SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING CODE-SWITCHING TEXTS: A CASE STUDY OF URDU-ENGLISH BILINGUAL DIALOGUES FROM THE PAKISTANI DRAMA *ZINDAGI GULZAR HAI*

Sara George

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English, Institute of Southern Punjab Multan, Pakistan
Email ID: georgesara772@gmail.com

Laiba Noor

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English, University of Education Lahore, Multan Campus, Pakistan
Email: laibanoor567745@gmail.com

Kiran Shahzadi

M.Phil Scholar, Department of English, Institute of Southern Punjab, Multan, Pakistan
Email id: kirranshahzadii@gmail.com

Tooba Riaz

Visiting Lecturer, Department of English, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
Email: toobaaamir820@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explores the sociolinguistic challenges involved in translating code-switching texts, focusing specifically on the Urdu-English bilingual dialogues in the acclaimed Pakistani drama Zindagi Gulzar Hai. Given the increasing prevalence of bilingual discourse in South Asian media, this research investigates how code-switching functions as a marker of identity, power, and cultural nuance, and the extent to which these functions are retained, lost, or altered in translation. Drawing upon a qualitative case study approach, selected episodes of the drama were analysed using frameworks from sociolinguistics and translation studies, particularly Mayers Scotton (1993) markedness model of code switching along with Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity. The findings reveal that code-switching in the source text serves not only pragmatic and stylistic purposes but also conveys socio-cultural hierarchies and emotional depth. Translators face significant challenges in preserving these layered meanings, often resorting to reductionist or neutralizing strategies that obscure the original's cultural specificity. This study underscores the need for culturally sensitive translation practices that acknowledge the functional role of bilingualism in contemporary media narratives.

Key Words: *Code-Switching, Sociolinguistics, Translation Studies, Urdu-English Bilingualism and Pakistani Media Discourse.*

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, language has become both a bridge and a barrier in cross-cultural communication. Among the many linguistic phenomena that reflect the complexities of multilingual societies, code-switching the alternation between two or more languages within a single discourse has emerged as a significant marker of identity, power, and social positioning. In South Asian contexts, particularly in Pakistan, Urdu-English code-switching is a widespread

linguistic practice, especially among the urban middle and upper classes. This bilingualism is not merely functional but socioculturally expressive, often used to signal class distinction, modernity, emotional shifts, or social resistance (Hamid and Fayaz, 2025).

Media, especially television dramas, play a critical role in representing these sociolinguistic realities. One such notable example is the widely acclaimed Pakistani drama *Zindagi Gulzar Hai,* which intricately weaves Urdu and English within its dialogue. The drama not only portrays class and gender dynamics but also uses code-switching as a tool for character development and socio-political commentary (Iftekhar et al., 2024; Kanwal et al., 2020). However, when such bilingual texts are translated for non-Urdu-speaking audiences, particularly into monolingual English subtitles, much of the linguistic nuance and cultural meaning embedded in code-switching is often lost, simplified, or misrepresented.

In Pakistan's multilingual society, Urdu-English code-switching has become a common communicative strategy in urban discourse, particularly reflected in popular media such as television dramas. The drama *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* exemplifies this linguistic phenomenon, where characters frequently shift between Urdu and English to express emotions, assert social identity, or emphasize particular meanings. However, this code-switching poses substantial challenges in translation, especially when these bilingual exchanges carry nuanced sociolinguistic functions. Translators often struggle to preserve these subtleties, leading to the loss of cultural, emotional, and pragmatic meanings in the target language (Qureshi, et al., 2023). Despite the global reach of Pakistani dramas, limited academic attention has been paid to the complexities of translating such code-switched texts. This study seeks to explore the sociolinguistic dimensions and translation challenges of Urdu-English code-switching in *Zindagi Gulzar Hai.*

Thus, the study aims to examine the sociolinguistic challenges in translating Urdu-English code-switched dialogues, using *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* as a case study. Drawing upon Mayer's Scotten(1993) code switching strategies and Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity, the research investigates how translation choices affect the representation of bilingual identities and sociocultural contexts. While Mayer's model helps to analyse how translation strategies function at lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic levels, Bhabha's concept of hybridity offers insight into the performative and symbolic nature of bilingualism as a site of cultural negotiation.

Meanwhile, by focusing on a contemporary and culturally rich media text, this study contributes to the broader discourse in sociolinguistics, translation studies, and media linguistics, highlighting the need for more nuanced and culturally sensitive translation practices in bilingual and hybrid linguistic contexts. It also emphasizes the importance of preserving the socio-pragmatic functions of code-switching, which are often central to meaning-making in multilingual narratives (Kanwal et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2022).

