed words not only convey information but also perform social actions within specific cultural contexts. Additionally, the paper analyzes Urdu-English code-switching in Pakistani English, focusing solely on the lexical and phrase levels for data analysis.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural communication, code-mixing, borrowing, semantic variations, pragmatic shifts, Pakistani English, Urdu, loss of originality, linguistic dynamism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication involves the transmission of information from one person to another, typically through linguistic codes. These codes serve as the medium through which speakers encode their ideas, later decoded by listeners. Within various social groups, unique jargon and terms develop to efficiently convey specific concepts and ideas (Zahid & Zeeshan, 2023).

Although core vocabulary tends to have a lengthy lifespan and stability, the speed of language evolution is notably highest in the lexicon. Unlike phonemes and grammatical morphemes, lexical words possess the unique quality of being easily added to the current inventory (Nevalainen, 1999). The socio-cultural significance of lexico-semantic variation, deeply embedded in adaptation and innovation, has motivated numerous researchers and linguists to extensively investigate within the fertile ground of Pakistani English. This exploration significantly contributes to the evolution and enrichment of English in non-native contexts. (Jilani & Anwar, 2018).

The paper aims to demonstrate that code-switching operates within grammatical rules, manifesting as a regulated activity occurring at the phrase and clause levels (Anwar, 2009). Additionally, it provides a concise examination of English usage as a non-native form. This paper proposes that language variations and evolutions constitute fundamental aspects of bilingualism and multilingualism.

1.1 Background of study

The themes of change, adaptation, and conflict that we delve into within this volume aren't unfamiliar to established disciplines like sociology and social psychology. These concepts embody experiential social occurrences that delineate and typify the connections between different states, contexts, or individuals/groups (Omoniyi, 2010). The usage and practices of language have been impacted by their prevalence as favored modes of communication on the Internet (Parveen &



Aslam, 2013). Code-switching exemplifies a linguistic phenomenon where these shifts can be observed. This extensive borrowing undoubtedly mirrors the diverse foreign interactions during that time and the increasing demands placed on the developing standard language (Nevalainen, 1999). Global economic forces, coupled with the emergence of global media, have created the conditions for a remarkable and rapid increase in worldwide bilingualism (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006). Presently, the unprecedented language interactions on a global scale, driven by global advertising, internet communication, and various electronic media such as DVDs and entertainment technology, mark an unparalleled phase in human communication history.

For approximately four centuries, Urdu and English have coexisted in contact, yet their virtual interaction has sparked a new inquiry about the influence of English on the Urdu language (Rafi, 2013). The research uncovers a considerable influx of English words integrating into the Urdu language, gaining momentum since the rise of Computer-Mediated Communication. Alongside socio-political factors, linguistic and psycholinguistic reasons should not be disregarded when examining code-mixing/borrowing as a routine occurrence. The study advocates for a careful approach when extrapolating language contact features in e-discourse, a matter debated for years.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study aims to emphasize the significance of pragmatic skills in comprehending jargon and its contextual application. The concepts involved possess a strong pragmatic essence, evolving from literal meanings to pragmatic interpretations through context. The study contends that these semantic shifts serve as indicators of the sociocultural dynamics within Pakistani society (Qureshi et al., 2023).

1.3 Research Questions

This article poses some important questions that the researcher tries to answer in this paper.

1. Do certain semantic-pragmatic roles influence which categories are more likely to be borrowed than others?
2. What drives the adoption of English items into Urdu?
3. Does borrowing lead to a loss of originality due to the inability to find suitable equivalents in inter-lingual situations?

1.4 Significance of Study

Utilizing English terms in Urdu, especially in cross-lingual scenarios, presents both benefits and obstacles. This research aims to examine the linguistic shifts occurring due to the motive behind borrowing. Specifically, it explores the need to incorporate contemporary ideas, technological progress, and global concepts into Urdu. Nevertheless, the article emphasizes that this practice may lead to a sense of diminished authenticity as individuals face challenges in identifying precise Urdu equivalents for certain English terms.

Fundamentally, borrowing enriches language and aids cross-language communication, yet it risks undermining originality. Achieving harmony between embracing linguistic advancements and safeguarding Urdu's authenticity demands thoughtful attention to cultural, semantic, and practical aspects during borrowing. These considerations are crucial to steer Urdu's evolution while safeguarding its distinctive identity and authentic expressions.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction to Theory

This research is poised to connect with Speech Act Theory by investigating semantic and pragmatic changes in lexical borrowings. It centers on language's performative nature, exploring how speech not only communicates information but also carries out social functions. In your area of interest, comprehending the semantic and pragmatic shifts of English-Urdu borrowings within social settings corresponds with Speech Act Theory's core principles. Both entail scrutinizing language use in communication within distinct cultural and social environments.

