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Exploring Code Switching as a Strategy for Euphemism: A study of Bilingual Undergraduate of Pashto and English in Degree college Wari, Dir Upper

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages within a conversation, is a well-documented phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual communities. This linguistic behavior has garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly in the fields of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis (Poplack, 1980; Gumperz, 1982). While much of the existing research has focused on the structural and functional aspects of code-switching, there remains a need to explore its use as a strategy for euphemism, particularly within specific cultural contexts. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how bilingual Pashto-English speakers use code-switching as a euphemistic strategy.

Euphemism, the substitution of a mild or less direct expression for one that might be harsh or blunt, plays a crucial role in social communication, allowing speakers to navigate sensitive or taboo topics without causing offense (Allan & Burrige, 1991). In multilingual societies, such as those found in Pakistan, code-switching offers an additional layer of complexity to euphemistic practices. By switching from their native language (L1) to a second language (L2), speakers can soften the impact of their words, particularly when discussing socially sensitive topics (Grosjean, 2010).

This study is situated within the context of Pashto-speaking communities in Pakistan, where certain topics are considered taboo, and discussing them directly in Pashto may be seen as impolite or offensive. Research has shown that in such contexts, bilingual speakers often resort to code-switching to English to mitigate the potential negative impact of their words (Kachru, 1983). Despite the importance of this phenomenon, there is a paucity of research specifically addressing how Pashto-English bilinguals use code-switching as a euphemistic strategy.

Previous studies have explored the broader implications of code-switching in various bilingual contexts, but there remains a need for research that specifically examines its role in navigating linguistic taboos in Pashto (Romaine, 1995). The current study aims to address this gap by focusing on the sociolinguistic factors that prompt speakers to switch languages when discussing taboo topics and how this practice functions as a form of linguistic politeness.

Ahmad et al (2013) investigate the nature and implications of linguistic taboos within Pashtun society. This research provides a detailed examination of how cultural taboos influence language use among Pashtuns, focusing on the specific linguistic constraints and norms that shape their communication practices. The study explores various aspects of linguistic taboos, including forbidden topics and expressions, and how these taboos affect social interactions within the community.

The researchers utilized a combination of qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, to gather data on linguistic taboos. By engaging with Pashtun speakers and analyzing their language behavior, Ahmad et al. identified key areas where taboos significantly influence language use. The study highlights how taboo topics are often avoided or discussed indirectly, reflecting deep-seated cultural values and social norms.

While their research provides valuable insights into the role of linguistic taboos in Pashtun society, it primarily focuses on broader sociolinguistic patterns and cultural constraints. In contrast, the current study delves specifically into how code-switching between Pashto and English functions as a euphemistic strategy when addressing taboo topics. This research aims to understand how bilingual Pashto-English speakers use code-switching to navigate sensitive subjects and maintain linguistic politeness in formal and academic settings.

The primary distinction between the two studies lies in their focus and methodology. Ahmad et al. examine linguistic taboos more broadly within the Pashtun cultural context, while the current study specifically investigates the strategic use of code-switching as a means of euphemism in formal discourse. By focusing on the dynamics of code-switching, the current research offers a more nuanced understanding of how bilingual individuals manage taboo topics in academic settings, complementing and extending the insights provided by Ahmad et al.'s sociolinguistic analysis.

In Pakistan, the linguistic landscape is marked by significant diversity, with Pashto and Urdu being two prominent languages. Pashto is predominantly spoken in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province and parts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which are primarily inhabited by Pashtuns. This language is an integral part of Pashtun identity and cultural expression (Rahman, 2002).

On the other hand, Urdu serves as the national language of Pakistan and is widely spoken and understood across the country, including in Punjab, another major province. Urdu functions as a lingua franca, facilitating communication among speakers of various regional languages and serving as a bridge language in formal and educational settings (Siddiqui, 2016).

The relationship between Pashto and Urdu is complex. While Pashto remains the primary language of the Pashtun community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Urdu's role as the national language means that it often intersects with Pashto in contexts such as education, government, and media. The bilingual nature of many Pashtuns, who are fluent in both Pashto and Urdu, reflects the interplay between regional linguistic identities and national linguistic cohesion (Mumtaz, 2013).

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) explores how individuals adjust their language to manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) and maintain social harmony. According to their framework, communication often involves potential threats to a person's "face," which refers to their social identity and self-esteem. To address these threats, speakers use various politeness strategies designed to protect both their own face and that of their interlocutors.

The theory distinguishes between two types of face: positive face and negative face. Positive face represents the desire to be liked and accepted, while negative face signifies the wish to be free from imposition or intrusion. When individuals perform FTAs—such as making requests, offering criticism, or discussing sensitive topics—they employ strategies to mitigate the impact of these actions. For example, rather than directly demanding something, a speaker might frame their request in a more indirect manner or use polite language to soften the request and reduce potential discomfort.

Positive politeness strategies aim to affirm the listener's positive face by expressing friendliness, solidarity, or appreciation. This approach seeks to make the interaction more pleasant and inclusive, thereby enhancing the listener's sense of being valued and accepted. On the other hand, negative politeness strategies focus on minimizing the imposition on the listener's autonomy. This often involves using cautious language, apologizing, or phrasing requests in a way that acknowledges the listener's freedom to refuse.

Brown and Levinson's theory provides a nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate social interactions through language, balancing the need to address FTAs while preserving interpersonal relationships and social harmony.

1.2 Research Problem

The primary problem this research seeks to address is the lack of detailed, systematic investigation into the use of code-switching as a euphemistic strategy among Pashto-English bilinguals. While existing literature acknowledges the prevalence of code-switching in multilingual contexts, it often overlooks the specific cultural and social motivations that drive this behavior, particularly in relation to taboo topics. This study will investigate which topics are considered taboo in Pashto, the reasons behind the choice to code-switch to English when discussing these topics, and how this practice serves as a form of linguistic politeness in the Pashto-speaking community.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1. To identify the topics that are considered taboo in Pashto-speaking communities.
2. To explore the sociolinguistic motivations behind the use of code-switching to English when discussing taboo topics.
3. To analyze how code-switching functions as a euphemistic strategy among Pashto-English bilinguals.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objectives outlined above, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. **What topics are considered taboo in Pashto-speaking communities?**
 - This question aims to identify specific subjects that are culturally sensitive or socially prohibited in Pashto-speaking contexts. Understanding these taboos is crucial for exploring the linguistic strategies employed to navigate them.

2. **What are the sociolinguistic factors that motivate Pashto-English bilinguals to code-switch when discussing taboo topics?**
 - This question seeks to uncover the underlying social and cultural reasons for code-switching to English when addressing sensitive topics in Pashto. It will investigate how factors such as social status, politeness, and cultural norms influence this behavior.
3. **How does code-switching to English function as a euphemistic strategy in Pashto-speaking communities?**
 - This question explores the role of code-switching as a form of euphemism, focusing on how switching to English can soften or mitigate the impact of discussing taboo topics.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the fields of sociolinguistics and bilingualism, particularly within the context of Pashto-speaking communities. By focusing on the intersection of code-switching and euphemism, this research provides insights into how bilingual speakers navigate linguistic taboos and maintain social harmony in a culturally sensitive environment.

1. **Cultural Insight:** The study offers a deeper understanding of Pashto culture, specifically how language is used to manage social interactions and avoid offense. It highlights the role of language in reflecting and reinforcing cultural norms.
2. **Theoretical Contribution:** This research extends existing theories of code-switching and euphemism by applying them to a specific cultural and linguistic context that has been underexplored in the literature. It contributes to the broader understanding of how bilingualism functions in non-Western contexts.
3. **Practical Implications:** The findings of this study have practical implications for educators, language policymakers, and sociolinguists working in multilingual settings. Understanding the motivations behind code-switching can inform language teaching practices, particularly in areas where cultural sensitivity is paramount.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into six chapters, each addressing different aspects of the research problem:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** – This chapter provides an overview of the research, including the background, research questions, objectives, and significance of the study.
- **Chapter 2: Literature Review** – This chapter reviews the existing literature on code-switching, euphemism, and bilingualism, with a focus on studies relevant to the Pashto-English context.
- **Chapter 3: Research Methodology** – This chapter outlines the research design, including the methodology, data collection methods, and ethical considerations involved in the study.
- **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results** – This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected through interviews and group discussions, focusing on the identified taboo topics and the role of code-switching as a euphemistic strategy.
- **Chapter 5: Discussion** – This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework, drawing connections between the data and existing literature.
- **Chapter 6: Conclusion** – This chapter summarizes the main findings of the study, discusses its limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

1.7 Research Context

The context of this study is the Pashto-speaking community in Dir Upper, located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. This region is predominantly inhabited by Pashtuns, who speak Pashto as their first language. Pashto, one of the two official languages of Afghanistan and a recognized regional language in Pakistan, is deeply embedded in the cultural

and social fabric of the Pashtun people. The language is rich in oral traditions, proverbs, and poetry, reflecting the values and norms of Pashtun society (Ahmed, 1980).

In Pashto-speaking communities, certain topics are considered taboo and are rarely discussed openly. These taboos are often linked to cultural values, religious beliefs, and social norms, which dictate what is considered appropriate or inappropriate to talk about. As a result, speakers may employ various linguistic strategies, including euphemism and code-switching, to navigate these sensitive topics without violating social norms or causing offense (Barth, 2012).

The choice of Dir Upper as the research site is significant due to its traditional social structure, where cultural norms are strongly upheld, and deviations are often met with social disapproval. The region's relatively conservative environment provides a unique setting to explore how bilingual individuals use code-switching as a strategy to manage the social sensitivities associated with taboo topics. The study focuses on bilingual undergraduate students who are fluent in both Pashto and English, as this demographic is likely to exhibit dynamic language use patterns influenced by both cultural traditions and modern education.

1.8 Justification for the Study

This study is justified on several grounds:

1. **Cultural Relevance:** The Pashto-speaking regions of Pakistan, particularly Dir Upper, represent a unique linguistic and cultural landscape where traditional values strongly influence language use. Understanding how code-switching functions in this context contributes valuable insights into the intersection of language, culture, and social norms.
2. **Literature Gap:** Despite the extensive research on code-switching and bilingualism, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the specific use of code-switching as a euphemistic strategy in non-Western contexts, particularly within the Pashto-speaking community. This study aims to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence and analysis of how bilingual Pashto-English speakers navigate taboo topics.

3. **Practical Implications:** The findings of this study have implications for language education and social communication within multilingual settings. By understanding the motivations behind code-switching, educators and policymakers can better address the linguistic needs of bilingual communities, promoting more effective and culturally sensitive communication strategies.

1.9 Definitions of Key Terms

To ensure clarity, the following key terms are defined as they are used in this study:

- **Code-Switching:** The practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a single conversation or discourse. In this study, it specifically refers to the switch from Pashto to English among bilingual speakers (Poplack, 1980).
- **Euphemism:** A linguistic strategy in which a mild or less direct expression is used in place of one that might be considered harsh, blunt, or offensive. Euphemism often serves to soften the impact of discussing taboo or sensitive topics (Allan & Burridge, 1991).
- **Taboo Topics:** Subjects or themes that are culturally or socially prohibited or restricted in discussion. In the context of this study, taboo topics refer to those considered inappropriate to discuss openly in Pashto-speaking communities, such as issues related to sexuality, bodily functions, or certain professions (Barth, 2012).
- **Pashto-English Bilinguals:** Individuals who are fluent in both Pashto and English and can switch between these languages depending on the social context and communicative needs.
- **Dir Upper:** A district in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, predominantly inhabited by Pashto-speaking Pashtuns. This area serves as the research site for this study.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations:

1. **Scope of Participants:** The study focuses on a specific group of bilingual undergraduate students in Dir Upper. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to other Pashto-speaking communities or to bilingual individuals in different regions or age groups.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** The sensitive nature of taboo topics may have influenced participants' willingness to fully disclose their language use practices, particularly among female participants. This could have affected the depth and breadth of the data collected.
3. **Data Collection Constraints:** Due to cultural and social barriers, the data collection process faced challenges in ensuring the participation of a representative sample, particularly among female students.
4. **Ethical Considerations:** The study involves collecting and analyzing personal data related to participants' language use, which requires careful attention to ethical considerations, including informed consent, data protection, and confidentiality. These aspects were addressed rigorously; however, they also imposed certain constraints on the research process.

1.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in research involving human participants, especially when sensitive topics such as linguistic taboos are under investigation. This study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants were respected throughout the research process.

1. **Informed Consent:** Before participating in the study, all participants were provided with detailed information about the research objectives, methods, and potential risks. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring they fully understood their involvement in the study and had the opportunity to withdraw at any point without consequence.
2. **Confidentiality and Anonymity:** The confidentiality of the participants was a top priority. Personal data collected during the research, including audio recordings, were

anonymized to prevent the identification of individuals. Pseudonyms were used in place of real names in all transcripts and reports, and all data were securely stored to protect participant privacy.

3. **Data Protection:** The study complied with data protection regulations, including the registration of the research project with the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (Sikt), which is mandatory for projects processing personal data.
4. **Minimizing Harm:** Given the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, care was taken to minimize any potential psychological or social harm to participants. Discussions were conducted in a respectful and non-judgmental manner, and participants were assured that their responses would be treated with the utmost sensitivity.
5. **Ethical Approval:** The study was reviewed and approved by the relevant ethics committee at the academic institution. This approval process included a thorough assessment of the research design, data collection methods, and measures in place to protect participants.

1.12 Overview of the Study

This thesis explores the use of code-switching as a euphemistic strategy among bilingual Pashto-English speakers, with a focus on how this practice is employed to navigate taboo topics within Pashto-speaking communities. The research is grounded in a detailed analysis of sociolinguistic factors that influence language choice, and it contributes to the broader understanding of bilingualism and linguistic politeness in non-Western contexts.

The study begins with a comprehensive literature review (Chapter 2) that examines the theoretical foundations of code-switching and euphemism, alongside a review of relevant research conducted in multilingual settings. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, including the design, data collection methods, and ethical considerations that guided the study. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis, detailing the findings related to taboo topics, the motivations for code-switching, and how these language practices function as a form of euphemism. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of these findings in relation to the research questions and existing literature, providing a critical analysis of the role of code-switching in managing social sensitivities. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarizing the key insights, acknowledging the limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

2 Literature Review

The phenomenon of code-switching, particularly in bilingual and multilingual communities, has been extensively studied within the fields of sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and applied linguistics. Traditionally, research on code-switching has focused on its structural aspects, examining how bilinguals manage two or more language systems within a single conversation. However, recent studies have begun to explore the sociocultural and pragmatic dimensions of code-switching, particularly its role in navigating sensitive or taboo topics. This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on code-switching, with a particular emphasis on its function as a euphemistic strategy in multilingual contexts. The review begins by exploring foundational theories of code-switching, including typologies and motivations. It then examines studies that have specifically investigated the use of code-switching as a tool for managing social interactions, maintaining politeness, and avoiding cultural taboos. By situating the current research within this broader academic discourse, the chapter aims to highlight gaps in the literature and establish a theoretical framework for analyzing code-switching behavior among bilingual Pashto-English speakers in Pakistan.

2.1 Evolution of Code-Switching Research

The study of code-switching (CS) has evolved significantly since its early days when it was often dismissed as a marginal or "imperfect" bilingual behavior. Early research, such as Haugen's (1950b) seminal work, laid the groundwork by consolidating studies on language hybridization and introducing concepts like 'mixed' or 'hybrid' language (Haugen, 1950a). These early discussions focused primarily on the linguistic aspects of bilingualism, positioning code-switching as a phenomenon of linguistic interference rather than a legitimate subject of the study. However, the landscape began to shift in the 1950s and 60s, when scholars like Li (1998) and Gumperz (1972) expanded the scope of bilingualism studies to include sociolinguistic and psychological dimensions. Gumperz challenges the notion of code-switching as a random or unstructured behavior, instead highlighting its 'stylistic' and 'metaphorical' functions (Romaine, 1995). This period marked a pivotal juncture, as code-switching was increasingly recognized as a deliberate and context-sensitive linguistic practice, influenced by social, cultural, and psychological factors.

The recognition of code-switching as a structured and socially motivated phenomenon led to the development of various theoretical approaches, which have continued to inform research into the present day. Among these approaches, the grammatical, psycholinguistic, and

sociolinguistic perspectives stand out (Ruan, 2003). While the grammatical approach focuses on how linguistic elements from different languages interact within a single discourse, the psycholinguistic approach examines the cognitive processes that enable bilinguals to manage multiple language systems. Meanwhile, the sociolinguistic approach explores the social and cultural motivations behind language choice, considering factors such as social context, interlocutor relationships, and the communicative functions served by code-switching (Hymes, 1962; Myers-Scotton, 2002).

2.2 Shifting Focus: From Structural to Socio-Cultural Motivations

Despite the initial emphasis on the structural aspects of code-switching, scholars like Bentahila and Davies (1992) have argued that this focus has been disproportionately narrow. They contend that much of the early research treated code-switching primarily as a syntactic phenomenon, often overlooking the socio-cultural and psychological dimensions that drive this behavior. Myers-Scotton and Gumperz (1982) echo this sentiment, emphasizing that language choices are inherently socially motivated and that each code carries specific social meanings and values, serving distinct functions in each context.