Hence, the study has been executed under the following objectives.

1. To examine the sociolinguistic functions of Urdu-English code-switching in the dialogues of *Zindagi Gulzar* Hai.
2. To analyze the challenges faced in translating these bilingual dialogues while maintaining their pragmatic, emotional, and cultural significance.

In the same way, the significance of this study lies in bridging the gap between sociolinguistics and translation studies within the context of South Asian media. By analyzing Urdu-English code-switching in *Zindagi Gulzar Hai,* the research provides insights into how language choice reflects identity, power dynamics, and emotional depth. Furthermore, it contributes to understanding the limitations and responsibilities of translators in dealing with multilingual texts. The findings will

be valuable for linguists, translators, subtitlers, and media professionals aiming to accurately represent bilingual discourse in translated media, ensuring both linguistic fidelity and cultural dimensions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Riaz et al. (2021) examined the representation of women in the Pakistani television drama *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* using a qualitative approach. The researchers collected data through interviews with playwrights and media professionals to gain insight into how women are portrayed in mainstream media narratives. The objective of the study was to critically analyze how television dramas, particularly *Zindagi Gulzar Hai,* shape public perceptions about gender roles and the status of women in Pakistani society. Employing thematic analysis as their primary methodology, the study found that female characters are frequently depicted in stereotypical roles, such as homemakers or subordinate professionals, and are often shown as emotionally dependent and socially restricted. The researchers concluded that despite evolving societal roles, television content continues to reinforce traditional gender norms, limiting the portrayal of empowered or authoritative female figures in mainstream media.

Iftikhar et al. (2024) conducted a comparative qualitative study using content-based data drawn from the full scripts and narrative arcs of the dramas *Zindagi Gulzar Hai and Kankar.* Their objective was to analyze how Umera Ahmed's work portrays women's empowerment, character development, and societal gender norms across both serials. Employing a comparative content analysis methodology, the authors examined themes of toxic masculinity, gender roles, and transformation of female protagonists. Their findings reveal that while both dramas address patriarchal structures and women's agency, Zindagi Gulzar Hai emphasizes women's resilience within traditional frameworks, whereas Kankar offers a more overt critique of misogyny and supports transformative empowerment. The study concludes that both dramas significantly contribute to public discourse on gender equality in contemporary Pakistani culture .

Asif and Ahmad (2023) examined *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* alongside *Humsafar* to investigate how language use intersects with gendered identities in Pakistani television dramas. Drawing on textual data from selected drama episodes, their objective was to explore how language specifically English versus Urdu is coded to signal varying levels of female agency and morality in a postcolonial context. Employing textual analysis methodology, the study found a clear pattern: women who spoke English were framed as "bad women," associated with modernity and transgression, whereas Urdu-speaking women were portrayed as "good women," embodying traditional gender ideals. These language-gender binaries reveal how cultural perceptions of womanhood are mediated through linguistic choices, reinforcing patriarchal norms and narrowing the scope of female agency within media narratives .

Azam et al. (2024) conducted a critical discourse analysis using dialogue and narrative data from mainstream Pakistani television serials among them *Zindagi Gulzar* Hai to examine how media discourse reinforces gender stereotypes. The objective was to analyze how language and text in these dramas uphold patriarchal structures and gender hierarchies. Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study found that women characters are frequently confined to traditional roles such as wives, mothers, or homemakers while male characters dominate dialogue and action, using language to restrict female mobility and agency. Deviations from these norms are socially penalized within narrative worlds. The research highlights that symbolic archetypes of "strong women" frequently appear but are constrained by pervasive cultural expectations, which sustain gender inequality in media representation .

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to investigate the sociolinguistic challenges encountered in translating Urdu-English code-switching dialogues from the Pakistani television drama *Zindagi Gulzar Hai.* The data comprises selected bilingual dialogue sequences from the original script, along with their available English subtitles or translations. The selection criteria focused on scenes that display frequent or contextually significant shifts between Urdu and English. The analytical framework draws on Mayers Scotton (1993) markedness model of code switching along with Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity , providing a postcolonial lens to explore how code-switching serves as a site of resistance, negotiation, and identity formation in postcolonial Pakistani society. Through a close comparative analysis of the original and translated dialogues, the study examines the extent to which translations retain or erase the hybrid cultural meanings embedded in bilingual expression, highlighting how translation can either preserve or suppress sociolinguistic complexity in multilingual contexts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Headstrong aur liberal, mujhe yeh dono baatein kisi bhi aurat mein pasand nahi hai."
(Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 3).