Utilizing Speech Act Theory to examine semantic and pragmatic changes in English-Urdu lexical borrowings within social settings holds importance as it offers a theoretical structure for analyzing linguistic alterations and the performative nature of communication. This method enables a deeper



comprehension of language utilization, unveiling the complex interplay of cross-cultural communication and the practical roles these borrowings play in various social environments.

2.2 Speech Act Theory

The theory of Speech Acts, initially formulated by J.L. Austin and subsequently elaborated by John Searle, investigates the concept that utterances do more than convey information—they also carry out actions. It highlights language's performative nature, where spoken words not only depict reality but actively mold and impact it. Searle further classified illocutionary acts into distinct categories like assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, each linked to different types of speech acts.

Speech Act theory underscores the performative function of language, asserting that utterances are not mere conveyors of information but active tools that perform actions. It highlights the idea that speaking is a form of social action, where words have the power to shape reality, influence others, and bring about change. In this framework, language is not solely a descriptive tool but a means of actively engaging in and impacting the social world through the very act of speaking.

In essence, Speech Act theory highlights the dynamic nature of language, where words are not just carriers of meaning but tools for performing social actions and influencing the behavior and attitudes of others.

2.3 Components of Speech Act Theory

The theory identifies three key concepts:

2.3.1 Locutionary Act

The locutionary act refers to the basic act of producing sounds and words to form an utterance. It encompasses the literal meaning of the words used and is the foundational level of speech acts. In the context of lexical borrowings, the locutionary act involves the physical articulation of the borrowed words, their pronunciation, and their initial semantic content.

When examining how speaking words influences the conveyance of meaning in borrowed vocabulary, it's vital to acknowledge the significance of pronunciation, intonation, and linguistic context. Uttering these borrowed words bestows them with distinct phonetic traits and speech patterns, incorporating a linguistic context that shapes their overall significance. Additionally, the manner in which these borrowed terms are assimilated into the recipient language impacts their semantic range. The subtleties and implied meanings carried over from the original language enhance the depth of meaning in the recipient language, frequently introducing nuances that might be absent in indigenous terms.

In summary, the locutionary act in lexical borrowings involves the physical expression of words, and through pronunciation and linguistic context, it contributes significantly to the nuanced and layered expression of meaning in the borrowing language.

2.3.2 Illocutionary Act

The illocutionary act, within the framework of Speech Act theory, refers to the social or communicative action performed by the speaker in making an utterance. It goes beyond the literal meaning of the words used and encompasses the speaker's intention and the effect on the listener. Illocutionary acts include speech acts such as asserting, requesting, commanding, promising, and more.

When examining the illocutionary force behind utterances in borrowed terms, it becomes crucial to understand the intention behind the speaker's use of these terms, for instance, requests, commands, or promises.

In transcultural communication, awareness of the illocutionary force in borrowed terms is crucial for avoiding misunderstandings. Different cultures may attribute varying degrees of politeness, authority, or commitment to certain speech acts. Sensitivity to these nuances helps navigate communication effectively, fostering mutual understanding and reducing the risk of misinterpretation in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

2.3.3 Perlocutionary Act

The perlocutionary act, in Speech Act theory, refers to the effect or impact that an utterance has on the audience or listener. It involves the influence of the speaker's words on the thoughts,



feelings, beliefs, or actions of the listener. The perlocutionary act goes beyond the speaker's intention and focuses on the actual consequences of the utterance.

When examining the intended effects of speech acts on the audience, especially in the context of borrowed words, it becomes evident that the reception and interpretation of these words contribute to semantic and pragmatic shifts.

In summary, the perlocutionary act emphasizes the actual impact of speech acts on the audience. In the case of borrowed words, the reception and interpretation contribute to semantic and pragmatic shifts, reflecting the dynamic nature of language and its ability to adapt to cultural and communicative contexts.

2.3 Significance in Research

In the theoretical framework of English-Urdu lexical borrowings, Speech Act theory plays a central role in unveiling the semantic and pragmatic transformations within social contexts. This framework emphasizes three key acts: locutionary (the literal utterance), illocutionary (the intended social action), and perlocutionary (the actual impact on the audience).

