

CODE-MIXING AMONG BILINGUAL ALBANIAN ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS

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Abstract

Research on code-mixing between the English language and different first languages has been conducted in many countries. There are studies which focus on the linguistic aspect, as well as others which analyze it from the social aspect. Using English language has become more than normal and as such requires more research. The growing inclusion of English vocabulary in the spoken Albanian language among young people is the reason for conducting this research. The main aim is to see if young people in Macedonia and Kosovo create a new personal and social identity because of code-mixing with English words in their everyday communication. The use of code-mixing in bilingual communities it is not only a means of communication, but it reflects self-discovery, modern identity, and the sense of belonging.

The methodology of this study includes a survey conducted with college students in the two countries mentioned earlier. The tool used is a Likert scale questionnaire, aiming to find the frequency of code-mixing, situations when it happens, motives behind it, and the perception of identity among young people. There is also a thematic analysis of open-ended questions. From the sociolinguistic aspect, the use of English as a prestigious language is related to evident sense of modernity among young people, who often choose to use code-mixing to show a certain desired global identity.

Keywords: *code-mixing, bilingual, identity, sociolinguistics.*

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, due to globalization, the development of technology and social media has widely affected the way individuals communicate and build their language identity. English Language, as an international language, has entered almost every society, being used for education, employment and intercultural communication. This feature of being the dominant language in the world, was given to English language since World War II, when it emerged as the language of international currencies of technology and commerce (Hutchingson and Waters, 1987, as cited in Skenderi & Ejupi, 2024).

From the Albanian perspective, especially among university students in North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania there is a noticeable increase in code-mixing between Albanian and English in everyday communication. This phenomenon is not sporadic or limited in certain fields, but is part of the daily discourse of young bilinguals. Bilingualism has been defined by many researchers, but in general it is seen as an ability of a speaker to produce utterances in another language (Huttner, 1997; Ahmad, F., Mahmood, A., & Shahid, M. A., 2023;).

However, the questions arise when we ask to what extent a person uses two languages (Mackey, 2007). While dealing with code-switching and code-mixing from the psychological aspect, as researchers, we face problems with terminology and their meaning. We come across different concepts, but sometimes they contradict each other, which makes it unclear the limit where one concept starts and the other one ends. Many researchers consider it as a single phenomenon, or as concepts interrelated. However, Franzagrosian and Bing Li (2013) (as cited in Draçini, 2018) have defined code-switching as complete passing from one language to another one during the communication, where the speaker commits a clear transition in another language and then comes back to L1.

In sociolinguistics, code-mixing is defined as using elements from two languages within the same sentence (Harya, 2018). Myers-Scotton (2017) believes that code-mixing is not an occasional form of language use, but follows specific rules, which are structural and pragmatic. Other researchers analyze the phenomenon from a grammatical perspective, seeing it as a social practice, which reflects power relation, prestige, and identity. So in terms of sociolinguistics, again, code-mixing is closely related to the concept of identity. Identity is not considered as a fixed category, but as a dynamic process which is built and rebuilt through social interaction. Using English within Albanian discourse can serve as a means for expressing modernity, modernism, belonging in a global community, and signaling academic and cultural competence. In this sense, language becomes a symbol of social and cultural capital.

According to the theory of linguistic capital of Bourdieu (as cited in Asquith, L. 2019), languages and language varieties have symbolic value in the social market. English, as a global prestigious language, represents a form of capital that can increase the social status of an individual. For Albanian bilinguals, using English in communication can be perceived as a sign of competence, openness through the world, and orientation towards modernism. Nevertheless, this practice can be followed with social judgment, creating tensions between the pride in bilingualism and criticism for overuse of English.

Different international studies have shown that code-mixing is specifically popular among young people, both from rural and urban areas. In many situations, code-mixing serves as an identity strategy to create solidarity within the group and differentiate from our previous generations and to build a new hybrid cultural identity. Some studies say that code-mixing should not be seen as a lack of competence in one language, but as an indicator of language flexibility and communicative creativity. In the Albanian areas in the Balkans, the impact of English has increased widely after the 90s because of opening with the world, migrations, and higher education. Albanian youth has been exposed to content through English, through internet, movies, music, and social media.