This critique has spurred a growing interest in the socio-cultural motivations behind code-switching, leading to a more nuanced understanding of how and why bilinguals switch languages. Researchers have increasingly sought to explore the functions that each code serves in discourse, examine speakers' attitudes toward different languages, and understand the socio-cultural factors that influence language choice. This shift in focus has opened new avenues for inquiry, particularly in multilingual societies where language plays a crucial role in identity formation, social stratification, and the negotiation of power dynamics.

2.3 Gaps in Research: Code-Switching in the Pakistani Context

While the global literature on code-switching has expanded considerably, there remains a notable gap in research focused on the Pakistani context, particularly within Pashtun society. Although several studies have explored different dimensions of code-switching in Pakistan, much of this research has centered on the structural aspects of the phenomenon, such as syntax and grammar, or its relevance in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms (Gulzar & Qadir, 2010; Muhammad & Mahmood, 2013). There has been comparatively little attention paid to the socio-cultural and pragmatic motivations that trigger code-switching in everyday interactions, especially in non-academic contexts.

One area that remains particularly underexplored is the use of code-switching as a euphemistic strategy. While there is substantial evidence to suggest that bilinguals often switch languages to navigate linguistic taboos or avoid potentially offensive terms, this function of code-switching has not been thoroughly investigated in the Pakistani context. This gap is especially pronounced in Pashtun society, where linguistic taboos are deeply embedded in cultural norms and where the strategic use of language is a key aspect of social interaction.

2.4 Socio-Pragmatic Functions and the Conscious Use of Code-Switching

A critical aspect of code-switching that has been increasingly recognized in recent research is its socio-pragmatic function, which is closely linked to the conscious use of language. While early studies often characterized code-switching as a subconscious behavior (Wardhaugh, 2000), recent scholarship suggests that speakers are often fully aware of their language choices and use code-switching deliberately to achieve specific communicative goals.

The socio-pragmatic functions of code-switching include a range of purposes, such as expressing social identity, building solidarity or intimacy, marking social distance, negotiating power dynamics, and accommodating interlocutors (Adendorff, 1996; Ahmad, Ghani, & Gull, 2013). These functions reflect the strategic nature of code-switching, as speakers consciously navigate linguistic codes to manage social interactions effectively. In Pashtun society, where language is closely tied to cultural identity and social hierarchy, code-switching serves as a powerful tool for negotiating social relationships and conveying nuanced meanings.

This conscious aspect of code-switching challenges the notion of it being merely a subconscious phenomenon. Instead, it highlights the active role of speakers in selecting and utilizing linguistic codes based on their awareness of social norms, audience characteristics, and situational demands. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of Pashtun society, where linguistic diversity and social stratification play crucial roles in shaping interpersonal interactions.

2.5 Code-Switching as a Euphemistic Strategy

Functional studies on code-switching in various plurilingual societies have identified euphemism as one of the key communicative functions served by this phenomenon. Researchers such as Gibbons (1987), Li (2000), and Dewaele (2010) have demonstrated that meaning—whether positive or negative—can shift when speakers switch from their native language (L1) to a second language (L2). This shift often reduces unintended negative

connotations, particularly in the case of linguistic taboos, allowing speakers to distance themselves from undesirable associations with certain words.

In Pashtun society, where linguistic taboos are deeply ingrained, code-switching to English/Urdu often serves as a means of conveying politeness, humility, and acceptability. However, the motivations behind this choice remain underexplored in the literature. While some scholars argue that the use of a non-native language helps speakers detach themselves from the emotional connotations associated with their native vocabulary (Gibbons, 1987), others suggest that this behavior is influenced by broader social and cultural factors, such as the desire to maintain social harmony or avoid offending others (Jay, 2009).

2.6 Identifying the Research Niche

The current study seeks to address the gaps identified in the existing literature by focusing on the use of code-switching as a euphemistic strategy in Pashtun society. By conducting a small-scale qualitative survey, this research aims to explore how bilingual Pashto-English speakers use code-switching to navigate linguistic taboos and maintain social harmony. The study will also examine the socio-cultural and pragmatic motivations behind this behavior, contributing to a broader understanding of code-switching in the Pakistani context.

Through this investigation, the study aims to provide new insights into the role of code-switching in Pashtun society, particularly in relation to linguistic taboos and euphemism. By situating the findings within the broader field of sociolinguistics, the research will offer a more nuanced understanding of how bilingual speakers use language to navigate social interactions and cultural norms in a complex linguistic landscape.

Poplack and Sankoff (2004) undertake a meticulous examination of the linguistic phenomenon characterized by the alternation between languages or dialects within a single conversational exchange. Their analysis delves into the intricate socio-linguistic factors that influence code-switching behaviors, emphasizing its role as a marker of identity, group affiliation, and social context. The authors meticulously categorize the various types of code-switching thereby elucidating the contextual triggers and cognitive processes underpinning this multifaceted behavior. Furthermore, they consider the implications of code-switching for linguistic theory, particularly in relation to models of bilingualism and the concepts of language dominance and proficiency. By situating code-switching within a broader sociocultural framework, Poplack and Sankoff effectively challenge monolithic perceptions of language use, advocating for an understanding that embraces the dynamic and interactive nature of bilingual communication. Their contributions not only illuminate the complexities inherent in bilingual

interactions but also invite ongoing inquiry into the implications of code-switching for both linguistic research and sociolinguistic practices, fostering a deeper appreciation for the nuanced interplay between language, identity, and society.

Myers-Scotton (2017) offers a comprehensive exploration of code-switching, defining it as a common practice in multilingual contexts where speakers alternate between languages within a conversation. Her work emphasizes that code-switching serves multiple pragmatic functions, such as clarifying speech, expressing identity, and negotiating power. One of the key arguments she makes is that code-switching is not random but highly systematic, driven by sociolinguistic factors such as speaker intentions and audience awareness. This idea aligns with my research, which also posits that code-switching occurs in structured ways among Pashto-English bilinguals.

However, a notable distinction between Myers-Scotton's research and the present study is the specific focus on code-switching as a euphemistic strategy in relation to taboo topics. While Myers-Scotton addresses the general motivations behind code-switching, including the social need for linguistic flexibility, her research does not delve into how this behavior is employed to navigate culturally sensitive topics or maintain politeness within specific linguistic communities. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of Pashto-English bilinguals, where taboo topics such as issues related to sexuality, death, or personal criticism—are often discussed in English to soften their perceived impact.

In contrast to Myers-Scotton's broader analysis, this study will focus specifically on the cultural and social motivations that drive Pashto-English bilinguals to code-switch when discussing taboo topics. By examining which topics are considered taboo in Pashto, this research will explore how code-switching serves as a strategic form of linguistic politeness, allowing speakers to engage in sensitive discussions without violating cultural norms. Myers-Scotton's framework on the systematic nature of code-switching provides a useful starting point, but the present research seeks to extend this analysis by focusing on euphemistic strategies within a specific bilingual community.

Martin-Jones' (1995) study provides a thorough review of research on code-switching within educational settings. The study consolidates findings from various empirical investigations conducted over two decades, focusing on how code-switching is utilized in classrooms by both students and teachers.

Martin-Jones examined a range of bilingual and multilingual populations across different educational contexts. The review highlights studies involving diverse age groups and

educational levels, where code-switching plays a significant role in classroom interactions. The methodology employed in the review consists of synthesizing observational data and analyzing classroom interaction studies to uncover the patterns and functions of code-switching.

The findings from Martin-Jones' review reveal that code-switching serves multiple pedagogical functions. Teachers often employ code-switching as a tool to facilitate comprehension and communication, particularly when explaining complex concepts or addressing students' needs in a more accessible language. This strategic use of code-switching helps bridge linguistic gaps and supports effective teaching.

Additionally, the review underscores the social and identity functions of code-switching among students. It is frequently used to manage social relationships, express cultural identity, and align with peer groups. This aspect of code-switching reflects the students' navigation between different cultural and linguistic contexts, showcasing its role in social dynamics.

However, Martin-Jones also notes potential drawbacks. Excessive or unstructured code-switching may impact language development and reinforce linguistic boundaries, potentially affecting students' proficiency in each language. Despite these concerns, the study highlights that both teachers and students engage in code-switching as a strategic tool—teachers to facilitate learning and students to navigate social interactions.

Auer and Eastman (2010) contribute significantly to the study of code-switching by examining the relationship between linguistic choices and social dynamics. Their work emphasizes that code-switching is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a social practice that reflects underlying power relations, identity negotiation, and group membership. According to their analysis, speakers use code-switching to signal belonging to multiple social groups or to manage interactions in complex social contexts. This concept of code-switching as a tool for social positioning resonates with aspects of my research, particularly the ways in which Pashto-English bilinguals navigate social expectations when discussing culturally sensitive topics.

However, while Auer and Eastman explore the social significance of code-switching, they do not specifically address how this practice is employed as a euphemistic strategy. In their analysis, code-switching is often framed in terms of its role in asserting identity or social alignment, whereas this research focuses on its function as a form of linguistic politeness in relation to taboo topics. In Pashto-speaking communities, code-switching to English allows speakers to address sensitive issues—such as gender relations, personal criticism, or social taboos—without breaching cultural norms of directness or modesty.

While Auer and Eastman's insights into the social motivations for code-switching provide valuable context for understanding bilingual language use, the present study aims to extend this understanding by exploring how these social factors intersect with the need to maintain politeness. Specifically, this research will investigate how code-switching to English functions as a euphemistic tool, mitigating the impact of taboo topics within Pashto-speaking communities. Auer and Eastman's work lays the groundwork for understanding the social underpinnings of code-switching, but this study will focus more narrowly on the interaction between language, culture, and politeness.

Wheeler, R. S. (2008) navigates the complex landscape of linguistic code-switching, a phenomenon whereby speakers alternate between different languages or dialects within a conversation, a process that is particularly prevalent in educational settings. The methodology employed involves a qualitative analysis that draws upon a combination of observational studies and interviews, providing a rich, contextual exploration of code-switching among diverse student populations. This approach allows Wheeler to capture the nuanced dynamics of code-switching as a pedagogical tool, exploring its implications for student identity, peer relationships, and academic performance. The results derived from this investigation yield insightful conclusions about the role of code-switching in fostering a more inclusive educational environment, asserting that when educators recognize and validate students' linguistic practices, they not only affirm their cultural identities but also enhance their academic engagement. Furthermore, the study raises critical questions regarding conventional educational practices that may inadvertently marginalize non-standard dialects, urging a reevaluation of pedagogical strategies to accommodate linguistic diversity.

Peter Muysken (2020) meticulously explores the intricate relationship between code-switching phenomena and established grammatical frameworks, thereby contributing significantly to the field of linguistic theory. Muysken adopts a rigorous methodological approach, juxtaposing empirical data derived from diverse bilingual contexts with theoretical constructs to elucidate the mechanisms underpinning code-switching. His analysis reveals that code-switching is not merely a linguistic anomaly but rather a systematic feature that adheres to specific grammatical rules relevant to the languages involved. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including case studies and statistical analyses, he provides compelling evidence to support his claims, thereby fostering a nuanced understanding of how bilingual speakers navigate their linguistic repertoires in real-time communication. The results of his inquiry underscore the complexity of bilingual language use, challenging traditional

notions of language separation and reinforcing the argument that code-switching can serve as a legitimate linguistic resource that reflects cognitive processes and sociolinguistic variables. Consequently, Muysken's work not only enriches the theoretical landscape of bilingualism and code-switching but also invites further investigation into the implications of these phenomena for our broader understanding of language structure and usage in multilingual societies.

Toribio (2009) investigated code-switching practices among Spanish-English bilingual speakers, focusing on how language alternation is influenced by social, cultural, and contextual factors. She collected data through a combination of naturalistic observations and structured interviews, allowing her to examine both spontaneous language use and self-reported motivations behind code-switching. The findings revealed that code-switching was most frequent in informal settings, such as conversations among family members or friends, where speakers alternated languages to manage social relationships, convey emotional nuances, and navigate sensitive or personal topics. Additionally, code-switches were often found in discussions about culturally sensitive matters, such as personal criticism or taboo topics, where switching to English allowed speakers to soften the impact of their statements.

This is highly relevant to the current study, which investigates how Pashto-English bilinguals use code-switching as a euphemistic strategy when addressing taboo topics. Like Toribio's findings, my research seeks to understand the role of code-switching in managing cultural sensitivities. However, while Toribio focuses on Spanish-English bilinguals, this study extends her work by exploring how Pashto speakers specifically switch to English to avoid directness when discussing sensitive issues, using English as a tool for linguistic politeness. The current study builds on Toribio's insights by examining the sociolinguistic motivations for code-switching in a different linguistic community, thus contributing to a broader understanding of how bilinguals use language strategically in culturally specific contexts.

In their comprehensive study, Gardner-Chloros & Weston (2015) engage in a thorough examination of the intricate relationship between code-switching phenomena and multilingualism within the realm of literature, presenting a nuanced methodological framework that intertwines both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The authors adeptly navigate through literary texts, employing a diverse array of case studies that illuminate the multifaceted ways in which code-switching manifests in narrative discourse. Their methodology is rigorously defined, encompassing a critical analysis of linguistic patterns alongside reader reception studies, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of how authors utilize code-switching as a stylistic and communicative tool. The results articulate significant findings that underscore the role of code-switching not merely as a linguistic occurrence but as a pivotal element in the

construction of identity and cultural context within literary works. Additionally, the authors contend that these multilingual practices serve to challenge monolingual norms, presenting a rich tapestry of voices that reflect contemporary societal dynamics. The implications of their findings extend beyond mere literary analysis, prompting a re-evaluation of linguistic practices within broader sociolinguistic frameworks, ultimately contributing to an enriched discourse on the intersectionality of language, culture, and literature.

Alvarez-Cáccamo (2013) presents a nuanced morphological analysis that delves into the intricacies of code-switching, a phenomenon often underexplored beyond its surface-level definitions. The methodology adopted is commendably reflective, combining qualitative analysis of conversational data with a critical engagement with existing literature on sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, thus allowing for a thorough interrogation of how communicative codes operate within vernacular practices. The framework posits a recontextualization of what constitutes code-switching, moving away from a binary understanding of language use towards a more fluid conceptualization that embraces the complexities of bilingual interaction and codes as dynamic entities influenced by social, cultural, and contextual factors. The results of Alvarez-Cáccamo's analysis underscore the significance of viewing code-switching not merely as a linguistic alternation but as a phenomenon deeply embedded in identity negotiation and the construction of social meaning, ultimately challenging traditional paradigms and inviting further scholarly discourse on the implications of communicative practices in multilingual settings. This critical examination thus reveals the richness of Alvarez-Cáccamo's contributions to the field of sociolinguistics, encouraging a broader understanding of communication as an inherently multifaceted and contextually driven activity.

Nilep (2006) adopts a qualitative methodology that prioritizes ethnographic observation and discourse analysis, enabling a nuanced understanding of code switching as a social phenomenon situated within specific cultural contexts. This approach is further underpinned by a sociocultural theoretical framework that embraces the complex interplay between language and identity, positing that code switching serves not merely as a linguistic mechanism but as a powerful tool for negotiating social roles and relational dynamics among speakers. The results of Nilep's investigation illustrate the multifaceted nature of code switching, revealing its significance in facilitating communication across diverse linguistic communities and highlighting the implications for social cohesion and identity expression. By situating code switching within a broader sociocultural context, Nilep's work contributes to the understanding of the intricate layers of meaning inherent in language use, thereby offering profound insights

into the ways in which individuals navigate their linguistic environments in a socially complex world.

Boztepe (2003) critically engages with various competing theories and frameworks, including sociolinguistic approaches that emphasize the contextual and social underpinnings of code-switching, as well as cognitive and pragmatic models that seek to elucidate the psychological mechanisms underpinning bilingual language use. The author skillfully navigates through the diverse literature, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each theoretical perspective, thus offering a nuanced analysis that acknowledges the complexity of bilingual linguistic behavior. Furthermore, Boztepe's results elucidate key factors influencing code-switching, such as identity negotiation and power dynamics within bilingual communities, while also addressing limitations in existing models that may overlook the socio-cultural dimensions of language use. By synthesizing these insights, Boztepe contributes significantly to the discourse on bilingualism, calling for a more integrative approach that reconciles the disparate theories and models to foster a deeper understanding of code-switching as a vital aspect of bilingual communication. This critical examination not only enriches the existing literature but also sets the stage for future research to explore the dynamic interplay between linguistic practices and social identity within multilingual contexts.