Speech Act theory allows us to analyze how borrowed terms evolve in their illocutionary force, considering politeness strategies, directness or indirectness, and cultural nuances. It reveals that the basic act of utterance not only conveys information but actively shapes social actions. Within this framework, the perlocutionary context is crucial, as it explores the real impact of these utterances, unveiling shifts in meaning and implications for transcultural communication.

By applying Speech Act theory, we gain insights into how borrowed terms undergo semantic and pragmatic adaptations, reflecting the dynamic interplay of language within social and cultural contexts. This theoretical lens enhances our understanding of the performative nature of communication, offering a comprehensive perspective on the intricate transformations of meaning in English-Urdu lexical borrowings.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is perceived as a structure of random symbols employed in human interaction, where a word's structure holds a random connection to its meaning (Sales, 2022). Considering the diverse aims of communication, the need to adjust to different languages has become imperative. Consequently, bilingualism and multilingualism have become noteworthy in today's global landscape. Linguistic diversity naturally maintains a language's vibrant nature. Semantic shifts, whereby word meanings undergo changes over time, location, usage, and environmental factors, represent one of the mechanisms showcasing a language's dynamism (Qureshi et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of code-switching, the interchange of two languages within and across sentences, has primarily been explored through two viewpoints: grammatical/syntactic and pragmatic/discourse (Romaine, 1995; Jake, 1994). Code-switching between Urdu and English is observable in datasets related to health and science (Zahra et al, 2021). During a conversation, there exists a shared comprehension between the speaker and their audience. The speaker engages in communication while taking into account the semantic, pragmatic, and socio-pragmatic elements of the interlocutors (Myers-Scotton 1996; Jake & Myers-Scotton, 2009). Moreover, borrowed vocabulary not only introduces fresh terminology for novel concepts but also expands the range of synonyms within the language. Consequently, it offers diverse ways of expressing identical ideas across various linguistic registers (Nevalainen, 1999). Nevertheless, while equivalence stands as a fundamental concept in translation theory, it is fraught with challenges (Satti & Ali, 2022). As these occurrences enhance authentic learning, it's suggested that language instructors encourage students to employ multiple codes—via code-mixing and code-switching—in oral classroom engagement (Sales, 2022).

Matras (2011) argues that He perceives borrowing not as a transfer of structure from one system to another, but as the elimination of an imperceptible boundary within the linguistic repertoire, which divides subsets or the speaker's 'languages'. Meanwhile, Giles and Powesland discuss the range of speech options available to an individual speaker, emphasizing the need for decision-making and adjustments to influence how they are perceived by the listener (1975: vi). According to them, our



speech accommodation involves adjusting the speed of delivery, pitch variations, phonetic elements, and choice of words. These aspects constitute micro-level linguistic adjustments. The fundamental idea here revolves around seeking and maintaining societal harmony by controlling the potential effects of social divisions and differences based on speech behaviors (Omoniyi, 2010).

In a bilingual or multilingual setting such as Pakistan, code mixing isn't an uncommon phenomenon. English holds a co-official status in Pakistan, and following colonization, the language and its literature thrived progressively over time (Zawar et al., 2021). ESL bilingual instructors employ this communication tactic to teach non-native English speakers the English language as a secondary language (Younas et al., 2020). They point out a notable prevalence of code-mixing, observing the frequent integration of words, phrases, and even the smallest language units from one language into another. Due to the continual exposure to English, especially through online platforms, it's expected that elements of the target language will commonly blend with elements of the native language during informal conversations (Sales, 2022), owing to the notion that certain relational processes in English possess semantic attributes akin to material processes found in Urdu (Yaqub, 2017).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To investigate the transcultural transformations of English-Urdu lexical borrowings within social contexts, a mixed-methods research approach is performed. Mixed methods research combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods within a single study. This approach seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research question by collecting and analyzing both numerical and non-numerical data. In the context of transcultural transformations in English-Urdu lexical borrowings, a mixed methods study might involve quantitative analysis of lexical data along with qualitative interviews to explore cultural nuances.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The study will commence with a comprehensive literature review to establish a theoretical framework and identify existing patterns of lexical borrowing. Following this, a quantitative analysis will be conducted, employing corpus linguistics techniques to examine a large dataset of English-Urdu lexical items. This quantitative phase aims to identify prevalent semantic and pragmatic shifts in borrowed words.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Concurrently, qualitative methods such as interviews and focus group discussions will be employed to gather insights from bilingual speakers, exploring their perceptions of the semantic and pragmatic nuances of borrowed lexemes in various social contexts. The qualitative phase will provide a rich understanding of the sociolinguistic aspects influencing the transformations of lexical borrowings. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data will enhance the robustness of the findings, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the semantic and pragmatic shifts in English-Urdu lexical borrowings within diverse social settings.