As a result, many English terms have been integrated into daily discourse, often without being translated. Pride in EFL/ESL learning has not been researched enough, compared to other emotions such as anxiety and motivation (Dewaele et al., 2022). Similarly, studies that analyze systematically the correlation between code-mixing, pride in bilingualism, and the global belonging in contexts of Albanians are still very limited. In Kosovo, as a result of the political and historical events, young people have been exposed massively to English language, and as such, English is used almost as much as Albanian among young people (Thaqi, 2005). An important dimension in literature is the social perception towards code-mixing. Some researchers argue that overuse of foreign elements can be seen as a threat for linguistic purity or snobbism. On the other hand, the supporters of functional approach point that language is a dynamic system and the change is part of natural evolution. In this regard, code-mixing can be interpreted as a result of interaction between cultures and not as weakening of the national identity.

2. Methodology of research

This study used a mixed approach of analysis, meaning that the results were analyzed both statistically and qualitatively. Combining these two approaches offers a deeper understanding of the reasons behind code-mixing, such as being bilingual and also feeling as part of the global world that surrounds us.

The data were collected via an online survey that was shared electronically among young students at university level mostly from North Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania, through convenience sampling. The respondents' mother tongue is Albanian, but they speak English and as such are considered bilinguals. The instrument was a questionnaire with two parts, quantitative and qualitative. There were 15 items with a Likert scale, offering us the quantitative data, and 3 open ended questions which fill the need for qualitative analysis. The number of participants was 108. The study aims to answer the following questions:

RQ. 1. Is pride in bilingualism correlated with the sense of belonging to a global culture?

RQ.2. Is code-mixing an everyday practice among bilingual university students?

3. Results and discussions

This part gives an overview of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results. From what is shown in the figure below, we can say the positive correlation is statistically significant, moderate-to-large, and helps us understand that the greater the pride of bilinguals is, the stronger the sense of global belonging is.



The following table shows the descriptive statistics for code-mixing.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for Code-Mixing Identity Scale

Variable	N	M	SD	Skew	Kurt
Pride in bilingualism	108	3.70	0.94	-0.52	0.18
Sense of global identity	108	3.01	1.10	-0.13	-0.83
Feeling closer to other bilinguals	108	3.31	1.12	-0.72	0.31
Identity expression	108	2.91	1.05	0.06	-0.73
Expressive function of English	108	3.38	1.16	-0.47	-0.42

Results of the survey show that the strongest perception is connected to the idea that people are judged of overusing English language when they speak, which suggests a high social sensitivity toward code-mixing. These values also tell us that as a phenomenon, code switching does not appear as a neutral thing, instead of it, it is burdened with social nature. On the other hand, a value of (M = 3.01) personal identification through code-mixing and feeling of belonging in the global culture (M = 2.91) stand on a medium level, which suggests that for students code-mixing does not necessarily present a strong identity element, but rather a functional practice. As another point of the study, the feeling of pride for being bilingual, the value (M=3.70) is relatively high, showing a positive approach toward bilingualism.

In terms of gender, the value $p > .05$ shows us that there was no difference in perceptions between males and females when it comes to using code-mixing or identity perception. The contrast is very important on this part, it means that pride is widely shared, whereas global belonging is mostly contested. There is also a significant result that the feeling of global belonging has a stronger relation with identity expressing through code-mixing ($\rho = .670$, $p < .001$) compared to bilingual pride ($\rho = .514$, $p = .001$). Stronger correlation between identity expression and expressing function of English language ($\rho = .693$, $p < .001$) strengthens this thought. This result shows the respondents who believe that the use of English helps them to express better are the same ones who use code-mixing as a way to build and communicate their personal identity.