Green and Wei (2014) present a comprehensive control process model of code-switching that merits a critical examination through the lenses of methodology, theoretical framework, and empirical results. The authors employ an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from cognitive psychology, linguistics, and neuropsychology, to elucidate the mechanisms underpinning the phenomenon of code-switching, wherein bilingual speakers seamlessly alternate between languages within a conversational context. Methodologically, their study is robust, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative analyses to construct a nuanced understanding of the cognitive processes involved. They propose a dual mechanism framework that delineates between controlled and automatic processes, thus providing a clearer delineation of the cognitive resources engaged during instances of code-switching. Furthermore, the empirical results derived from experimental methods, including reaction time measurements and accuracy assessments, substantiate their theoretical assertions, demonstrating a significant correlation between contextual cues and the activation of language systems. However, while the model is commendable for its thoroughness and integration of diverse theoretical perspectives, it also raises questions regarding the extent of its generalizability across different sociolinguistic contexts and the implications of individual differences among bilingual speakers. Green and Wei's control process model significantly advances our understanding of

code-switching, yet it invites ongoing inquiry into the complexities of bilingual language processing and the socio-cultural factors that may influence these cognitive dynamics.

Reyes (2004) utilizes a qualitative research framework that encompasses extensive observational studies and contextual analyses of conversational exchanges in naturalistic settings, thereby ensuring that the findings emerge from authentic interactions rather than contrived scenarios. This methodology is particularly robust as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the social and cultural contexts influencing code-switching behaviors, including factors such as peer influence, situational appropriateness, and the linguistic repertoire of the participants. Furthermore, Reyes systematically categorizes the functions of code-switching observed, providing a comprehensive framework that delineates pragmatic, social, and identity-related motivations underlying this phenomenon. The results of the study reveal that children engage in code-switching not merely as a linguistic strategy but as a multifaceted communicative tool that serves to negotiate their identities, navigate social hierarchies, and express solidarity with their bilingual peers. This intricate interplay between language use and social context underscores the significance of code-switching as a pivotal element of bilingual discourse in educational settings. Reyes' research contributes valuable insights to the fields of sociolinguistics and bilingual education, illuminating the complexities of language use among schoolchildren and advocating for a deeper appreciation of bilingual competencies in academic curricula.

Heller (2020) utilizes a qualitative approach that emphasizes ethnographic methodologies, allowing for a nuanced exploration of code-switching as a dynamic sociolinguistic phenomenon rather than a simplistic linguistic tool. This is complemented by a sociopolitical lens that underscores the relationship between language practices and power dynamics within bilingual communities, effectively situating code-switching within broader discourses on identity, agency, and resistance. Furthermore, Heller draws upon theoretical frameworks grounded in sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, which facilitate a comprehensive understanding of how language operates not only as a means of communication but also as a conduit for cultural expression and social positioning. The results articulated in this chapter reveal that code-switching is not merely a reflection of linguistic competence but is profoundly intertwined with issues of social inequality, marginalization, and the politics of representation, thereby challenging traditional paradigms of bilingualism. Heller's work is instrumental in elucidating the complexities of language practices, offering valuable insights into the interplay between linguistic behavior and sociopolitical contexts, and ultimately

contributing to the ongoing discourse on the significance of bilingualism in contemporary society.

Hall & Nilep (2015) present a nuanced exploration of the intricate interplay between code-switching, identity formation, and the dynamics of globalization, thereby establishing a significant methodological and theoretical framework that underscores the multifaceted nature of linguistic practices in contemporary society. The authors adeptly employ a qualitative methodology that integrates both sociolinguistic theories and ethnographic insights, facilitating a comprehensive examination of how code-switching serves not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as a vital communicative strategy through which individuals navigate multiple identities in an increasingly interconnected world. Their framework is anchored in the premise that language is not a static entity, but a dynamic tool influenced by various social, cultural, and political factors, which allows for a robust analysis of the results presented. The findings, as elucidated in their discourse, reveal that code-switching is fundamentally linked to broader processes of identity negotiation and cultural adaptation, particularly in contexts marked by transnational exchanges. Such results not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge in discourse analysis but also invite further inquiry into the implications of these linguistic practices for broader societal trends, such as migration and cultural hybridity, thereby illuminating the critical role of language in shaping individual and collective identities amidst the complexities of globalization. Hall and Nilep's work stands as a pivotal reference point for scholars seeking to understand the myriad ways in which language and identity intertwine in our globalized era.

Patricia Gardner-Chloros offers a nuanced exploration of the multifaceted phenomenon of code-switching—a practice increasingly prevalent in bilingual and multilingual communities. Through a rigorous synthesis of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, Gardner-Chloros elucidates the sociolinguistic variables that influence the occurrence and nature of code-switching, including but not limited to social identity, power dynamics, and contextual constraints. Her meticulous examination reveals how speakers navigate their linguistic repertoires as a means of negotiating cultural boundaries and asserting group membership, while simultaneously drawing attention to the cognitive processes underpinning these linguistic decisions. Moreover, Gardner-Chloros situates her analysis within the broader landscape of sociolinguistics, where she deftly engages with existing literature to highlight gaps in contemporary understanding and suggest directions for future research. This book not only serves as an essential resource for scholars and students in the field of sociolinguistics but also

fosters a deeper appreciation of the complex interplay between language and society, ultimately challenging simplistic views of bilingualism and multilingualism.

Maschler (2013) embarks on an intricate exploration of the linguistic phenomenon that characterizes bilingual and multilingual interactions. The chapter meticulously delineates the continuum between code switching—a strategic linguistic maneuver employed by speakers to navigate varying sociolinguistic contexts—and the emergence of a mixed code, wherein elements of distinct languages coalesce to form a hybridized linguistic mode. Maschler rigorously analyzes a variety of conversational data, shedding light on the complex interplay between social identity, cultural context, and linguistic choices in real-time discourse. Through her astute observations, she reveals that the transition from code switching to mixed codes is not merely a linguistic shift but is imbued with profound implications for understanding the cognitive processes underlying bilingual communication. Furthermore, the author engages critically with existing theoretical frameworks, offering novel insights that challenge traditional notions of language boundaries, thus advancing the discourse in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Maschler's contribution is both an empirical investigation and a theoretical enrichment.

Deuchar (2020) presents a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted phenomenon of code-switching, which encompasses the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a conversation or discourse. Deuchar meticulously delineates various theoretical frameworks and empirical findings that have emerged in the study of code-switching, thus situating her arguments within the broader landscape of sociolinguistic research. The author skillfully navigates through the complexities of contextual factors, such as speaker identity, sociocultural dynamics, and linguistic structure, which significantly influence code-switching behaviors. Furthermore, Deuchar challenges prevailing misconceptions surrounding the practice, asserting that it is not merely a sign of linguistic inadequacy but rather a sophisticated communicative strategy employed by multilingual speakers to convey nuanced meanings and facilitate social interaction. Through her rigorous examination, Deuchar not only elucidates the intricacies of code-switching but also advocates for its recognition as a legitimate and valuable area of linguistic inquiry, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of multilingualism and its implications in contemporary society. This position paper serves as a pivotal reference point for scholars and practitioners alike, prompting further exploration into the intricate relationship between language, identity, and culture in an increasingly globalized world.

3 RESEARCH METHDODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the phenomenon of code-switching among undergraduate English students, focusing on the differences observed between male and female participants. The methodology comprised two main components: focused group observations (FGOs) and individual interviews. Data collection was conducted over multiple sessions, involving 20 participants in total, consisting of 13 males and 7 females, all of whom were proficient in English. The FGOs were conducted to observe and analyze code-switching behavior within a controlled setting. The first Focus Group Observation (FGO) session included 13 male participants, while the second group consisted of 7 female participants. Both sessions were facilitated by a faculty member from the Department of English. The presence of the faculty member was essential for creating a formal, academic atmosphere, which was conducive to the objectives of the study. The inclusion of the teacher aimed to maintain a structured environment where the participants would be more likely to code-switch to English when discussing taboo topics. Without the presence of the faculty member, the situation might have been less formal, allowing the participants to feel more comfortable expressing themselves freely in Pashto without the need to code-switch.

The formality introduced by the teacher ensured that participants were more conscious of their language use, particularly in an academic setting where linguistic politeness is often expected. This was crucial for the study's focus on how code-switching functions as a euphemistic strategy. The participants might not have code-switched as frequently in an informal setting, where discussions might have flowed more naturally in their native language, as they would have felt less need to soften the impact of taboo topics.

During the session, participants were presented with predetermined topics for discussion. These topics (for topics see 4.5) were carefully selected to encourage formal language use and academic discourse. The duration of the session was approximately one hour, during which nearly sixty instances of code-switching were observed among the male participants. Following the FGO sessions, individual interviews were conducted with each participant to gain deeper insights into their code-switching behavior. The interviews were structured to elicit responses regarding the participants' intentional use of code-switching and their motivations behind specific language choices. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions, such as whether they intentionally code-switched and the reasons behind their choice of expression. These interviews were conducted separately for each participant, ensuring confidentiality and

encouraging candid responses. The duration of each interview session averaged one hour and twenty minutes. The data collected from both the FGO sessions and individual interviews were subjected to qualitative analysis. Recorded instances of code-switching were transcribed and categorized based on the context and motivations identified during the observations and interviews. Themes and patterns emerging from the data were analyzed to identify differences in code-switching behavior between male and female participants.

3.1 Research Design

The present research adopts an interpretive paradigm and employs descriptive qualitative research methods to explore, understand, interpret, and describe subjective social phenomena rather than aiming to testify, confirm, or present purely objective reality independent of the observer. Qualitative research, in this context, seeks to engage in a deeper understanding of the subject matter, moving beyond surface features (Johnson, 1995). Utilizing a multimethod approach, the study combines qualitative interviews with qualitative focused group observation (FGO). Unlike a mixed-method approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods, multimethod involves deliberately combining different types of qualitative methods within the same investigation to overcome each method's weaknesses and limitations (Hunter & Brewer, 2003). The multimethod approach allows the researcher to triangulate data obtained from FGO with semi-structured informal interviews through elicitation techniques. Triangulation, in this context, refers to the integration of multiple data collection methods to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings and to offset the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another. The justification for using triangulation is rooted in the argument that no single method can adequately solve the problem of rival causal factors, as each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality. Therefore, multiple methods of observation must be employed to obtain a comprehensive understanding (Denzin, 2009). A pilot study was conducted to determine the validity and reliability of the FGO and interview methods, ensuring that they would yield relevant information for the study's objectives. This preliminary investigation also helped estimate the time required for data collection and analysis. The reliability and validity of interview questions and discussion topics were determined through the pilot project, leading to the selection of well-planned and structured questions and topics for data collection. The researcher chose Focused Group Observation and Interviews as the most suitable data collection tools for enhancing the reliability of the results. FGO, a form of non-participant observation, allows the researcher to observe participants producing utterances in a natural setting without intervening. This method is considered crucial for linguistic

programs (Labov, 1972) and provides access to unexpected information, revealing hidden aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Semi-structured interviews were selected to gain useful insights from respondents. This format allows for modification or alteration of question sequences, enabling a deeper exploration of respondents’ thoughts. Semi-structured interviews are deemed suitable for this research because the interviewer has a clear picture of the topics to be covered but is also prepared to allow the interview to develop in unexpected directions (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

3.2 Participants

The researcher selected a purposive sample comprising 20 students with a mixed gender (13 males and 7 females) (for details see table 1 below) from the bachelor of English program for the present study. Demographically, the participants belonged to the Dir district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. These participants were multilingual, with Pashto being their first language (L1), and they were asked to give a detailed information. All participants were adults within the age range of 20 to 25, and they were considered educated and literate enough to easily switch and/or mix codes. In summary, the selected participants met the essential criteria for being an ideal sample for the present inquiry—Pashto-English bilinguals.

Table 1: Participants

Gender	Strength	English proficiency	Age (Avg)	Other language
Male	13	Advance	25	Pashtu
Female	7	Advance	24	Pashtu

3.3 Data Collection

As described above, the data collection for this study occurred in two phases: a) non-participant focused group observations, and b) Stimulated recall semi-structured interviews through elicitation. The data collection process spanned approximately one month and involved both sources. The purposive sample, consisting of 20 students, was used for both observations and interviews. In the first phase, an observation sheet was utilized to identify taboo topics and instances of code-switching in a formal setting or discourse. Subsequently, the identified participants were interviewed using stimulated recall semi-structured interviews with direct

and/or indirect elicitation. They participated as part of a group, but their individual responses were recorded for analysis, focusing on their code-switched taboo words from Pashto to English. The study setting was intentionally kept formal based on the literature review, suggesting that very informal situations might not prompt many instances of polite discourse involving code-switching. The data were exclusively collected at Govt. Degree College Dir Wari. A focused group of 20 students from the Department of English and Foreign Languages was selected for this study, including a separate session for a detached group of female students. Participants were given specific topics for discussion, with a high probability of eliciting the use of linguistic taboos in Pashto. Before the topics for discussion were introduced, the faculty member informed the participants that they were expected to discuss the given topics and instructed to discuss these topics primarily in their mother tongue. Code-switching strategies were noted, and observatory notes were prepared for data analysis and interpretation. Similarly, interviews were conducted with the same sample of twenty students who participated in the focused group discussions. Their responses were recorded and later transcribed, following Eisner's acknowledgment that note-taking and audiotaping are crucial tools in qualitative research, providing reminders, quotations, and details for both descriptions and interpretations.

3.3.1 Focused Group Observation

Focused Group Observation (FGO) serves as a valuable method for collecting authentic data in a natural social setting. In the first phase of this study, spontaneous instances of code-switching (CS) involving linguistic taboos from native Pashto to foreign English were recorded during FGO sessions. Firstly, the participants were given topics for discussion and the name of the topics were written in Pashtu. These instances were then transcribed, isolated, and cited for further analysis. Careful verification by the participants ensured that the identified instances were strategically code-switched for euphemistic purposes or other reasons. After completing the FGO task, participants were individually interviewed regarding their code-switching behavior. Specifically, they were asked whether they engaged in code-switching strategically and purposefully or if it occurred unintentionally. This interview process aimed to gain insights into the participants' awareness and intentions behind their code-switching practices. To address potential issues like the observer's paradox, two factors were considered during FGO: the presence of the recorder and the researcher himself. Prolonging the discussions was one strategy employed to minimize the impact of the observer's paradox on the natural flow of participants' speech. This approach proved effective in maintaining the authenticity of the data. Despite the researcher cum teacher's presence during discussions, the results of the study are

unlikely to be adversely affected. Participants were keen on presenting a positive face in their speech, avoiding offensive or unpleasant language in the presence of their teacher. This strategic language choice added depth to the study's findings.

3.3.2 Interviews

All interviewees were provided with a brief explanation of the study's purpose and the terms 'taboos' and 'code-switching' at the beginning of the interviews. The researcher, conducting the interviews himself, ensured a comprehensive exploration of all relevant points. The interviews were recorded for later transcription and analysis, providing a thorough examination of the data. This process not only complemented the insights gained from FGO but also allowed for a clearer understanding of the validity of the obtained results. The recorded interviews were transcribed to facilitate analysis, and the participants' views were directly written in the analysis section ensuring their voices were accurately represented in the data analysis. To enhance the validation and reliability of the findings, the results of interviews and their interpretations were shared with the students, promoting a collaborative and transparent approach to the research process.

3.4 Ethical Concerns

Ethical considerations were given utmost priority and were a significant concern throughout the data collection process. The researcher obtained both verbal and written consent from the participants, utilizing an Informed Consent Form (ICF) provided in the appendix. Prior to data collection through Focused Group Observation (FGO) and interviews, participants were not only briefed about the nature of the study but were also informed about the audio recording of sessions and interviews. They were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point, adhering to ethical standards. All participants willingly contributed to the study. To ensure confidentiality, participants were assured that their responses would be used exclusively for research purposes and would not be made public without their permission. Identifying information was safeguarded by assigning abbreviated labels (MR1---MR13/ FR1--FR7), whereas MR represents males while FR represents females, with numeric numbers for reference, except for indicating their genders, which were necessary for data analysis. This approach was taken to protect the participants' identities and uphold ethical standards in research.

3.5 Data Analysis

In the analysis phase, the recorded interviews underwent transcription, coding, and the development of categories. Themes emerged from these categories, which were then simplified for interpretation. Thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data, was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach aims to uncover meaningful categories or themes in the data (Fulcher, 2010). According to Howitt and Cramer (2010), the researcher's task in thematic analysis is to identify a limited number of themes that adequately reflect the textual data. A theme represents a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and typically arises through the inductive analytic process characteristic of qualitative research. The researcher, by scrutinizing the text, seeks to abstract recurring themes about what is being communicated. Data familiarization is crucial in thematic analysis, and after becoming familiar with the data, the researcher can systematically organize it. The results section of the report then presents the collated and reported themes. The study identified themes that were thoroughly analyzed and incorporated. This process ensured a comprehensive exploration of participants' perspectives on code-switching, linguistic taboos, and euphemism in a clear and accessible language (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fulcher, 2010).