This sentence exemplifies intra-sentential switching, where the English adjectives "headstrong" and "liberal" are embedded within an Urdu matrix sentence. These borrowed lexical items reflect Zaroon's internalization of Western ideals often linked to liberal feminism terms he uses disapprovingly to express his conservative view of women's roles. The English terms carry ideological weight and signal class-inflected judgments. In Mayer's model, such insertion shows bilingual competence used to highlight social identity and power positioning, especially in gender discourse. This line also Reflects Bhabha's ambivalence, where the speaker rejects these values but uses their language, showing internal cultural negotiation.

"Zindagi mein pehli dafa koi meri shield bana hai…" (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 8)

Here, the noun shield is an intra-sentential switch, standing out in an emotionally intense Urdu sentence. The English word symbolizes emotional protection an abstract concept that gains added emphasis due to its unexpected language switch. According to Mayer's model, this strategic insertion functions emblematically to dramatize vulnerability and gratitude. The code-switch serves as both an emotional marker and a metaphorical elevation of the Urdu sentence's sentimental tone. While according to Bhabha's hybrid theory this line suggests emotional empowerment through Western language in a South Asian relationship context.

"I had no idea that you would look so beautiful while being pregnant." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 12)

This is a classic case of inter-sentential switching, where a full English sentence is used. In the context of Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Zaroon uses this line to express admiration with emotional distance and sophistication. According to Mayer's model, such switching may reflect a moment of role-shifting from a culturally conventional husband to a more global, romantic persona. It also marks intimacy and modernity, often found in educated, upper-middle-class discourse.

"Maybe your eyes are deceiving you." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 12)

Again, this is an inter-sentential switch, but more notably a tag-like insertion used in a playful, teasing tone by Zaroon. The line employs a high level of linguistic fluidity, illustrating Mayer's view that bilinguals can use switching for stylistic effect, emotional modulation, and humorous intent. The choice to use English in a flirtatious moment reflects the character's intellectual and elite identity. Here, the line reflects Bhabha's hybridity, creating a "third space" where local

Pakistani identity is expressed through a global linguistic medium. This fusion subverts cultural boundaries, blending traditional context with modern, Western-influenced expression.

> "…But if it's deception, then I'm okay with it because it couldn't be a more beautiful one." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 12)

This continuation of the English narrative demonstrates inter-sentential switching, maintaining a coherent English thread across multiple lines. In Mayer's framework, sustained code-switching can signal solidarity and emotional climax. Here, the monolingual stretch in English serves a poetic and expressive function, while also reflecting the character's educated background and emotional transformation within the romantic context. It also shows cultural fusion in love language Bhabha's third space where East and West converge in emotion.

> "Tum always emotional ho jaati ho, even when main sochta hoon ke situation manageable hai." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 13)

This is a clear example of intra-sentential switching with multiple embedded English lexical items: always emotional and manageable. The frequent switches show Kashaf's cognitive fluency in bilingual construction and reflect her middle-class educational background. According to Mayer, such switching emphasizes specific emotional nuances and aligns with sociolinguistic functions like asserting intellectual authority or coping with emotional complexity. While, from Bhabha's perspective it blends Western rationalism with local emotional discourse showing fragmented identity construction.

> "I don't want conflict but I won't apologize just to keep the peace." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 16)

A full sentence in English indicates inter-sentential switching, reflecting emotional distancing and a rational, Western-style conflict resolution approach. In Mayer's framework, such shifts signal identity positioning Zaroon is asserting maturity and moral clarity using English, the language of educated authority.

> "That's exactly why I need closure aur peace of mind." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 16)

Intra-sentential switching is visible with the English noun phrases closure and peace of mind. These terms, loaded with psychological and therapeutic connotation, are hard to translate without loss in tone. In Mayer's model, these switches express Kashaf's emotional precision and her gradual navigation of modern emotional vocabulary rooted in English discourse.

> "I know you need me to understand you, but sometimes main pressure feel karta hoon." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 16)

This line is a hybrid, with intra-sentential switching where main pressure feel karta hoon blends an Urdu matrix with an English noun and verb (pressure, feel). This portrays bilingual resourcefulness. According to Mayer, this hybrid switch expresses internal stress while maintaining expressive clarity, suitable for a character negotiating emotional vulnerability.

> "Main compromise nahi karungi, my values, my self-respect." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode,18)

This mix of intra- and inter-sentential switching uses English nouns and a full English clause to emphasize agency. Kashaf's assertive tone is reinforced through English, the symbolic code of empowerment and self-definition. Mayer's model would frame this as emblematic switching reflecting identity assertion and resistance.