By applying Speech Act theory to English-Urdu lexical borrowings, we can explore not only the linguistic aspects of these borrowings but also their social and cultural implications, providing a comprehensive understanding of how language functions in diverse communicative contexts.

5. ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

5.1 Data Analysis


This is an inevitable fact that words or phrases undergoing semantic and pragmatic changes can vary over time as being influenced by various factors, including cultural adaptation, technological advancements, and evolving social norms. A comprehensive study would involve analyzing a broader range of lexical items in specific social contexts to capture the nuances of these shifts accurately. Creating a comprehensive list of words or phrases undergoing semantic and pragmatic changes when borrowed from English to Urdu would require an in-depth linguistic analysis and may vary across different social contexts. While it's challenging to provide an exhaustive list due to the



dynamic nature of language and its changes over time, here are 20 English words borrowed into Urdu for colloquial usage, along with potential semantic and pragmatic shifts.

Serial No.	Borrowed Words from English to Urdu	Semantic Shift	Pragmatic Shift
1	Selfie	From a self-portrait photograph to a broader concept of self-expression	Usage in social contexts as a means of personal branding or communication
2	Meeting	Extending beyond formal discussions to include casual get-togethers, social gatherings, or even appointments	Allowing for a range of interactions from formal business discussions to informal social engagements
3	Challenge	Shifting from a call to complete to engaging in daring or unconventional activities	Popularized in social media as a trend involving creative or risky tasks
4	Trend	Moving from a general direction to indicate a prevailing fashion or popular style	Often used in the context of social media and lifestyle choices
5	Cool	Originally denoting temperature, now often used to express approval or admiration	Becoming a colloquial expression for something fashionable or impressive
6	Chat	Evolving from a casual conversation to include online messaging	Extending beyond face-to-face interactions to encompass digital communication
7	Rush	Shift from a sudden quick movement towards something to a swarm of large number of people	Modified to use for a disorganized gathering of people that might be causing nuance
8	Update	Evolving from the latest information to signify anything occurring recently	Used more broadly to signify any recent development or news, not just technological or informational updates
9	Chill	Getting a slight modification from a relaxed or easygoing attitude to a sensation of leisure	Connotation for denoting a unique way of doing things
		Incrementing meaning from	Popularized for denoting a

10	Style	personal fashion to one's overall demeanor or attitude	unique way of doing things
11	Scene	Expansion from a specific situation or setting to describe a social situation or event	Capturing a more dynamic or dramatic nuance
12	Sorry	Enhancing from expression of apology to convey sympathy or regret in a broader sense	Not only for personal apologies but also to convey condolences or lack of understanding or interest
13	Over	May retain the core meaning of completion or conclusion, but also convey a sense of excess or abundance	Used to express not just completion but also to convey a sense of abundance, surplus, or even state of being overwhelmed
14	Shade	Inclusion of metaphorical notions of subtlety, indirect criticism to the basic meaning of shadow or shelter from sunlight	Showing overlapping, influence, or criticism among others
15	Excuse me	Expansion from politely seeking attention or pardon to include culturally specific nuances in communication	Usage not only for apologizing or attention seeking but also functions as a polite way to initiate a request, interrupt a conversation, or express courtesy in various social situations
16	Uncle	Transition from naming the word for older blood relations to far male acquaintances	Summoning unrelated male individuals in order to make momentary or enduring familiarity
17	Boss	Encompassing the formal phrasing particular to the higher-up over to quite informal scenarios	Sarcastically or friendly luxuriating in a pursuit while addressing someone in informal situations



18	Aunt	Transposition from using the word for blood related women to female older strangers or far acquaintances	Addressing distant relative or unknown woman in order to get into casualness
19	Bold	From a courageous, distinct, and strong denotation to an impression of being gaudy, erotic, and bad-mannered	Amalgamation of negativity into the typical connotation of the word
20	Gown	Introduction of Muslim femal outer garment to a full-length distinct robe worn on formal occasions by women or put on by professional or academic persona	Incrementing into the cultural and religious significance of the specific loose-fitting robe-like dress

These examples showcase how borrowed words from English can undergo semantic as well as pragmatic shifts in colloquial Urdu, adapting to the cultural and communicative needs of the Urdu speakers. The transformations are influenced by evolving nature of language and integration of borrowed terms into everyday conversation of Urdu speaking communities.