3.6 Reliability of the Tools and Contents

To ensure the reliability of the research tools, a pilot study was conducted involving five Pashto speakers who were interviewed, and a group discussion was organized. Following their participation, the participants were asked to provide feedback on the topics and questions covered in the interview. The valuable input received during this pilot phase played a crucial role, and adjustments were made to the tools based on their suggestions. This iterative process helped refine the research instruments and enhance their effectiveness for the main study.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The main objectives of this study were to identify common linguistic taboos in Pashto that were deliberately code-switched into English, and to assess how Pashto speakers perceived such taboo topics when expressed in their native language compared to a foreign language. Two distinct data sources were analyzed to address these objectives comprehensively: focused group observation and semi-structured interviews. While the focused group observations provided insights related to the study's first research question, the semi-structured interviews offered deeper perspectives, primarily addressing the second research question, which examined speakers' perceptions and strategies behind the code-switching.

4.1 Results of the Focused Group Observation

The focused group observation sessions were designed to encourage participants to discuss taboo topics in Pashto (L1), though they were free to mix languages if they felt it necessary. The data were categorized based on gender, with the first section summarizing taboos highlighted by male participants (referred to as MRs), and the second section focusing on female participants' responses (FRs). A noticeable pattern emerged where participants consciously opted to code-switch taboo words into English to either soften the perceived rudeness or to demonstrate politeness. This linguistic behavior is critical in understanding the societal norms shaping Pashto-speaking communities. Using more Pashto taboo words in conversation increased the likelihood of code-switching to English, as speakers sought to mitigate the social risk associated with these topics.

4.1.1 Gender-Based Code-Switching Patterns

Gender played a significant role in how linguistic taboos were navigated. For instance, male students frequently substituted English terms for Pashto words such as *khazaa* (woman) or *khazi* (women), expressing discomfort in using the native terms when discussing the opposite gender. Instead, they used English equivalents like "woman" or "lady," demonstrating how code-switching can serve as a politeness strategy to navigate the inherent cultural restrictions surrounding the discussion of gender in Pashto. For example, in Pashtun culture, discussing topics related to personal or sensitive matters, such as using the Pashto word for "woman", can be considered impolite or inappropriate in public contexts. This cultural sensitivity was reflected in the participants' discussions. Several participants indicated that they preferred to use the English term "wife" rather than the Pashto word "*khaaza*" when referring to their

spouses in formal or public settings. This practice aligns with a broader cultural norm among Pashtuns to avoid directly mentioning their wives' names in public as a sign of respect and modesty. By choosing English over Pashto, the participants were able to navigate the discussion of sensitive topics more politely and with greater adherence to social norms, reflecting the euphemistic strategy that code-switching serves in these contexts. The formal environment, reinforced by the faculty member's presence, was instrumental in encouraging such polite language use, demonstrating how code-switching can function as a strategic tool for maintaining cultural decorum.

Female students exhibited similar tendencies when discussing physical appearance, preferring the English term "handsome" over the Pashto equivalent *khkolaay* when referring to male attractiveness. This observation suggests that the participants viewed English as a "safe zone," free from the loaded cultural implications that native Pashto words carry.

The clear distinction between male and female code-switching choices illustrates how the pressures of politeness and cultural taboos are internalized differently across genders in Pashto-speaking societies.

4.1.2 Deliberate Code-Switching as a Politeness Strategy

The participants frequently confirmed that their choice to code-switch was intentional, specifically aimed at avoiding offending others or breaking social taboos. A total of 162 code-switched instances were recorded, of which 119 were verified by the participants as strategic switches aimed at using euphemisms. This high frequency underscores the significant role that politeness and face-saving strategies play in Pashto speakers' everyday language choices.

The strategic decision to code-switch highlights the socio-linguistic phenomena that shape Pashto speech. Individuals adjust their language to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), Brown and Levinson's politeness theory 1987) which in this context, are the cultural taboos. By switching to English, participants circumvented the embarrassment or offense that could arise from using the corresponding Pashto terms.

4.1.3 Contextual Nature of Taboo Words

An important aspect of the study's findings was the contextual fluidity of taboo words. What may be considered taboo or inappropriate in one context could be acceptable in another.

Participants often explained that while certain Pashto words might be seen as inappropriate in a familial or formal setting, they could be acceptable among close friends or in informal situations. This aligns with contextual language theory, which posits that the meaning of words, particularly taboo words, can shift dramatically depending on the social environment.

For example, while terms like *khazaa* (woman) or *khkolaay* (handsome) are not inherently offensive, their use in a conversation involving the opposite gender may be seen as violating cultural norms, prompting participants to code-switch as the faculty member was a woman herself. This awareness of context demonstrates a nuanced understanding of how social settings influence language choice.

4.2 Results from Semi-Structured Interviews

While the focused group data offered a glimpse into the spontaneous occurrences of code-switching, the semi-structured interviews were designed to dive deeper into the motivations and perceptions behind these linguistic choices. The interviews revisited the study's first research question and further explored the second research question, which examined Pashto speakers' perceptions of taboo words in both languages.

4.2.1 Strategic Code-Switching: A Socio-Cultural Buffer

Many participants admitted that English provided a form of "linguistic shielding." They believed that using English not only avoided the negative connotations associated with the Pashto taboo words but also allowed them to engage in sensitive discussions without risking social censure. This strategic decision to switch to English reflects broader cultural attitudes toward foreign languages, which may be perceived as neutral or less emotionally charged than the native tongue.

Participants also noted that, while they could have found euphemistic Pashto alternatives, they preferred to switch entirely to English for taboo words as it felt "safer." This demonstrates a heightened awareness of the consequences of taboo language use and a conscious effort to avoid linguistic risks by adopting a different language entirely. The choice to code-switch, therefore, acts as a socio-cultural buffer, reducing the potential for offense and maintaining conversational politeness.

4.2.2 Gendered Linguistic Choices

Interviews confirmed that both male and female participants displayed gendered patterns of linguistic behavior. Women tended to code-switch when discussing physical appearance, while men did so when referring to gendered roles or attributes, such as substituting *khazaa* with "woman." This pattern indicates the deep-rooted gender norms influencing language use in Pashto-speaking communities, where certain words are culturally taboo or seen as inappropriate based on the speaker's gender and the context.

4.2.3 Perceptions of Language and Identity

Participants were also asked to reflect on how code-switching impacted their perception of themselves and their communication. Some expressed discomfort with relying on English for sensitive topics, feeling it created a sense of linguistic and cultural dissonance. They acknowledged that while English allowed them to navigate taboos more easily, it also distanced them from their linguistic heritage. This reflects the tension many bilingual speakers face when code-switching, as it may create a divide between their native cultural identity and the practical need to adhere to social norms.

4.3 Conclusion of Data Analysis

4.3.1 Focused Group Observation (FGO) Results

During the group discussion sessions, 13 male participants were assigned various topics (refer to Table 4.2), and the discussions lasted for one hour and ten minutes. Over the course of the session, the male participants engaged with 60 taboo topics, code-switching 23 times, although these instances were not motivated by euphemistic purposes. In this particular context, the taboo topics were freely discussed without any explicit need to soften or mitigate their impact through the use of code-switching.

Following the male session, a separate group of 7 female participants was organized to discuss the same topics. Like the male group, their discussion also lasted for one hour and ten minutes. In total, 59 instances of code-switching were recorded among the female participants, with 20 of those instances occurring for reasons unrelated to linguistic taboos. The gendered responses highlighted in both groups provide an insightful glimpse into how social expectations and cultural norms shape the use of taboo language and the strategic employment of code-switching in Pashto-speaking communities.

4.3.2 Conclusions Drawn from Interviews

To initiate the interviews, participants were asked general questions to gauge their awareness of linguistic taboos. Interestingly, with only a few exceptions, most respondents demonstrated limited understanding of what constituted a taboo. Although they recognized that certain words and topics were inappropriate for public conversation, they had a vague sense of why these terms should be avoided. Upon being introduced to the concept of linguistic taboos, they acknowledged that certain words or expressions carried negative connotations and should not be spoken in certain social contexts.

During the interviews, the participants confirmed the deliberate use of English terms over their Pashto equivalents when discussing sensitive topics. One male participant explained his choice, stating, “I used the English terms because I couldn’t bring myself to say the Pashto words in front of my seniors and classmates when discussing topics like abortion and pregnancy” (MR3). This conscious decision to switch to English reflects a desire to maintain social politeness and avoid discomfort. The participant was keenly aware of the potential awkwardness and impoliteness that might arise from using the native language in these contexts, choosing instead to adopt English as a strategic and intentional buffer.

Through these interviews, it became evident that the participants viewed code-switching as more than just a linguistic tool; it was an important social mechanism used to navigate the complexities of cultural norms and politeness. The preference for English when addressing certain taboo topics highlights the deep connection between language, social propriety, and the need for face-saving strategies in Pashto-speaking communities.

4.4 Comparing Switched and Un-switched Linguistic Taboos

The terms in the native and non-native languages are thoroughly analyzed in this section, and the participants have provided their rationale for selecting the native or non-native words. Example words in pairs (an English word and its Pashto equivalent) were supplied to the participants from the following list, which was primarily taken from Ahmad et al. (2013)’s study on linguistic taboos in Pashtun society.

4.5 List of Topics

The Following topics were given to the participants for the discussion, first and then the sub-topics below in the right column.

Table 2: List of topics

Topic	Description
1. Physical Body Parts	- Seena (Breast) - Memi wrkool (Breast-feeding) - Shoondy (Lips)
2. Physical Disabilities	- Mazuaraa (Disable/differently able) - Konr (Deaf) Rond (Blind)
3. Animal Names as Taboos	- Spyee/Sapay (Dog/Bitch) Khree Khraaha (Donkey/Ass) Sandha/Mikha (Buffalo)- Ghwaa (Cow) - Gongayee/Kwhang (Owl)
4. Names of Certain Professions	- Nayee (Hairdresser) -Chapraaasi (Peon)
5. Singing	- Dhamtob (Singing) - Dham/Fankaar (Singer)
6. Divorce	- Talaak (Divorce)
7. Sex	- Korwalay (Sex)
8. Love Marriage	- D Menee Wdh (Love Marriage)
9. Socially Outlawed Behavior	- Segrete Skhal (Smoking Cigarette)
10. Women’s Disease	- Bache Artwal (Abortion)
11. Menses	- Khzu Bimre (Women’s Disease)
12. Miscarriage	- Mashoom Lredal (Miscarriage)
13. Cousins	Trah Loor (Uncle’s Daughter) Trah Zway (Uncle’s Son)

The study in question focuses on a corpus of 162 target words, (see the below table 3) of which 119 are categorized as taboo. These taboo words encompass terms related to physical body parts, disabilities, animal names used as insults, certain professions, intimate relationships, and socially outlawed behaviors. The prevalence of taboo language in the dataset underscores its significance in linguistic interactions, highlighting the complex interplay between language, culture, and social norms.

Table 3: List of total code-Switched Words

Khaaza	(wife)	Chaprrassi	(Peon/Laborer)
Khawend/	Mirh (husband)	Dham	(Singer)
Khoor	(sister)	Fankaar	(Singer):
Lor	(daughter)	Talak	Divorce

Khazi	(women)	Zha wahhi shvee	I am married
Doctara	(female doctor)	yam	Married
Dayee	(lady health worker)	Wdh Kray	Marriage
Jenyee	(female)	Wdh	Early marriage
Jenayeei	(girls)	Makhki Wah	Late marriage
Malgriii	(girlfriend(s))	Rosta wadh	Love marriage
Malga'ray/Malgari	(boyfriend(s))	D mene wdh	Divorce
Trhloor	(cousin)	Talaq	Smoking
Tattyee	(bathroom/toilet /washroom)	Skhal	Alcoholic
Shoondy	(lips)	Shraabia	Drugs
Sina'a	(breast)	Naashaa	(Drugs addicted)
Mazura'a	(disabled)	Naashayee	(Abortion)
Khaarr	(donkey)	Mashoom ghorzawal	(Depression)
Spyee/Sapay	(dog/bitch)	Khfgnn	(Miscarriage)
Khree khraaha	(donkey/ass)	Mashoom lredal	(Baby Birth)
Sandha/Mikha	(buffalo)	Mashoom kidaal	(Check up)
Ghwaa	(cow)	Zan pokhtana	(Breast cancer)
Gongayee/Kwhang	(owl)	Do Sinnii Maarhaz	Pieces of aborted baby)
Nhaye	(Hair- dresser/Barber)	Peerwan (Mashum Lrikawal	(Medical effects)
		Da dhwayie asaraat	

Langedaal	(Delivery case	Da Khazu Bemarii	Mensus
Naswar	Snuff –	Khiyal sathal	Women Disease
Ghadar	Traitor	Bemar	(Physical care)
Khkwlay	Beautiful	Kheta Ghtiidhal	(Patient)
Naqabila	Dull	Bache rwral	(Unsafe babies)
Twaif	Courtesan	Kheta Sa'atal	(Child bearing)
Sheetan	Evil/Wicked	Nhaye)	(Baby bear)
Katha	Bald	Chaprrassi	(dresser/Barber)
Qsabi	Butcher	Dham	(Peon/Laborer)
Kafir	Infidel/Non-believer	Fankaar	(Singer)
Harami	Bastard	Talak	(Singer)
Dala	Jobless	Zha wahhi shvee yam	(Divorce)
Shodda	Fool	Wdh Kray	(I am married)
Sheetan	Devil	Wdh	(Married)
Aram khor	Eater of Forbidden	Makhki Wah	(Marriage)
Lowly Bekara	Lowly	Rosta wadh	Early marriage
Ghazi - Jihadi	Ghazi	D mene wdh	Late marriage
Sex Worker - Koni	Sex Worker	Talaq	Love marriage
Villain - Kameena	Villain	Skhal	
Lazy - Soor	Lazy	Shraabia	

Saint - Molla	Saint	Naashaa	Divorce
OBodda	Old Man	Naashayee	Smoking
Dala	Coward	Khfgnn	Alcoholic
Marghay	Bird	Mashoom Iredal	Drugs
Kamzoor	Weak		Drugs addicted
Sinnii Maarhaz	(Breast cancer)		Depression
Bachay	Son	Mashoom ghorzawal	(Abortion)
Ror	Brother	Mashoom kidaal	(Miscarriage)
Shay	Thing	Zan pokhtana	(Baby Birth)
Morghud	Illegitimate	Kafir	(Check up)
Hijrah	Enoch	Bachabaz	Non-believer
Tattayee	Wshroom		Same Gender love
Ghuslaye	Bathroom		Bed
Mena	Love	Kat	Stupid
		Gandoo	Beloved
		Laila	Sick
		Bemar	Thug
		Badmash	

Of the total target words, it is inferred that all taboo words were code-switched, amounting to 119 instances. Code-switching in this context serves as a linguistic strategy for negotiating the expression of sensitive or taboo topics within the conversational framework. Furthermore, the

study provides insights into the distribution of taboo word production among participants based on gender. While 7 female participants contributed 59 taboo words, 13 male participants produced 60 taboo words. Although the difference in total taboo word production between genders is marginal, it suggests potential variations in language use influenced by social and cultural factors as some the words were produced as code-switch but not for the avoidance of taboo or euphemism for that matter (see table 4 below: words that are code-switched for other reasons). These findings contribute to our understanding of how gender dynamics may intersect with linguistic practices in taboo language expression.

Table 4: List of Words Code-switched for other Reasons

English Word code-switched	Pashtu	English code-switched	Pashtu
Male	Nareena	Courtesan	Twaif
Mad	Lewanay	Evil/Wicked	Sheetan
Woman	Zanana	Bald	Katha
Extra	Palto	Butcher	Qsabi
Son	Bachay	Infidel/non-believer	Kafir
Brother	Ror	Bastard	Harami
Thing	Shay	Jobless	Dala
Illegetimate	Morghud	Beggar	Mlang
Enoch	Hijrah	Fool	Shodda
Non-believer	Kafir	Devil	Sheetan
Same Gender Affection	Bachabaz	Eater of forbidden	Aram khor
Bed	Kat	Lowly	Bekara

Stupid	Gandoo	Ghazi	Jihadi
Beloved	Laila	Koni	Sex worker
Sick	Bemar	Villan	Kameena
Thug	Badmash	Lazy	Soor
Snuff	Naswar	Saint	Molla
Traitor	Ghadar	Old Man	Bodda
Beautiful	Khkwlay	Coward	Dala
Fixer	Badakhor	Bird	Marghay
Dull	Naqabila	Weak	Kamzoor

Table 5: Qualitative Differences between Linguistic Taboos in Pashto and English

Categories	Example word	Pashto equivalent
Opposite Sex Relations	Sister	Khor
Bodily Functions	Washroom	Ghuslayee
Anatomical Terms/Parts Of The Body	Lips	Shoondyee
Disability: Physical Defects	Handicapped	Mauzoora
Animals' Names As Taboos	Donkey	Khaar
Some Professions As Taboos	Barber/Singer	Nayee/Daam
Divorce and Marital Status	Divorce	Talak
Socially Prohibited Acts	Smoking	Sigarette skhall
Disease And Women's Conditions	Pregnant	Khetta Kidal

Sex And Sexuality	Intercourse	Koorwaly
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4.6 Opposite Sex Relation (Interview Results)

During the interviews, participants were asked to explain their choice between using the native Pashto word or its English equivalent when referring to members of the opposite sex. With the exception of one participant (MR9), all interviewees—both male and female—confirmed that discussing relationships with the opposite gender in Pashto is culturally sensitive and often considered taboo. This sensitivity is particularly evident when referring to terms related to marital relationships.