> "Let's communicate clearly no assumptions, just transparency." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode,18)

Inter-sentential switching plus tag switching with the lexical noun transparency. English is used as the dominant language for clear, rational discussion. This aligns with Mayer's model, where switching indexes pragmatic function in this case, conflict resolution using formal, precise English discourse.

"Tumhari ambition meri bhi hai, I want you to shine." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode,19)
This line combines intra- and inter-sentential switching. The use of ambition and I want you to shine portrays both admiration and empowerment. Per Mayer, this switching reflects solidarity and emotional alignment, reinforcing Zaroon's supportive identity.

"Don't misjudge me because of misunderstanding." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 19)
A full English sentence ending with a repeated English noun. This is inter-sentential switching, relying on misjudge and misunderstanding terms from psychological and interpersonal domains. Mayer would view this as strategic invoking English to assert cognitive control and correct misperceptions.

"I promise, no more games, just honesty." Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 20).
Another inter-sentential switch, where English conveys moral clarity and emotional seriousness. The noun honesty functions as an ethical anchor. Per Mayer's framework, such switches index sincerity, with English used to convey high-stakes emotional commitments.

"Presentation ke liye I need a strong opening, something impactful." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 20)
A classic case of intra-sentential switching within an academic/professional context. The embedded English structure reflects code preference in formal domains. According to Mayer, such usage denotes domain-based switching, where English dominates academic discourse, often indicating education level and class.

"This is about mutual respect, not just tradition." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 22)
A full English sentence where code-switching expresses ideological contrast between modern values (mutual respect) and traditional roles. Mayer's model would categorize this as motivated switching to emphasize generational/cultural transformation.

"Sometimes my heart wants closure, and sometimes it wants forgiveness." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode 23)
Entirely in English, this line fits inter-sentential switching, with therapeutic terms (closure, forgiveness) that lack direct Urdu counterparts. Per Mayer, this is emotionally loaded switching used for internal monologue or psychological reflection, English becomes the language of introspection.

"Stop defending yourself, I'm listening now." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 25)
Full English again, denoting inter-sentential switching. Zaroon's use of English aligns with a shift in relational power, moving from confrontation to empathy. Mayer's model recognizes this as stance-taking switching, offering validation through English.

"Life has taught me resilience and that's my key strength." (Zindagi Gulzar Hai, Episode, 26).
Here, the emotionally rich concept resilience is embedded within an English phrase inter-sentential and emblematic. Kashaf claims emotional agency using psychological vocabulary rooted in English. According to Mayer, the switch marks symbolic empowerment and narrative closure.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The analysis of *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* reveals complex patterns of code-switching between Urdu and English, functioning as a key tool for identity construction, negotiation of power, and expression

of social roles. Several sociolinguistic challenges emerged when examining the English translations (subtitles and dubbed versions):

1. Marked vs. Unmarked Code Choices Disrupted in Translation

Using Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, it was observed that characters used English as a marked choice to signal education, modernity, or elitism, while Urdu functioned as an unmarked code, aligning with social norms and cultural intimacy. For instance, Zaroon's use of English in conflict situations often marked a shift in power or superiority. However, in the English translation, the shift between marked and unmarked codes was flattened, thereby erasing the socio-pragmatic intent behind the code-switching.

2. Hybrid Identity Construction Obscured

Through the lens of Bhabha's Theory of Hybridity, characters like Kashaf and Zaroon reflect the 'third space' a hybrid linguistic identity that challenges the binaries of East vs. West or traditional vs. Modern. This hybridity, evident in their fluid alternation between Urdu and English, was lost in the translated version, which failed to capture the cultural ambivalence and in-betweenness represented in their speech patterns.

3. Translation Erased Gendered Language Dynamics

Female characters often used Urdu to assert moral authority or emotional depth, while male characters used English to assert dominance or rationality. This gendered use of language became linguistically neutral in translation, thus erasing the layered power dynamics and social commentary inherent in the original dialogues.

4. Cultural Concepts and Pragmatic Functions Misrepresented

Certain culturally embedded expressions (e.g., "tum jaise larkay", "amma keh rahi hain") carried deep cultural resonance and contextual nuance that did not translate effectively into English. The translated versions often lacked the emotional, cultural, or relational undertones, diminishing the authenticity of social relationships and cultural references.

These findings highlight that translating code-switched dialogues is not merely a lexical or grammatical task, but a sociolinguistic and cultural act that requires sensitivity to power structures, identity performances, and symbolic meanings.

Using Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model, the study found that characters strategically chose languages based on expected social norms. The markedness of English as a prestige language served to construct elite or dominant identities, whereas Urdu as the unmarked choice reinforced cultural belonging. However, translation practices ignored these marked distinctions, resulting in a monolingual rendering that flattens the rich social semiotics of bilingual interactions.