5.2 Implications of Findings

The study involves a detailed qualitative analysis of the semantic and pragmatic changes in lexical borrowings between English and Urdu. Applying Speech Act Theory to this study allows for a nuanced examination of how these lexical shifts not only reflect linguistic adaptations but also serve specific communicative functions within diverse social settings.

The qualitative analysis explores the performative aspects of language use, emphasizing how the borrowed terms in English and Urdu go beyond mere linguistic exchange. It delves into the social actions embedded in these linguistic shifts, examining how speakers employ these borrowings to perform various speech acts in different cultural and social contexts. Speech Act Theory provides a lens to dissect the intention, meaning, and impact of these borrowings, revealing the intricate dynamics of cross-cultural communication.

The study seeks to unveil the cultural nuances and social implications of lexical borrowings, showcasing how Speech Act Theory enriches the analysis by elucidating the pragmatic functions of these linguistic transformations within the broader context of transcultural communication.

5.3 Limitations of Study

Borrowing from English to Urdu, or any inter-lingual context, can contribute to a perceived loss of originality due to the challenges in finding suitable equivalents. Here are some specific factors:

5.3.1 Cultural Nuances: English and Urdu belong to different language families and have distinct cultural contexts. Direct borrowing may overlook cultural nuances inherent in Urdu, potentially diluting the richness and specificity of expressions.

5.3.2 Semantic Differences: English and Urdu may not always have one-to-one equivalents for certain terms. Borrowing without considering the semantic nuances can lead to a loss of precision and original meaning.

5.3.3 Phonetic and Syntactic Misalignment: The phonetic and syntactic structures of English and Urdu differ. Direct borrowing might result in terms that do not phonetically align well with Urdu or disrupt its syntactic flow, impacting the natural rhythm of the language.



5.3.4 Pragmatic Incongruence: Pragmatic considerations, such as formality levels and appropriate usage in different social contexts, may vary between English and Urdu. Borrowed terms may not seamlessly align with Urdu pragmatic norms, potentially leading to a loss of original communicative intent.

5.3.5 Language Identity and Authenticity: Excessive borrowing from English could impact the authentic identity of Urdu. It might lead to the perception that Urdu is heavily influenced by or dependent on English, potentially eroding its linguistic individuality and originality.

5.3.6 Impact on Language Creativity: Relying too heavily on borrowed terms might stifle the creativity and innovation within Urdu. Speakers may opt for borrowed terms rather than exploring or creating new expressions that are more culturally and linguistically fitting.

In order to preserve originality amidst borrowing, a sensitive approach is crucial, taking into account the specific linguistic and cultural contexts of both languages. Furthermore, there's currently a lack of reliable studies on Pakistani English phonology (Mahboob, 2003). Adjusting terms to align with Urdu's phonetic, semantic, and pragmatic framework can help uphold the language's richness and authenticity despite the influence of borrowing.

5.4 Conclusion

Research findings indicate widespread code-switching among bilingual speakers of Pakistani Urdu and English on Facebook. The study's analysis reveals that code-switching occurs not only in spoken interactions but also in written online conversations, with similar reasons for code-switching in both verbal and written communication.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of semantic and pragmatic shifts in English-Urdu lexical borrowings within social contexts unveils a dynamic interplay between linguistic adaptation and cultural nuances. This exploration underscores the evolving nature of language as it traverses cultural boundaries, reflecting the intricacies of societal communication. As these transformations continue, they contribute to the rich tapestry of linguistic diversity, showcasing the adaptability and resilience inherent in language exchange across transcultural landscapes.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS


In this study, sample terms were deliberately selected from real-life contexts. The study's findings emphasize how lexico-semantic changes in Pakistani English involve the integration of English vocabulary and terms into the local context, adopting various shades of usage and interpretations across diverse functional settings in Pakistan (Jilani & Anwar, 2018).

The research expands the scope and creates diverse opportunities for researchers in fields such as grammar, lexicon, semantics, pragmatics, and more. This is achieved through constructing and expanding corpora, as well as conducting comparisons with various forms of English.

Beyond investigating colloquial language, additional research avenues may focus on written Pakistani discourse found in short stories, novels, newspapers, autobiographies, as well as exploring spoken discourse in various Pakistani television programs and speeches, adhering to the provided model (Zafar et al., 2021).

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