The male participants expressed a strong reluctance to use the Pashto word *khaaza* (wife) in public due to the cultural and religious constraints prevalent in Pashtun society. One participant summarized this sentiment by stating, "The word *khaaza* in Pashto generally refers to a gender relationship but carries extremely negative connotations" (MR8). Another male participant further solidified this notion, explaining, "The word *khaaza*, or even mentioning a female's name in public, is considered disrespectful in Pashto society. I would rather use 'wife' in a formal setting than *khaaza*" (MR2). Similarly, female participants were asked to choose between the Pashto terms *khawend* or *mirh* (husband) and the English equivalent, "husband." All the female interviewees expressed discomfort in using the Pashto words in public or formal contexts. One participant openly admitted, "Saying *khawend* feels really weird to me. I'm embarrassed to say it" (FR4). Another female participant remarked, "If you say the other word [*khawend/mirh*], it feels off. It's not a word you can say comfortably in front of elders or in public settings" (FR7).

This dynamic was further elaborated by another participant, who explained that Pashto cultural norms permit women to refer to their husbands by name within the household or private gatherings, but using the term *khawend* in public is discouraged. She concluded, "A man is not allowed to discuss his wife or even mention her name in public. While women may mention their husbands' names at home or in social gatherings, it's more appropriate to use 'husband' in public settings. The word *khawend* doesn't seem suitable in those contexts" (FR1).

This feedback reveals the deeply ingrained cultural expectations that guide language use around gender and marital relationships in Pashto-speaking societies. The preference for English terms

over Pashto ones underscores the discomfort associated with native terms, further highlighting the role of code-switching as a politeness strategy aimed at navigating social taboos.

Table 6: Words Referring to Opposite Blood Relation/Gender (MRs)

Code-switched to English	Pashto equivalent
Sister	Khoor
Daughter	lor
Partner/wife	khaaza
Women	khazi
Female doctor	Doctara
Lady health worker	Dayee
Female	Jenyee
Girls	Jenayeei
Girlfriend(s)	malgriii
Boyfriend(s)	malga'ray/ malgari

Furthermore, male participants were asked whether the Pashto word "khour," which means "sister," is considered taboo in their language. Many confirmed that the term is indeed problematic in public discourse. One participant explained, "The Pashto word *khour* is equally forbidden, so we tend to use the English word. Both *khour* and *lor* are taboo in Pashto, and English words seem like suitable substitutes" (MR7). Another participant elaborated, saying, "*The English word sister gives a beautiful meaning. It seems prohibited to use the Pashto word khour. The English term sister is very formal*" (MR4). Similarly, the word "daughter" (*lor*) is also shunned outside the Pashtun community. One participant noted, "In educational contexts, for instance, we prefer using 'sister' or 'daughter,' but in our communities, we typically say

khoor or *lur*" (MR5). This suggests that the Pashto word *khoor* carries negative connotations and is avoided outside the family, even though it is used within familial circles.

As shown in Table 2, during the Focus Group Observation (FGO), a significant number of terms relating to the opposite gender were documented. Participants acknowledged that they deliberately switched these terms from Pashto to English because they felt more comfortable doing so. Additionally, many interviewees expressed discomfort discussing other family relationships involving opposite genders, such as female cousins for males. For example, male participants were hesitant to refer to their *troor lur* (aunt’s daughter) or *trah lur* (uncle’s daughter) in public. Instead, they preferred to use terms like "cousin" or "female cousin." One participant admitted, "Sometimes, I feel hesitant to say she is my *trah lur* or *trah loor*, so we typically just say *cousin*. But when we are with relatives in the village or at home, we have no choice but to use the Pashto terms" (MR6). This confirms the preference for using foreign terms to avoid linguistic taboos, as long as the listener understands the alternative word. However, when the alternative English word is not understood, code-switching as a euphemistic technique is not an option. In educational contexts, most female participants expressed discomfort regarding male cousin relationships. They favored avoiding the topic entirely, but when necessary, they preferred using the English term "cousin," as it allowed them to obscure the gender identity of the cousin. One participant commented, "It is preferable to use the English word *cousin*, even though it hides the gender" (FR3). Another participant highlighted the negative connotations of the Pashto term *trah zway* (uncle’s son). "The relationship is better if we avoid using the Pashto term *trah zway*, which has a bad reputation. The English term 'cousin' is neutral and more acceptable" (MR8). This further emphasizes the association of negative meanings with the native Pashto terms in public discourse.

Table 7: Phrases Denoting Gender/Blood Relation Opposite (FRs)

Code-switched to English	Pashto equivalent
<i>Partner</i>	<i>Shreek</i>
<i>Husband</i>	<i>Khwend/mirha</i>
<i>Second wife</i>	<i>Dweama khza</i>
<i>Couple</i>	<i>jorra)</i>

Male	Saray
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Similarly, when talking about topics in groups with other men, female participants chose the terms husband, partner, and male. They acknowledged that using these terms in Pashto makes them aware of the gender distinctions between them, which may be the cause of their lack of confidence. As a result, they deliberately chose to hide their "face" by speaking in English (refer to Figure 3.).

4.7 Physical Processes

In many cultures and countries, terms such as "bathroom," "washroom," "toilet," and "call of nature" are considered taboo or inappropriate in certain contexts. The data collected from Pashto speakers in Dir Upper reflects a similar sentiment, particularly when discussing such topics in formal or mixed-gender settings. Both male and female participants indicated that they avoid using native Pashto terms for these concepts in public or official environments. Instead, they opt for euphemistic English phrases when in the presence of elders, the opposite gender, or in educational and formal contexts. For instance, one participant (MR1) stated, "*Washroom* or *Tattyee* is not a good fit for the Pashto term *Tattyee*." Another participant (MR4) suggested that a more circuitous or polite approach is to use the English word "washroom," which they described as a foreign term, not native to Pashto. This illustrates that speakers have the option to choose a euphemism when using native terminology is deemed inappropriate. Another participant, MR5, explained that while *Tattyee* might be acceptable when speaking informally among close friends, it is more appropriate to use "restroom" in formal situations, particularly in classrooms or when both males and females are present. Another male participant, MR3, provided a detailed context for this distinction: "When we're among less educated people, we typically use informal phrases like, *stop the car, tashoo ta, or tashe meetyazee kom, gady wadrwaa* ['stop the car, I need to use the restroom']. However, if we are in a formal setting or around women, we should say 'washroom' instead of using the Pashto term."

Female participants echoed these views, emphasizing the discomfort associated with the native Pashto words for "bathroom" or "washroom." The first female respondent (FR1) described *Tattyee* or *ghussalayee* as odd and unpleasant. Another participant (FR7) explained, "It feels repulsive because it is in your native language. But if you say *washroom*, it seems appropriate." This highlights the perception that native words may carry negative associations, while English

terms seem more neutral or polite. A third female respondent (FR4) suggested that saying "washroom" conveys an air of education, good manners, and a respectable family background, whereas using *Tattyee* or *ghussal khawana* may create an impression of discomfort. She was particularly concerned about how others would perceive her based on her choice of words. Another participant (FR5) expressed a similar view, explaining that if she were to use the Pashto terms *Tattyee* or *ghussalayee* in front of friends, elders, or well-mannered people, they might think she had poor manners (*sharmeedelyaa*).

4.8 Physical Nouns or Body Parts

While not all body parts are considered taboo in Pashto, several specific terms—particularly those referring to women's bodies—are often avoided in public discourse. For instance, when participants were asked about their comfort levels using the word "lips" (*shoondy* in Pashto), they expressed mixed views. Many noted that referencing body parts, especially in Pashto, can evoke sexual connotations, making these terms inappropriate for formal or public settings. However, using the English equivalent often mitigates the discomfort.

One participant stated, "The word *shoondy* is more provocative than the English word 'lips'" (MR8), emphasizing how the native Pashto term carries more sexual implications. Generally, interviewees agreed that certain body parts are taboo in Pashtun society, and using the English word for those parts felt more acceptable in intimate or sensitive contexts. However, one male participant (MR7) held a different perspective, explaining that he did not perceive any significant distinction between the Pashto and English terms for lips, stating, "Both words, *shoondy* and 'lips,' carry the same emotional meaning for me." This insight reveals a spectrum of opinions on the matter, indicating that cultural sensitivity to language may vary based on individual perception and social context. Another participant, MR3, provided a more contextual observation, explaining that while using the English word "lips" would not draw much attention, saying *shoondy* in Pashto could provoke negative thoughts or reactions from listeners. He added that the Pashto term *shoondy* is often associated with inappropriate jokes or "dirty" humor, especially in casual conversations (MR11). This difference in interpretation suggests that certain native terms have been sexualized or degraded over time, which has contributed to their taboo status.

The taboo surrounding Pashto terms for body parts extends to professional settings. MR5 explained that while it might be acceptable to use *shoondy* among friends, employing

such terms in a classroom or professional environment would be inappropriate. He emphasized that using Pashto terms for body parts, especially in formal settings, could cause discomfort among students, particularly if a teacher were to use the term. Another participant, MR2, summed up the situation by stating, "We can talk about lips, calves, and thighs with friends, but in a classroom with both males and females, we can't say words like *shoondy*, *khunatee* (posterior), or *paton* (thigh)." He further explained that, given Pashtun cultural norms, even discussing a woman's name in public is avoided—let alone mentioning her body parts. Terms like *seena* (breast), for example, are avoided, even though words like "chest" or "chest infection" are more commonly accepted.

Male participants in the focused group observation (FGO) reported feeling particularly uncomfortable discussing topics such as breast cancer or breastfeeding because the word "breast" in Pashto is associated with a woman's private or sexual body parts. Using the English term, on the other hand, allowed them to navigate these discussions more easily, as reflected in the results (see Table 4).

Table 8: Words that refer to body parts: semi-private and personal (MRs).

Code-switched to English	Pashto equivalent
<i>Breastfeeding</i>	<i>Memi warkwal</i>
<i>Breast cancer</i>	<i>De sini naroghi</i>

All the female participants expressed strong objections to the use of the Pashto word *shoondy* (lips), stating that they found it improper, embarrassing, or uncomfortable. Many felt that the word evoked negative or even sexual thoughts. One interviewee commented, "*The Pashto word shoondy sounds unpleasant for women to use; it feels typical and personal*" (FR2). She explained that it felt like something was lost or diminished when the word was spoken. In contrast, she found the English word "lips" acceptable and more appropriate for formal settings.

Another student (FR3) shared similar sentiments, stating that using *shoondy* reflected "bad etiquette" and made her uncomfortable, even though she was perfectly fine using words like "head," "eyes," or "ears." The fact that the participants knew and understood the connotations of words like *shoondy* suggests that they are used in specific social contexts, which reveals the

deep connection between language and social belonging. By exploring when and where these words are used, we gain insight into how language shapes our social interactions and relationships.

This reluctance to use certain words like *shoondy* illustrates the broader social norms governing language in Pashtun society, particularly in contexts where body parts are considered intimate or inappropriate for public conversation. One interviewee (FR4) whispered that she would never dare to use *shoondy* at the market, fearing that the shopkeeper would think poorly of her. "*It's fine to say 'lipstick' in English, but saying da shondo surkhi (lipstick in Pashto) sounds wrong in Pashto,*" she admitted.

Other female interviewees reinforced the idea that the Pashto word *shoondy* is prohibited or at least uncomfortable to use, while its English equivalent "lips" carries no such stigma. For example, one respondent (FR5) shared that using *shoondy* in public would make people think the speaker was too "brave," implying it would be seen as inappropriate or ill-mannered. Similarly, another participant (FR7) struggled to articulate her feelings, stating, "*It [shoondy] is a Pashto word, but it's still...*," before trailing off, clearly uncomfortable. She added, "*I detest this word. I don't know what to call it, but it's like... it's a nasty word. I never speak it.*"

The emotional responses and discomfort shared by the female participants indicate that *shoondy* is indeed a word laden with taboo connotations in Pashto society, making it difficult for women to discuss even in appropriate contexts. For them, discussing body parts like lips in Pashto seems far more intimate and inappropriate than using the English equivalent, highlighting the complex role language plays in reinforcing social taboos and boundaries.

4.9 Impairment: Physical Flaws

Disability, whether physical or mental, carries a strong social taboo in Pashto-speaking communities. Words referring to individuals with disabilities, such as *konr* (deaf), *roond* (blind), or even *mazura'a* (disabled), are generally avoided due to their perceived harshness. Many participants expressed discomfort using these Pashto terms, noting that substituting them with their English equivalents lessens the negative connotations and potential embarrassment. One participant explained, "We cannot tell our fellow in Pashto that he is *mazura'a*, but we can say he is disabled in English" (MR2). The use of words like *konr* (deaf) or *roond* (blind) in Pashto is particularly awkward, and most interviewees agreed that using English terms in such contexts is more socially acceptable.

Another participant, MR1, supported this view, explaining that linguistic taboos in Pashto tend to affect emotions more strongly than those in English. "In formal settings, English words like 'disabled' or 'deaf' seem more polite, especially because disabled people often encounter these terms in official documents, such as identity cards. In contrast, the Pashto terms may cause them discomfort or even trigger feelings of inferiority" (MR11). This sentiment suggests that English words are preferred in legal and formal contexts because they are seen as more neutral and polite, while Pashto equivalents may carry stigmatizing connotations.

One female participant, FR2, expanded on this idea, stating, "If I say *mazura'a* in Pashto, the person may feel hurt or develop an inferiority complex. But if I say 'disabled' in English, it sounds more courteous and respectful." Another female interviewee, FR7, agreed, describing the use of Pashto words for disabilities as "abusive" to those with impairments. FR5 echoed this sentiment, explaining that English terms are considered more polite and socially appropriate.

Overall, the preference for English terminology when discussing disabilities illustrates how Pashto words can be perceived as more offensive or degrading, even when no harm is intended. The choice of English terms reflects a desire for civility and sensitivity, especially in public or formal contexts, where speakers aim to avoid causing offense or discomfort to those with disabilities.

4.10 Names of animals that are taboo.

Similar to other cultures, Pashtun society uses certain animal names in a negative light, often as synonyms for profanity or insults. For example, the Pashto word *khaarr*, meaning "donkey," is frequently used disparagingly, akin to English terms such as "idiot" or "stupid." However, unlike in English, using such terms in Pashto is considered highly inappropriate and offensive. All participants were asked whether certain animal names were taboo in Pashto and to specify which ones carried these connotations. Following this, the interviewees were invited to compare the negative impact of these animal terms in both Pashto and English.

The participants' responses revealed that while some animal names were deemed acceptable, the majority were not. Among the most commonly cited taboo terms were *spyee/sapay* (dog/bitch), *khree/khraaha* (donkey/ass), *sandha/mikha* (buffalo), *ghwaa* (cow), and *gongayee/kwhang* (owl). As one participant explained, "We typically use the names of animals as swear words in Pashto" (MR4). He added that *mikha* (buffalo) is also used derogatorily to

refer to a big girl, demonstrating how animal names are often repurposed as insults beyond their literal meanings (MR12).

One interviewee, MR2, shared that while he didn't mind being called "stupid" or "idiot," he would not tolerate being called *khaarr* (donkey), highlighting the greater offensiveness of the Pashto term compared to its English equivalent. Another respondent similarly noted, "I will call someone *khaarr* if I intend to hurt them; otherwise, in a friendly setting, I would just call them stupid or idiot, and they won't mind" (MR7). This observation illustrates how certain animal names in Pashto carry a more deeply offensive and insulting tone than their English counterparts.

Female participants echoed this sentiment, with one stating, "*The Pashto term for animals is very degrading and insulting*" (FR3). Another female interviewee, FR7, mentioned that it felt "weird" to call someone *khaarr* in Pashto, while using English terms like "idiot" or "stupid" seemed more acceptable. She agreed with FR6 that animal-related insults in Pashto, like *khaarr*, were much harsher and more offensive than their English equivalents.

A participant, FR3, summarized the feelings shared by many of the interviewees: "Even as I speak to you in this interview, I feel comfortable saying words like 'dog,' 'donkey,' or 'bitch' in English, but if I were to use these terms in Pashto or my L1, it would feel offensive, falling under *gaali galoch* (swearing/abuse)." Another participant added that using terms like "stupid" in English implies a light-hearted joke, but using *khaarr* in Pashto has a more pejorative, almost "barbaric" connotation (FR2).

It is clear that while English insults like "idiot" or "stupid" may be used casually or humorously, the Pashto equivalents are often much more charged with negative connotations, especially when they reference animals. The findings demonstrate that Pashto speakers tend to avoid using these animal-based insults due to the offensive weight they carry in their native language.

4.11 Certain Occupations considered as Taboo/s

One of the defining characteristics of Pashtun society is the avoidance of certain occupations perceived as socially inferior. Professions such as barber (*nhayee*) and peon (*chaprrassi*) are considered low-status and are often avoided in public discourse. Similar to the use of derogatory terms, these occupations are frequently invoked to belittle or insult others.