In parallel, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity sheds light on how characters inhabit a linguistic third space simultaneously local and global, traditional and modern. This hybrid identity challenges fixed notions of culture and self. Yet, in translation, this dynamic hybridity was replaced by homogenized dialogues that reflect neither the tension nor the coexistence of multiple cultural identities.

The drama's bilingualism functions not only as a reflection of postcolonial identity but also as a discursive strategy to challenge power hierarchies. Translating all dialogue into English removes this tension and undermines the authenticity of the characters' experiences, particularly in a society like Pakistan where language is a key marker of class, gender, and education.

The study underscores that translation must go beyond literal equivalence. Translators should aim to preserve the symbolic functions of code-switching perhaps through selective retention of Urdu

words, use of glosses, or footnoting cultural terms especially when dealing with postcolonial, multilingual media texts like *Zindagi Gulzar* Hai. This approach would help maintain the sociolinguistic richness and hybrid identity that define such works.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the intricate sociolinguistic challenges involved in translating Urdu-English code-switching in the Pakistani drama *Zindagi Gulzar Hai.* It demonstrates that code-switching in bilingual dialogues is far more than a stylistic feature, it is a powerful tool for constructing social identity, expressing cultural hybridity, and negotiating class, gender, and emotional nuance. However, translation into monolingual English often strips away these layered meanings, leading to a loss of socio-pragmatic depth and cultural authenticity. By employing Mayers Scotton (1993) markedness model and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity, the research reveals that traditional translation approaches may fall short when dealing with hybrid linguistic practices. Therefore, there is a pressing need for translation strategies that are culturally aware and context-sensitive, especially in multilingual media contexts. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of preserving the performative and symbolic functions of code-switching in translation to ensure that the richness of bilingual narratives is not diluted or lost in the process of cross-cultural communication.

REFERENCES

Asif, D., & Ahmad, M. (2023). Good woman, bad woman: Language, gender and agency in Pakistani TV dramas. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 203–210. https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2023(4-I)19

Azam, L. A., Shaheen, F., Iqbal, M., & Jahan, M. (2024). Deconstructing portrayals of women in Pakistani television: A critical discourse analysis of gender stereotypes. *International Journal of Contemporary Issues in Social Sciences,* 3(3), 3649–3664.

Bhabha, H. K. (1994). The location of culture. Routledge.

Hamid, M., & Fayaz, S. (2025). The role of code-mixing in identity construction in Pakistani television dramas: A stylistics perspective. *Journal of Applied Linguistics & Studies,* 3(3), 4025–4042.

Iftikhar, A., Aziz, S., Sarwer, S., & Sagheer, I. (2024). A comparative study of two dramas written by Umera Ahmed: Zindagi Gulzar Hai and Kankar. *Pakistan Islamicus (An International Journal of Islamic & Social Sciences)*, 4(1), 207–220.

Kanwal, N., Shahnaz, A., & Zahra, N. (2020). Discerning the functions of Urdu–English code-switching in talk shows. *Pakistan Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1(2), 225–230.

Khan, A. R., Ahmad, A., Nawaz, R., Shah, U., & Itbar, K. (2022). Code-switching and code-mixing: A textual analysis of Wajahat Ali's The Domestic Crusaders. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology,* 19(1), 502–512.

Khan, U. A. (2025). Exploring code-switching and code-mixing in classical and modern Pakistani dramas: A Labov–Bourdieu analysis. *International Premier Journal of Languages & Literature,* 3(2).

Nawaz, M. H., Yali, Z., & Ikhlaq, M. (2023). The sociolinguistic landscape of language representation in Pakistani television dramas: A critical discourse analysis. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review,* 7(4), 499–510. https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-IV)43

Qureshi, M. S. D., Irfan, F., Zaman, S., & Mehmood, H. (2023). Impact of Pakistani Geo and Hum TV dramas on language and dressing of women. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences,* 11(2), 1850–1857. https://doi.org/10.52131/pjhss.2023.1102.0487

Riaz, M. (2019). Language variation: Code-mixing and code-switching in Pakistani commercials. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies,* 15(2), 411–419.

Riaz, S., Iftikhar, M., & Aslam, S. (2021). Revisiting television in Pakistan: A case study of women representation in Pakistani television drama Zindagi Gulzar Hai. *Jahan-e-Tahqeeq*, 4(3), 539–550.

Shah, M. I., & Zaib Un Nisa. (2024). The role of Urdu–English code-switching in mitigating disagreement: A content analysis of Pakistani political talk shows. *Migration Letters,* 21(S10), 1310–1329.