The following comments illustrate how Pashto phrases for these occupations carry negative connotations, whereas their English equivalents are free from such social taboos.

One participant commented, "*The negative connotation of the term nhayee (barber) is instantly recognizable; everyone knows how bad it sounds. That's why we hesitate to use this word. But when we compare it to 'hairdresser,' nhayee sounds far worse*" (MR7). Another respondent shared his personal experience, explaining how the term *nhayee* caused offense: "*A friend of mine who cuts hair refused to continue his work when someone called him nhayee. He left the scissors and comb on the spot. However, if you call him a 'hairdresser,' he doesn't mind at all; in fact, he proudly displays 'hairdresser' outside his shop*" (MR2).

The taboo associated with these professions extends beyond personal interactions. As one male student explained, "*The English word is better and more appropriate. Here in Upper Dir, people look down on the profession of a hairdresser, but if we use English, we focus on their work rather than their low social standing*" (MR11). The use of English words like "hairdresser" or "peon" elevates the conversation and diverts attention from the perceived inferior social status of these occupations.

Female participants echoed these sentiments, agreeing that using English terms was more appropriate and respectful. "*We talk about the same professions,*" noted one participant (FR3), "*but in Pashto, these terms are forbidden or frowned upon.*" Another female respondent added, "*Many professions are considered taboo in Pashto, especially nhayee and chaprrassi. These words feel abusive and disrespectful, as if you're cursing someone*" (FR7).

Singing and dancing, despite being enjoyed by many Pashtuns, are similarly viewed as demeaning professions in the community. The word for singer, *dham*, can carry both impolite and euphemistic connotations. Two participants shared their experience, stating, "*We love being part of the singing profession, but people look down on those who sing. They call us dham, but fankaar (artist) is a better word*" (MR6). They further noted that using English terms like "artist" or "performer" is becoming increasingly common and more polite.

The participants' comments highlight the hierarchy of professions in Pashtun society, with certain occupations carrying high prestige while others are considered lowly. This classification is reinforced by language, with Pashto terms often viewed as insulting or derogatory. Using

English terminology, on the other hand, helps to soften the stigma associated with these professions, allowing speakers to engage in more polite and respectful discourse.

4.12 Separation, divorce, and marriage/Relationship Status

In Pashtun culture, discussing divorce or marital status, particularly for women, is deeply frowned upon. Divorce, in particular, is treated as a severe social taboo, a phenomenon influenced by both cultural and religious norms. Pashto speakers typically avoid using terms associated with divorce or marriage in public discourse, opting for euphemisms or English equivalents, which are perceived as more neutral and less offensive.

One male participant illustrated this point, remarking that divorce is "*a harsh taboo because it is a very rare occurrence in our Pashtun society, and it is considered like thunder [very harsh, tragic, and unpleasant]*" (MR9). When discussing which term—*divorce* or *talak*—seemed more appropriate, participants expressed a clear preference for the English word. "*I would prefer 'divorce' rather than the Pashto word 'talak',*" one participant stated without hesitation (MR1). He further explained, "*In our community, 'talak' is derogatory and aggressive. If someone has done something wrong, we might call them 'divorce' as a swear word.*" In contrast, using the English word, *divorce*, is seen as more formal and neutral, allowing speakers to discuss the subject without the same level of social judgment. As one participant explained, "*If we use 'talak' in Pashto, people will immediately assume negative things about the person involved, whereas 'divorce' in English carries less stigma*" (MR11).

Female participants echoed these sentiments, often with more emotional intensity, as they are typically more affected by the social consequences of divorce. One woman pointed out, "*Women should avoid using the word 'talak' because it feels harsher and is more problematic for them than it is for men*" (MR3). This sentiment was echoed by another participant, who explained that in Pashtun society, "*Talaak' has a very negative connotation, and it deeply hurts our feelings when someone says it, whereas saying 'divorce' in English doesn't provoke the same emotional response*" (FR1).

The participants' responses suggest that while *divorce* in English is not entirely devoid of negative connotations, it is seen as significantly more acceptable, formal, and polite than the Pashto word *talak*. In other words, while *divorce* may still imply the negative reality of a marital breakdown, it carries far less emotional weight and social stigma than the native Pashto term.

Other female interviewees supported these claims, with one participant stating, "*The English word 'divorce' doesn't make you feel as bad as 'talak'. In our society, calling someone 'talak' reflects badly on their character, whereas 'divorce' does not have the same personal attack attached to it*" (FR4). Another interviewee added, "*'Talak' has many negative connotations attached to it. But 'divorce' is just an English word. It doesn't carry the same emotional baggage*" (FR6).

Table 9: Words Associated with Divorce and Marital Status (MRs)

English Code-switched words	Its Pashtu Equivalent
<i>Married</i>	<i>Wdh Kray</i>
<i>Marriage</i>	<i>Wdh</i>
<i>Early marriage</i>	<i>Makhki Wah</i>
<i>Late marriage</i>	<i>Rosta wadh</i>
<i>Divorce</i>	<i>Talaq</i>
<i>Rate of divorce</i>	<i>D talaq rate</i>
<i>Love marriage</i>	<i>D mene wdh</i>

Names that indicate marital status are also considered taboo for men in Pashtun culture, as expressed by male participants during the Focus Group Observation (FGO) and interviews. The male participants consistently reported that openly discussing one's marital status is frowned upon in Pashto society. Although disclosing marital status is not as strictly prohibited as mentioning divorce, it remains a subject of discomfort. Words that were used by participants to indicate marital status, and later identified as taboo by them, are presented in Table 5 above.

The data analysis further revealed that Pashto speakers, particularly men, are hesitant to openly declare their marital status. One male participant remarked, "*In Pashto, it's frowned upon to disclose one's marital status*" (MR3). Although a few participants felt that both Pashto and English words could be used interchangeably when discussing marital status, there was a

general consensus that the English term *married* was more acceptable and caused less discomfort than its Pashto equivalent, *zha wahhi shvee yam*.

One male participant expressed his preference for the English term, explaining, "*Saying zh wadh shvee yama [I am married] is very awkward for me, but I can say za married yam [I am married] without hesitation*" (MR12). Similarly, a female participant emphasized the awkwardness of the Pashto term, stating, "*The Pashto word embarrasses me, but the English word doesn't make me feel uncomfortable at all*" (FR4).

Interestingly, the data also revealed that women were comparatively more comfortable than men when discussing their marital status, though they still preferred the English term over the Pashto one. One female participant shared, "*Saying 'zh wadh shvee yama' feels too personal and awkward, but 'I am married' is much easier to say in public*" (FR4). This finding highlights the pervasive discomfort associated with discussing marital status in Pashtun society, where using English words like *married* is perceived as more formal, neutral, and polite compared to the native Pashto equivalent.

Table 10: Terms Associated with Divorce and Marital Status (FRs)

<i>English words-codeswitched</i>	<i>Pashtu Equivalent</i>
<i>Married</i>	<i>Wdh</i>
<i>Late marriages</i>	<i>Rosta wadh</i>
<i>Second marriage</i>	<i>Dwayam Wdh</i>
<i>Divorce</i>	<i>Talak</i>

When it comes to disclosing their marital status in Pashto, both men and women experience a shared sense of shyness or humiliation. This reluctance was clearly noted during the Focus Group Observation (FGO), where female participants collectively confirmed that using Pashto terms for divorce and marriage caused discomfort (refer to Table 6). However, English words seemed to provide a linguistic buffer, allowing individuals to communicate these ideas without

the associated shame. The participants generally agreed that using terms like *divorce* or *married* in English enabled them to discuss these subjects more openly and with less embarrassment, as English words were perceived to be more neutral and less emotionally charged than their Pashto counterparts.

4.13 Socially Outlawed Behaviors

Like many other cultures, the Pashtun community strongly discourages socially unacceptable behavior. During the interviews, participants exhibited a marked preference for English phrases over their native Pashto equivalents when discussing such behaviors. For instance, when asked if they would prefer English terms over the Pashto equivalents for behaviors like smoking, many interviewees confirmed their inclination toward English. A male respondent (MR1) and a female respondent (FR6) both expressed that the English term "smoking" felt more acceptable than the Pashto word "skhal." In his own words, one respondent noted, "*The English phrase 'smoking' is more polite because it directly conveys the act, whereas the Pashto word 'skhal' feels rude*" (MR11). This response suggests that Pashto terms carry additional connotations tied to one’s character, in contrast to English terms, which seem more neutral.

A female respondent echoed this sentiment, stating, "*Saying 'smoking' is far better than using the Pashto equivalent, which leaves a bad impression on people*" (FR4). One particularly insightful comment came from a male student who noted the emotional impact of language: "*In our mother tongue, even a child understands the weight of a word, and that’s why it has a stronger effect. The English term doesn’t have the same impact*" (MR10).

This reflects a broader pattern, as shown in Table 11, where participants consistently chose English words over Pashto when discussing socially prohibited behaviors like alcohol and drug use:

Table 11: Terms linked to Socially Prohibited Behaviors (MRs)

Code-switched to English	Pashto equivalent
<i>Alcoholic</i>	<i>Shraabi</i>

<i>Drugs</i>	<i>Naashaa</i>
<i>Drugs addicted</i>	<i>Naashayee</i>

Addiction (referred to as *naashaa* in Pashto) is stigmatized in Pashtun society, and those struggling with addiction are often publicly shamed for moral failings. Discussing addiction or addicts using Pashto words invokes negative connotations, as highlighted by one female participant: "*If I want to seriously address the issue, I use the word 'smoker,' but if I intend to ridicule someone, I say 'cigratti.' The Pashto word will offend them more deeply*" (FR3). This example demonstrates that Pashto terms are often more emotionally charged and are used deliberately to provoke or offend, while their English counterparts serve to soften the negative implications. Another respondent summarized this dynamic by explaining that using the English term "smoker" serves to "*highlight or reduce the negative impact of the equivalent taboo Pashto word*" (FR2). One female participant lamented the offensiveness of discussing smoking in Pashtun society but acknowledged that the English term would seem more natural: "*Smoking sounds better than its Pashto counterpart, even though it's a negative act*" (FR7).

4.14 Disease and Women's Conditions

This category is included because, during interviews, participants frequently brought up taboo terms related to health and women's conditions when responding to questions. For example, one student (MR4) noted, "*Abortion is generally considered undesirable in Pashtun society, regardless of whether it's said in English or Pashto.*" This reflects the broader discomfort surrounding topics like pregnancy and abortion. Respondents shared that these subjects are taboo in Pashto, but when discussed in English, the words seemed less harsh. One female participant confirmed, "*Abortion is an appropriate word in English, but in Pashto, it feels really nasty or awkward.*" Similarly, the same male participant (MR4) who stated that abortion was problematic in Pashto, also mentioned a common euphemism, "bimhara," which means "ill" or "sick." He explained that Pashto speakers often use this word as a substitute for pregnancy, though its literal meaning can confuse listeners. Another Pashto speaker (MR9) echoed this, stating that he would say his wife was "*beemara da*" rather than using the actual Pashto word for pregnant. This reflects the cultural discomfort with discussing pregnancy openly, opting for vague terms instead.

Interestingly, when clarity was needed, some respondents would switch to English. For instance, MR9 stated, "*If they didn't understand what I meant by 'beemara,' I would use the English word and say 'hagha pregnant dha' [she is pregnant].*" In this case, the English term served two purposes: it clarified the meaning where the Pashto euphemism failed, and it softened the impact of the taboo connotations associated with the Pashto term. One respondent linked language with social norms, explaining that cultural and socioeconomic factors prevent him from using the Pashto word for pregnant. However, "*pregnancy seemed to me a valid word in English.*" He elaborated that in Pashtun society, men are uncomfortable discussing women in this way, and it is culturally disapproved of. Comparing Pashto society with Western cultures, he concluded, "*In the West, people don't mind if you say outright that a woman is pregnant.*" (MR1).

The table below lists the expressions recorded during the Focus Group Observations (FGO) that were spoken in English instead of Pashto, specifically for topics related to illnesses and women's conditions.

Table 12: 2 Words Concerning Women's Conditions and Disease and Illness (MRS) switched the code to English

Abortion	Mashoom ghorzawal
Depression	Khfgnn
Miscarriage	Mashoom lredal
Baby Birth	Mashoom kidaal
Check up	Zan pokhtana
Breast cancer	Do Sinnii Maarhaz
Pieces (of aborted baby)	Peerwan
Abort	Mashum Lrikawal
Medical effects	Da dhwayie asaraat
Delivery case	Langedaal

Women Disease [sic]	Da Khazu Bemarii
Physical care	Khiyal sathal
Patient	Bemar
Unsafe babies	Kheta Ghtiidhal
Child bearing	Bache rwral
Baby bear	Kheta Sa'atal

It was also noteworthy during the observation that, while many taboo words are commonly discussed within close friendship circles, certain Pashto terms—such as "pregnancy"—remain strictly off-limits. As one participant (MR12) stated, "Some words are forbidden to be discussed, even with close friends." However, exceptions arise when English terms are introduced or substituted, allowing for the discussion of these taboo subjects without the associated cultural discomfort.

Table 13: Words Associated with Illness, Disease, and Conditions Specific to Women (FRS) Code-switched to English:

Code-switched	Pashtu words
Baby carry	Halak Garzawal
Safety	Khayal kol
Rate of fertility	Amaal Hesshab
Mentally	Dhemaghi
Physically	Badan

One interviewee's concluding remarks encapsulate the entire discussion on recognizing, avoiding, and navigating situations where Pashto speakers are compelled to discuss taboo topics. He stated: "Actually, we are brought up in an environment where our elders see this [talking about women and their conditions] as a lack of *gheeraat* [honor], and they disapprove

of sharing a wife's or sister's serious condition or illness with others" (MR11). He further noted, "We feel and assume that these words must be taboo in Pashto... there's something inherently embarrassing about them because we observe our elders or teachers avoiding many Pashto words. For instance, they use the English word 'pregnancy' instead of its Pashto equivalent." As a result, such words are rarely used in speech, or they are substituted with English terms (MR11).

4.15 Sex and Sexuality

In Pashto, words that directly or indirectly allude to sexual matters are heavily stigmatized and disapproved of in most social contexts. Terms such as *yarana* or *yari* (affair/relation/friendship), *yaar* (lover), *yara* (girlfriend), and *baachey paaida kawaal* (to give birth to a kid) are particularly avoided, especially in inappropriate contexts. These words carry strong cultural connotations and are perceived as highly inappropriate or offensive, reinforcing the cultural taboo around openly discussing sexual relationships or childbirth. This reflects the deep-rooted values in Pashtun society where discussions related to sexual matters or relationships outside of marriage are often seen as dishonorable, and the language used to refer to them is shunned in polite conversation. As a result, speakers frequently turn to euphemistic expressions or switch to English when referring to these topics to mitigate discomfort and avoid violating cultural taboos.

Table 14: Words Referring to Sex or Sexual connotations (MRS) Code-switched to English:

Relation (amorous/ sexual) Illegal relation	Be nekaha taluq
Sex-education	Jhensye sabq
Sex	korwalaay
Contraceptive	Bache bndaawal
Condom	Pookanye
Illegal sex	Baadkaarii
Unwanted sex	Khwshay kar
Impotent	Na marda

Illegal relationship	Naikaiz Taluk
Illegal sexual relationship	Zenakarii wala reshta
Temptation and Sex	Zrh kwal and khwshay kar kwal
Illicit Affairs	Reshtay
Sexual Relationship	Zainakarii wala reshta
Sexual energy	Merh motmayan kwal
Tempted	Allk wran she
Girl Friend boyfriend	Yar aw Yari wala reshta sathal
Childbirth	Bchey Kidal
Prostitutions	Matiztub kwal
Unwanted Baby (Bastard)	Araaami
Character	Kerdar
Girlfriend	Malgarii
Boyfriend(s)	Malgaraay

Tables 10 & 11 show the kinds of terms that participants purposefully avoided by switching to English vocabulary even in group conversations. As surprising as it may sound, one cannot use terms like "Malga'ray" to refer to a boyfriend and "Malga'rey" to refer to a girlfriend in public. The premarital relationship between a boy and a girl in Pashtun society deviates from sociocultural norms. As a result, in speech, these ideas are regarded as strange and offensive.

Table 15: Terms with Sexual Allusions and References to Sex (FRS) Code-switched to English

Code-switching	Pashtu words
Illegal relation	Yaraan\ bd neka tluq
Interests	Gharaaz
Relation	Taluk
Young Age	Zwani
Feelings	Jazbath
Attractive	Khaista/khkolay
Attraction	Zrh kwal
Friendship	Dostana
Boundary	Had
New Generation	Neway Nasahl
Immature	Kamaqal

Table 15 presents an intriguing example of the manifestation of friendship, as women participants pointed out, since in Pashtun culture, relationships between people of different sexes are generally viewed as immoral, irritating, vulgar, and indecent. Women tend to be more aware of the need to avoid any expression that even slightly connotes sex or sexuality. But, in contrast to what they hear or say in their own tongue, they would speak in a foreign language to convey such ideas since they feel more at ease there.

4.16 Perceptions of and Prompts for Code-Switching

In analyzing the participants' perceptions of and prompts for code-switching in the context of linguistic taboos, it becomes clear that the switch from Pashto to English is largely motivated by a discomfort in using native terms deemed too offensive or inappropriate in public discourse. The participants' responses revealed a shared tendency to replace taboo Pashto words

with their English equivalents, citing English as a more "polite" language that mitigates the negative connotations associated with the native terms. This aligns with the idea that certain Pashto expressions, particularly those related to social taboos such as divorce (*talaq*) or bathroom usage (*Tattyee*), elicit feelings of shame, embarrassment, or discomfort when spoken in public.

The participants reported feeling that Pashto taboo words, when spoken aloud, often come across as "extremely rude" or "derogatory" (MR8), while substituting them with English terms reduced their harshness. As one participant aptly stated, "English language is so polite that the words do not exert bad feelings on people" (FR1). This sentiment highlights the preference for English as a linguistic shield, protecting speakers from the cultural implications of using taboo words in their native tongue. The term *Tattyee*, for example, was described as repulsive when spoken in Pashto, but acceptable in English, as the meaning felt transformed in translation.

The taboo nature of words like *talaq* (divorce) is particularly striking, as both Pashto and English terms may carry similar weight in different cultural contexts. Yet, participants often felt that using the English term for divorce appeared more formal and acceptable, whereas using *talaq* in Pashto would negatively affect the speaker's image. Pashto words for taboo subjects were described as degrading and insulting (FR3, FR2), and using them in conversation would make the speaker seem uncivilized. In contrast, using English taboo terms allowed the speaker to navigate difficult topics without being perceived as rude or disrespectful.

Interestingly, the preference for code-switching to English also raised concerns about the erosion of the Pashto language and its cultural significance. One male respondent (MR8) noted that while it was essential to use English terms in formal settings, especially when discussing taboo topics, it was equally important to preserve the use of Pashto taboo terms in informal settings to maintain the cultural fabric of Pashtun society. This highlights the tension between the need to avoid cultural discomfort and the fear of losing linguistic and cultural heritage by relying too heavily on English to express socially sensitive subjects.

The participants' attitudes towards code-switching when addressing taboo topics underscore a complex negotiation between cultural sensitivity, linguistic politeness, and the preservation of language. English serves as a tool for softening the harshness of taboo topics, while Pashto, the native language, is reserved for more intimate or less public settings. However, the increasing

reliance on English for handling socially prohibited topics raises important questions about the long-term impact on Pashto's linguistic richness and cultural identity.

4.17 Guilt and Humiliation.

For Pashto speakers, native terms associated with taboos evoke intense feelings of shame, embarrassment, and even mortification. This sentiment is strongly reflected in the participants' choice to consciously use English as a substitute for taboo words to avoid the discomfort these words bring when spoken in Pashto. Participants expressed those terms like "divorce," "lips," and "husband" felt particularly "disgusting" and "uncomfortable" when spoken in their native language, which prompted them to switch to English as a more neutral and less emotionally charged alternative. As one female respondent (FR1) stated, she felt no "hesitation" when using these terms in English, but when confronted with their Pashto equivalents, she blushed and felt "mortified," which hindered her ability to speak freely.

This pattern of discomfort extended beyond the individual speaker, as respondents indicated that others within the Pashto-speaking community would also react with embarrassment when hearing such taboo words. The reluctance to use these expressions reflected a broader cultural avoidance of discussing sensitive topics openly, particularly in formal or mixed-gender settings. As a result, speakers often hesitated, became reserved, and exhibited a level of shyness that reflected the deeply ingrained cultural norms surrounding these topics. However, an interesting nuance emerged from the data: while taboo words are generally considered inappropriate in formal settings or when speaking to strangers, teachers, or elders, they are more openly discussed in close friendship circles. In these intimate settings, the use of such terms is more acceptable, though still considered sensitive. When confronted with a formal or public context, the use of these words could lead to blushing, embarrassment, and offense both for the speaker and the listener.

This study thus reveals a significant dynamic in Pashtun culture where English functions as a tool for linguistic politeness, allowing speakers to navigate around the emotional and cultural weight carried by taboo words in their native Pashto. It also highlights how social context influences language choices, demonstrating the intricate ways in which language and culture interact in shaping communication practices.

4.18 Using Code-switching as an Empathic Discourse Technique

The main objective of this study was to explore how Pashto speakers navigate linguistic taboos in their language, especially by switching to English as a strategic discourse technique. To achieve this, the study posed qualitative questions that sought to uncover three primary areas: first, how linguistic taboos are perceived in both Pashto and English; second, whether Pashto speakers intentionally code-switch to English to avoid native taboo expressions; and third, what factors support such code-switching strategies.

The findings revealed that Pashto speakers frequently avoid using native taboo words to prevent discomfort for their interlocutors, aiming to appear courteous and well-mannered. Code-switching to English emerged as a central strategy, functioning as a means to reduce the perceived harshness or offensiveness of taboo topics in Pashto. Participants were asked why they preferred English terms over their native Pashto when discussing sensitive subjects, and the majority expressed that English expressions, particularly for topics like body parts or sexual relations, felt less provocative and more socially acceptable than their Pashto equivalents. For example, one respondent (MR8) noted that the Pashto word *shoondyee* (lips) is far more sexually suggestive than its English counterpart, *lips*. Similarly, MR3 explained that Pashto taboo words can "divert" the listener's thoughts toward negative connotations, making it impolite to use such words in public or formal settings. This aligns with broader findings that indicate taboo words in Pashto carry a level of 'bad etiquette' that English words do not. As such, English words are considered more polite, eloquent, and emotionally neutral in comparison.

Pashto speakers consciously avoid using linguistic taboos in public or formal discourse. In situations where avoiding such topics is not possible, they often substitute the taboo word with an English term, which is considered more respectful. For educated Pashto speakers who are fluent in both Urdu and English, English is generally preferred over Urdu due to its higher prestige and perceived politeness. A student (MR2) explained that, when avoiding the Pashto term for sexual relations, he opted for the euphemistic *korrwale* rather than a direct reference, further underscoring how Pashto speakers strategically choose language to soften the impact of taboo expressions. The study also showed that the use of English expressions is context-dependent. For instance, the term *mutyazy* (urination) is acceptable in informal settings or when speaking to less educated people, but when addressing women or speaking in formal contexts, it is preferable to use the English term *washroom*. This reflects how Pashto speakers adjust their

language based on their audience and context, a key finding of this research. Overall, the data confirm that Pashto speakers commonly use English code-switching as a politeness strategy to mitigate the negative impact of taboo words. This strategy not only reflects their desire to maintain good relationships and avoid being perceived as ill-mannered but also serves as a tool for navigating sensitive topics without offending listeners. In fact, MR5 explained that the primary motivation behind using English is to ensure that the audience does not feel offended or uncomfortable.

The analysis highlights a significant relationship between Pashto and English in terms of politeness, with English expressions acting as a polite alternative to Pashto taboo words. While the use of linguistic taboos in Pashto is considered uncivilized and degrading, switching to English softens their negative impact and fosters a more pleasant social interaction. Age and gender were also identified as important factors influencing language choice, with younger speakers tending to be more tactful around elders and both men and women avoiding taboo words in mixed-gender conversations to avoid disrespect. It transpired that Pashto speakers navigate the tension between cultural taboos and communication by strategically using English code-switching as a form of linguistic politeness. This technique allows them to maintain respectful social relationships while avoiding the negative implications of taboo words in their native language. As MR3 remarked, using taboo words in Pashto could make people think of the speaker as *bishraam* (disrespectful), underscoring the importance of carefully selecting language based on the audience and context.

4.19 Summary of the Results

The results of this study reveal that Pashto speakers use code-switching to English as a deliberate strategy to navigate linguistic taboos in social discourse. Cultural sensitivities, especially regarding gender, significantly influence language choices. Separate Focus Group Observations (FGOs) for male and female participants showcased the avoidance of using native Pashto words for topics considered taboo, such as body parts, marital status, and socially unacceptable behaviors. Participants preferred English terms, which carry fewer negative connotations and cause less embarrassment. This strategic code-switching is largely driven by the perception that English is more neutral and acceptable when discussing such topics, whereas Urdu was not considered a viable alternative due to shared linguistic taboos with Pashto.

The study highlighted that Pashto speakers intentionally switch to English to soften the impact of taboo words in their native language. Terms like *khoor* (sister), *seena* (breast), and *mazoora*

(disabled) were replaced with *sister*, *breast*, and *disabled* in English to avoid offending listeners and to create a less uncomfortable environment. This linguistic maneuver serves as a politeness strategy, where code-switching functions to maintain social harmony and avoid causing discomfort or insult. English terms were perceived as more courteous and socially acceptable compared to their Pashto counterparts, which were often regarded as rude or inappropriate. Social and religious norms further complicate the use of Pashto taboo words, especially in discussions surrounding sensitive topics like divorce, pregnancy, and disability. While these subjects are avoided in Pashto, they are more comfortably addressed using English terms. Additionally, the appropriateness of using Pashto or English depends on the social context and audience. In formal settings or mixed-gender conversations, participants leaned heavily on English to navigate these discussions. However, in informal family settings, Pashto might be used, though even then, speakers often employ euphemisms to soften the impact of taboo expressions.

The analysis of both focused group observations and semi-structured interviews reveals the complexity of code-switching as a linguistic tool employed by Pashto speakers to navigate taboo topics. The participants' deliberate choice to switch to English for sensitive subjects highlights a broader socio-linguistic phenomenon, where language serves not only as a mode of communication but also as a means of cultural negotiation. Gender and context play pivotal roles in determining when and how speakers code-switch, with English serving as a politeness strategy to avoid cultural taboos.

Future studies could further explore the implications of this phenomenon on language preservation, cultural identity, and the evolving nature of politeness strategies in multilingual societies. The findings from this study underscore the intricate relationship between language, culture, and societal norms, offering a deeper understanding of how Pashto speakers tactically employ code-switching to manage social expectations and maintain conversational harmony.

5 DISCUSSION

The data collected from both the Focus Group Observations (FGO) and semi-structured interviews highlight that Pashto-English code-switching is predominantly a strategy employed to navigate cultural and social taboos, which suggests that speakers adjust their language use to align with the norms and expectations of their listeners. Pashto speakers frequently switch to English when discussing topics considered sensitive or taboo in their native language to mitigate discomfort for both themselves and their audience. This is particularly evident when addressing issues such as bodily functions, marital status, or relationships with the opposite gender. Brown and Levinson's **Theory of Politeness** (1987) further supports these findings, where English serves as a "politeness strategy" that allows speakers to avoid the **face-threatening acts** associated with using direct Pashto words for taboo topics. In situations where Pashto expressions may seem too blunt or offensive, English is perceived as softer and more formal, reducing the social risk of causing offense. For instance, terms like *seena* (breast) or *shoondy* (lips) were substituted with their English counterparts to avoid negative reactions, aligning with Brown and Levinson's concept of "negative politeness," where the goal is to minimize imposition on the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The findings mirror those of previous studies that examined the role of English as a "safe space" for speakers dealing with uncomfortable subjects in multilingual societies. For example, Akhtar et al. (2020) explored how Urdu-English bilinguals in Pakistan utilized code-switching to avoid discussing sensitive topics. The perception of English as a "neutral" and "modern" language, compared to the "traditional" and "conservative" associations of Urdu and Pashto, reinforces the idea that bilinguals in KP Pakistan strategically switch codes to avoid taboos (Akhtar et al., 2020). Moreover, Dewaele (2010) suggested that switching to a second language for taboo topics creates a psychological distance between the speaker and the subject, reducing emotional impact, which was evident in the way Pashto speakers navigated terms related to disability, sexual matters, and socially unacceptable behavior.

The decision to switch from Pashto to English to express taboo subjects is influenced by several sociocultural factors, as the study reveals. Goffman's **Face Theory** (1955) provides a crucial lens to understand these factors. Pashto speakers are particularly concerned with maintaining face in public conversations, especially when discussing taboo topics in the presence of elders or people of the opposite gender. Using Pashto in such situations is often perceived as damaging

to one's social image or "**face**", while English is used to preserve dignity and politeness (Goffman, 1955).

The findings also highlight **contextual cues** such as the presence of women, elders, or formal settings, which encourage speakers to code-switch to English. English, in this case, serves as a buffer to maintain politeness and decorum in public settings. For instance, discussing topics like divorce (*talaq*) or pregnancy in Pashto was deemed highly inappropriate, but switching to English made these discussions more acceptable. This aligns with **CAT's** assertion that language choice reflects social dynamics, where individuals modify their speech to conform to their listeners' expectations (Giles, 1991). Additionally, the avoidance of linguistic taboos in Pashto is linked to cultural factors, such as the **honor code (ghairat)** prevalent in Pashtun society, which dictates that certain topics, particularly those concerning women or bodily functions, are off-limits in native speech. However, these taboos are less rigid in English, allowing speakers to discuss such matters with less discomfort and fear of offending others. This also supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) assertion that certain cultures exhibit "**off-record**" **politeness**, where indirect language is preferred to avoid direct confrontation or discomfort.

These findings resonate with similar research in other bilingual societies, where speakers use a second language to navigate social taboos. **Gumperz's (1982)** study on **conversational code-switching** supports the idea that bilinguals often employ their second language to mitigate the impact of socially inappropriate topics. Similar findings were reported by Chung (2006), who explored how Korean-English speakers switched to English to discuss sensitive topics like health issues and relationships, as the emotional detachment provided by the second language facilitated smoother communication.

The **Communication Accommodation Theory**, **Face Theory**, and **Theory of Politeness** offer a comprehensive framework for understanding why and how Pashto speakers use code-switching as a tool to navigate linguistic taboos. **Giles' CAT** explains the social adaptability of language use, where bilingual speakers switch codes to align with the social expectations of their audience. This is particularly relevant when Pashto speakers use English to avoid causing offense or embarrassment, as seen in discussions about bodily functions, disability, and socially forbidden behavior. Goffman's Face Theory (1955) further elucidates the motivations behind such linguistic behavior, particularly in maintaining one's public image or "**face**". By code-switching to English, speakers protect their own and their interlocutors' face, avoiding the

discomfort or loss of dignity that may arise from using direct, taboo-laden Pashto expressions. Lastly, **Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory** reinforces the notion that Pashto speakers engage in **negative politeness** by using English to avoid face-threatening acts, particularly in formal or mixed-gender conversations.

Additionally, further exploration of the impact of **honor (ghairat)** in Pashtun society, particularly how it dictates language choices around sensitive topics, will be included to deepen the cultural analysis. We will also integrate more recent studies, such as Mahmood and Ahmad (2022), who explored similar dynamics in other regional languages in Pakistan, offering a broader contextual framework for understanding bilingual code-switching in KP. By aligning these theoretical insights with the research questions, the study offers a nuanced understanding of why Pashto speakers switch codes to English when discussing taboo subjects, providing a comprehensive sociolinguistic analysis of code-switching behavior in KP Pakistan.

5.1 Understanding of Linguistics Taboos

From a linguistic standpoint, words are neutral entities and acquire their social classification—whether polite or impolite—based on cultural norms, values, and attitudes (Chu, 2009; Agyekum, 2002; Gobert, 2015). Linguistic taboos (LTs) are not inherently offensive or courteous; rather, they become taboo due to prevailing societal beliefs and collective perceptions within a specific cultural setting. While there is extensive documentation on the avoidance of certain words and actions as part of socio-cultural norms, literature lacks a convincing explanation for why particular words attain taboo status. This is largely because linguistic taboos are socio-culturally driven, shaped by the values and beliefs of the community.

As noted by Al-Khatib (1995), in some contexts, cultures enforce linguistic sanctions, discouraging or prohibiting the usage of taboo or unacceptable topics in discourse. Despite this, determining what constitutes a taboo is subjective, varying widely across contexts. This subjectivity creates a *continuum of taboo*, where some words are perceived as more offensive or damaging than others, with varying degrees of *tabooness* across individuals and settings. Linguistic taboos can be classified into three broad categories—severe, mild, and moderate—depending on the context, situation, and individual perspective. Words that might be seen as trivial by one speaker may evoke strong reactions from another. For instance, words related to bodily functions, sex, or relationships often fall on different points of the taboo spectrum depending on factors such as gender, age, and the context in which they are used. The Focus Group Observations (FGOs) highlighted this subjectivity. Some participants viewed particular

words as taboo, while others considered them normal. For instance, words related to physical impairment or marital status carried varying degrees of discomfort for participants. Substituting a taboo word with a corresponding term in a second language (L2), such as English, often mitigated the negative emotional effects. This is because second languages create a psychological distance between the speaker and the word's connotations, allowing for more neutral, or at least less offensive, communication. The concept of linguistic taboo is not static. It shifts based on cultural perceptions, individual sensitivities, and the situational context. While taboos remain deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of a community, the act of code-switching to a second language can serve as a strategy for softening or neutralizing their impact. This understanding is essential for analyzing the data collected, as it provides a framework for interpreting how Pashto speakers navigate taboos in their native language versus a second language, specifically English, and how they use code-switching to mitigate the discomfort associated with these linguistic taboos.

5.2 Motivations and Reasons Based on Sociolinguistics

The analysis of data revealed that bilingual Pashto speakers hold a favorable opinion of English code-switching (CS) in their speech, particularly when addressing taboo subjects. This section explores the motivations behind their preference for code-switching and the sociolinguistic reasons driving this behavior. It specifically addresses the second research question regarding the factors that lead L1 Pashto speakers to switch to English when faced with linguistic taboos (LTS).

5.2.1 The Linguistic Taboos' Perceived Derogatory Nature in Linguistics:

The evidence gathered suggests that native Pashto speakers perceive taboo words in their own language as more derogatory, offensive, and socially inappropriate compared to similar words in English. Pashto taboo words are considered highly impolite and are avoided in public discourse to maintain social propriety. In contrast, English expressions for the same concepts seem to soften the emotional impact of these words. This is especially true in Pashtun society, where taboos are strongly enforced, and the use of linguistic taboos in Pashto conveys an "uncivilized" image of the speaker (FR3, FR2). Pashto speakers often resort to code-switching to English when confronted with discussing LTS because using English terms reduces the perceived harshness of the taboo. This supports the idea that language's emotional strength varies between L1 and L2, with L1 being more emotionally charged and L2 perceived as more neutral or euphonious. Consequently, when a taboo word is embedded in English

during a conversation, it is less likely to be deemed offensive, even though the underlying concept remains the same.

The data analysis also hints at the emotional attachment that speakers have to their native language. This emotional bond could explain why Pashto taboo words evoke stronger reactions compared to their English counterparts. As Li (1994) suggests, "the speaking self is emotionally detached from the true self" when a speaker uses L2, particularly when discussing topics that evoke strong emotional responses. This emotional detachment enables the speaker to address sensitive topics without the same level of discomfort that would arise from using L1. The concept of **emotional distancing** through language was further reinforced by Bond and Lai (1986), who referred to it as the "distancing function" of CS. Wai (2013) supports this view by describing code-switching as a "face-saving" mechanism that helps speakers avoid embarrassment. Eilola and Havelka (2011) also noted that participants in their study experienced no negative emotions when using L2 forbidden terms, indicating that L2 evokes less emotional arousal than L1. The data confirms that bilingual Pashto speakers use English to navigate around linguistic taboos because it allows them to maintain social harmony, minimize emotional discomfort, and avoid being perceived as impolite. This linguistic strategy of code-switching to English reflects a deeper socio-cultural phenomenon where language is used not just for communication but also for managing social relationships and emotional expression.

5.2.2 Being Embarrassed and Shame

Language shapes the perceptions that listeners form about speakers, often leading to feelings of embarrassment or shame. The findings from this study highlight that shame, embarrassment, and social disapproval play significant roles in influencing Pashto speakers' reluctance to use linguistic taboos (LTs) in everyday conversations. Native taboo words in Pashto evoke strong feelings of discomfort for both the speaker and the listener, leading to mutual embarrassment. This is particularly true when discussing sensitive topics such as "divorce," "lips," "husband," "pregnancy," and "restroom." The participants revealed that when such taboo words are brought up in their native language, there is a shared sense of mortification.

The embarrassment associated with using these terms in Pashto stems from the cultural and social norms that govern speech in Pashtun society. For instance, words that may cause blushing or discomfort in a public setting are often avoided, as they undermine the speaker's sense of propriety and trust in the conversation. Pashto speakers often feel hesitant to discuss taboo

topics, particularly in formal settings or in front of strangers, elders, or people of the opposite gender. This reluctance to use LTs in public contrasts with how they are freely discussed within close circles of friends where intimacy and humor allow for more candid conversation.

The results indicate that the context in which taboo words are spoken plays a critical role in whether or not they are used. In informal, close-knit groups, LTs are common and may even foster stronger social bonds. However, in public or formal situations, these words are strictly avoided due to the cultural importance placed on modesty and decorum. This dynamic reveals the significant role that shame and embarrassment play in shaping linguistic choices, as speakers seek to navigate the delicate balance between maintaining social norms and expressing themselves authentically.

5.2.3 Following Social, Cultural, and Religious Norms

One of the key motivations for linguistic avoidance and the integration of English terms into Pashto speech is the adherence to socio-cultural and religious norms. The discourse context, social assumptions, and speakers' backgrounds heavily influence how language is used and understood. As Gumperz (1982) noted, language is deeply intertwined with society, culture, and religion, and this relationship is particularly prominent in the Pashtun community. The strong cultural and religious foundations that guide Pashtun society demand that individuals behave in socially acceptable ways, which includes careful selection of words in conversation. In particular, Muslims, and especially Pashtuns, are attentive to their manners and codes of behavior, including their use of language. Pashto speakers place high value on politeness and courtesy, often prioritizing euphemistic language and indirect communication in order to maintain social harmony. This practice of linguistic avoidance is evident in their reluctance to use linguistic taboos (LTs) in everyday conversation. In many cases, Pashto speakers avoid addressing taboo subjects altogether, engaging in what is referred to as total linguistic avoidance. However, this is not always feasible, as there are situations where sensitive topics must be discussed, either for practical or social reasons. When speakers encounter such topics, they are faced with the challenge of navigating emotionally charged language. They often resort to code-switching, inserting English (or Urdu) terms to buffer the emotional impact of taboo words. Alternatively, they may use indirect, euphemistic expressions in Pashto to convey their message in a less offensive manner. This strategy is particularly prevalent among bilingual Pashto speakers who can draw from both Pashto and English to soften the impact of their speech.

The use of English to replace Pashto taboos allows speakers to align with their religious and socio-cultural values, as it helps them avoid transgressing linguistic norms. English expressions, which are perceived as less emotionally charged, provide a way for Pashto speakers to discuss sensitive issues without violating cultural or religious expectations. This highlights the importance of code-switching as a tool for navigating the complex social and moral landscapes of Pashtun society, where language must align with deeply ingrained religious and cultural values.

5.2.4 Using Code-switching as an Empathic Discourse Technique

In the current study, we sought to address two primary research questions:

1. How do bilingual Pashto speakers use code-switching (CS) to avoid linguistic taboos (LTS) in discourse?
2. What social, cultural, and linguistic factors motivate bilingual speakers to switch from Pashto to English when dealing with sensitive or taboo topics?

Our objectives were to examine these CS practices in the context of Swat, KP, Pakistan, particularly in light of how speakers navigate linguistic taboos in their native language, Pashto (L1), and their second language, English (L2). From the analysis, it became clear that Pashto speakers deliberately use CS to English when discussing taboo topics as a strategy to soften the negative connotations of these words. This finding aligns with Giles's Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which posits that speakers adjust their communication style to maintain harmony and reduce social distance with their interlocutors (Giles, 1991). In this case, the switch to English helps Pashto speakers avoid offending listeners, especially in formal and public settings. Moreover, Goffman's Face Theory (1955) highlights the concept of "face-saving" in communication. When Pashto speakers switch to English, they are employing what Goffman would call a "face-saving act." They aim to protect both their own face (avoiding shame or embarrassment) and the listener's face (preventing offense). The research participants were keenly aware that using Pashto taboo words could threaten the listener's face, especially in mixed-gender settings, with elders, or in formal situations. Thus, the switch to English softens the blow of potentially face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The evidence strongly indicates that switching to English is perceived as a socially acceptable and less offensive alternative to using LTS in Pashto. Pashto taboo words are seen as derogatory, offensive, and even immoral in public discourse, which creates an obligation for

the speaker to use a more "neutral" or less emotionally charged language—English. Pashto speakers expressed that LTS in Pashto conveys an image of being uncivilized or impolite. In contrast, using the same words in English—whether discussing body parts, social roles, or other taboo topics—carries less emotional baggage and is not perceived as offensive. The shift from L1 to L2 during taboo discourse represents a "distancing function" (Bond & Lai, 1986). This is an attempt to emotionally detach from the topic and reduce the intensity of its meaning in conversation, which was consistent with previous studies that showed less emotional arousal when using a second language (Eilola & Havelka, 2011). The strong religious and cultural values embedded in Pashtun society dictate that using LTS in Pashto is highly discouraged. The data clearly shows that Pashto speakers code-switch to English to uphold the socio-cultural norms that discourage direct speech about sensitive topics such as relationships, bodily functions, or taboo professions. Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) suggests that Pashto speakers use English as a form of negative politeness, which aims to avoid conflict and maintain social harmony. By employing English, speakers follow the cultural expectations of "honor" (gheeraat), a central value in Pashtun culture, ensuring they maintain proper manners while discussing uncomfortable topics (Gumperz, 1982).

The findings also indicate that CS is employed to conform to broader social norms. Participants frequently mentioned that using English allowed them to maintain the appearance of being educated and well-mannered. This reflects the social prestige associated with English in Pakistan, particularly in formal settings such as education, media, and government documents (Al-Khatib & Sabbah, 2008). Interestingly, the data showed a higher frequency of CS to English among female participants. Women seemed to be more concerned about the appropriateness of their language, especially when discussing topics such as pregnancy, beauty, and intimate body parts. This aligns with Lakoff's (1975) assertion that women's language tends to be more polite, indirect, and euphemistic, reflecting traditional gender roles. While men were also careful with their language, women were more likely to switch to English when addressing taboo topics, particularly in mixed-gender or formal situations.

Overall, the results show that Pashto speakers use CS to English as a polite and empathic discourse strategy to avoid offending listeners and maintain social harmony. The use of English softens the negative impact of taboo words, helping speakers navigate sensitive topics in a way that aligns with their cultural and religious values. Moreover, the findings support the hypothesis that English is perceived as a "polite and neutral" language in this context, acting as a buffer between the speaker and the potentially offensive meaning of LTS. This aligns with

Mashiri, Mawomo, and Iom's (2002) observation that speakers use CS as a face-saving technique to avoid direct confrontation with linguistic taboos. The use of CS from Pashto to English is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a culturally driven discourse strategy. It allows speakers to uphold politeness, respect cultural and religious norms, and avoid the discomfort and offense that could arise from using native taboo words.

6 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of code-switching (CS) between Pashto and English in managing linguistic taboos, an area that has been overlooked in previous research on Pakistani bilingualism. The research explored how Pashto speakers strategically use CS as a polite discourse strategy to mitigate taboo subjects, leading to several key findings.

The primary discovery is the strong association between euphemism and Pashto-English code-switching. CS serves as a way for Pashto speakers to bypass taboo topics, such as those related to family relations, body functions, disabilities, professions, diseases, sexuality, and social behaviors. The use of semi-structured interviews and Focused Group Observations (FGO) revealed that breaking taboos in Pashto induces feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, nervousness, and anxiety among speakers and listeners alike. This study identified three strategies that Pashto speakers typically employ to handle taboos: complete avoidance, euphemistic expression, and CS to English. CS, in particular, emerges as a face-saving technique that allows speakers to navigate sensitive subjects without offending others, supporting the use of euphemism as a vital linguistic strategy in polite discourse. The findings show that this CS behavior is deeply influenced by socio-cultural and religious norms, which impose restrictions on the use of taboo words in native Pashto. English becomes a preferred alternative due to its less emotionally charged nature in comparison to Pashto, thus mitigating the negative connotations associated with linguistic taboos. Moreover, the study extends beyond previous research on taboo management by delving into the social and cultural underpinnings of linguistic behavior among Pashto-English bilinguals. Factors such as shame, embarrassment, and altruism, along with the desire to present a polite and respectable front, shape the CS behavior of Pashto speakers. CS functions as a sociolinguistic tool to preserve face and avoid potential offense, making it a crucial mechanism for navigating socially sensitive topics.

In conclusion, this research emphasizes the importance of CS as a multifaceted sociolinguistic phenomenon, unique to bilinguals. It underscores that bilingual Pashto speakers leverage CS not only as a method of euphemism but also as a means of adhering to socio-cultural and religious expectations, highlighting the adaptability and complexity of language use in sensitive contexts.

7 References

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8 Appendix

Consent Form

Are you interested in taking part in the research project.

Exploring Code-Switching as a Strategy for Euphemism: A study of Bilingual Undergraduate of Pashto and English in Degree college Wari, Dir Upper.

Purpose of the project

You are invited to participate in a research project where the main purpose is to conduct a research study as part of my master's program at UIT, Norway. The purpose of this study is to explore how bilingual undergraduate students at Degree College Wari, Dir Upper, use code-switching as a strategy for euphemism. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the reasons behind the classification of certain words as taboo, providing insight into the concepts of language and taboo words.

Your participation in this study involves providing data through interviews or focus group discussions. This data will be transcribed and translated for the purpose of my research study.

Which institution is responsible for the research project?

UIT, The Arctic University of Norway is responsible for the project, including I myself as a researcher Zeeshan Ahmad.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being asked to participate because you are a bilingual (Pashto/English) undergraduate student at Govt. Degree College Dir Wari, and your insights are valuable for this research project.

What does participation involve for you?

Your participation in this study involves providing data through interviews or focus group discussions. This data will be transcribed and translated for the purpose of my research study.

Participation involves two phases:

Focused Group Observations (FGO): You will participate in focused group observations where authentic instances of code-switching involving linguistic taboos voice will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The voice recorder or a smart phone would be kept on recording while it would be recording your voice about the given task.

Unwilling Student who do not want to record their voice:

If in case there were student who do not want to have their voice recorded, i will ensure to keep pausing on the recorder when and if they speak during the Observation and Interview process.

Semi-Structured Interview:

You may also be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to further explore your experiences with code-switching and euphemism.

During the participant observation and group interviews, I will accurately record your voice data. This data will be stored securely in university accounts. After the transcription and translation, your data will be erased, including in cases of withdrawal. Data will remain in university accounts until December 31, 2024, after which it will be permanently erased.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

This data will be transcribed and translated for the purpose of my research study. Rest assured, your identity, including your name and any personal details, will remain confidential and will not be disclosed. The data collected will be stored securely on the online portal of The Arctic University of Norway, with the university acting as the controller of the data. Only the researcher (Zeeshan Ahmad) and Supervisor (Bjorn Lundquist) will have the access to your data. You have the right to withdraw your data at any point during the study if you believe it is being used inappropriately or against you.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

Your data will be anonymized at the end of the research. After transcription and translation, your data will be erased. The planned end date is December 31, 2024; after this date, your data (voice recordings) will be erased from the university accounts.

Your rights

If you feel that the translation or interpretation of your data is inaccurate, you have the right to request changes.

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Uit, The Arctic University of Norway the Data Protection Services of Sikt – Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and research has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project meets requirements in data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

If you have any questions or concerns, or want to exercise your rights, please feel free to contact:

- Uit via my supervisor, Bjorn Lundquist, at bjorn.lundquist@uit.no, or you can reach out to me directly at zah001@post.uit.no.
- Our data protection officer at the university of Norway, Joakim Bakkevold (Joakim.bakkevold@uit.no)
- If you have questions about how data protection has been assessed in this project by Sikt, contact: email:(personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Yours sincerely,

Project leader Researcher

Bjorn Lundquist Zeeshan Ahmad

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end of the project.

(Signed by participant, date)

Assessment of processing of personal data



Reference number

145131

Assessment type

Standard

Date

05.04.2024

Title

MA-Thesis

Institution responsible for the project

UiT Norges Arktiske Universitet / Fakultet for humaniora, samfunnsvitenskap og lærerutdanning / Institutt for språk og kultur

Project leader

Björn Lundquist

Student

Zeeshan Ahmad

Project period

21.03.2024 - 31.12.2024

Categories of personal data

General Special

Legal basis

Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr. 1 a) Explicit consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 9 nr. 2 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, so long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 31.12.2024.

Notification Form

Comment

ABOUT OUR ASSESSMENT

Data Protection Services has an agreement with the institution where you are a student or a researcher. As part of this agreement, we provide guidance so that the processing of personal data in your project is lawful and complies with data protection legislation. We have now assessed that you have legal basis to process the personal data.

TYPE OF DATA

The project will process special categories of personal data about ethnicity and religious beliefs.

LEGAL BASIS

The data subjects give their consent to the processing of their personal data. The legal basis for the processing is art. 6.1 a) of the GDPR. The data subjects give their explicit consent to the processing of special categories of personal data. Thus, the conditions in art. 9.2 a) are met and the prohibition against processing special categories of personal data does not apply.

COMMENTS ON THE INFORMATION LETTER

Your information letter is missing some key points required by law. You will have to add these points to your information letter before handing it over to the participants. You do not need to upload the updated version to the Notification Form:

- You should add a description about how the sound recordings will be done practically during the participant observation. In this description you should write something about how you ensure that students who do not want to participate in the project do not get their voices recorded.
- You should add contact information to your institution's Data Protection Officer

Take a look at the template on our website for suggestions: <https://sikt.no/en/information-and-consent>

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

You must store, send and secure the collected data in accordance with your institution's guidelines. This means that you must use data processors (and the like) that your institution has an agreement with (i.e. cloud storage, online survey, and video conferencing providers).

Our assessment presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

NOTIFY CHANGES

If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project, it may be necessary to notify us. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes: <https://sikt.no/en/notify-changes-notification-form>

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

We will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