TABLE 2
Response distribution for PRIDE and GLOBAL BELONGING

Response	Pride	Global belonging
Strongly disagree	2	10
Disagree	9	29
Neutral	34	30
Agree	41	21
Strongly agree	22	7

A very important finding is also the lack of correlation between the awareness for judgment and bilingual pride ($\rho = .083$, $p = .393$), as well as between social judgment and global belonging. So, this shows us that they are aware that their use of English can be judged and seen as negative by others, but this does not affect their perception of identity.

TABLE 3 VARIABLES

Variable	W	p-value	Decision
Pride	0.8790	<.001	Non-normal
Global belonging	0.9075	<.001	Non-normal
Feel closer	0.8400	<.001	Non-normal
Identity expression	0.9118	<.001	Non-normal

Except the data, the qualitative part of the survey helps us come up with other analysis. Many participants described code-mixing as way to better and fully express emotions, communicate more effectively and reflect on their complex identity. One of the participants, said that code-mixing helps her express her identity by showing both sides of who she was, her being Albanian and proud, but also belonging to the global world too. The combination of the moments makes them percept code-mixing as normal, practical skill and wider possibility to express themselves through bilingualism.

In the open-ended questions, some of the answers were these:

In what situations do you usually mix English and Albanian? some of the answers were:

- S1. I actually mix alb and eng when i am in a society which provides me comfortness
- S2. When speaking to friends who also do the same thing.
- S3. Texting online
- S4. When i feel like one english word would explain the situation better or make it shorter than saying few words in albanian when i can say just one in english

How does code-mixing help you express your identity?

- S1. Code-mixing helps me express my identity because it shows the mix of languages that I'm part of.
- S2. It feels natural to switch between Albanian and English since both are part of how i communicate and connect with others my age.
- S3. When i use code-mixing it helps others to see that im connected to both local and global communities
- S4. I think that code-mixing helps me being cool and also i like being cool and special too
- S5. It just comes naturally
- S6. It does show that i know both languages but other than that it's not really about expressing mostly about finding the right words

What do you think code-mixing says about your generation?

- S1. People say we're an unserious generation
- S2. I think code-mixing makes us feel part of a modern generation
- S3. I think it shows that ky generation is open minded and connected to different cultures. And also i guess we switch between languages easily because unfortunately we grow up with social media, movies etc, in different languages
- S4. It shows that we are open-minded, global, and connected to different cultures

So, in these three open-ended questions, we can see that code-mixing dominates in informal situations, especially in conversations with friends, online communication, and in social media. Most of the students say that they use English when they can't find the right word in Albanian, when they discuss topics like technology, media, pop culture, or when they want to express their feelings easier in a more natural way. As far as identity is concerned, a considerable number of responses shows that code-mixing is perceived as a reflection of a bilingual identity and a modern one, also as an expression of global belonging, the Albanian one and the global one. However, there are students who see this practice as a simple, natural way of communication without mixing it with any identity.

In the third question, they mention the word *modern* and other forms of *modern*, like *modernism*, *modern world*, seven times. Also, the word *global*, including here *global* and *globalization*, are used 23 times, followed by the word *open-minded* nine times, and the word *judge* once, which means that they don't really think of judgment when they use code-mixing.

4. Conclusions

This study aimed to analyze the relationship between code-mixing of bilingual Albanian university students, pride in bilingualism, and the feeling of global belonging. The findings show that code-mixing is an acceptable practice and normalized in their communication, but its meaning goes further beyond a simple linguistic function. Initially, the results show that bilingualism is perceived as a positive value and as a source of personal and individual pride. Students see their ability to use two languages as an academic advantage, as well as professional and social one. This pride in bilingualism is not only correlated to linguistic competence, but also to the awareness of belonging in a broader reality, cultural as well as global.

Secondly, code-mixing does not necessarily appear as a direct and strong identity expression, but more as a functional practice which helps them find better words to express their opinions and emotions. Nevertheless, for parts of students, using it serves as a mean to build and communicate a modern identity, open and related to the world. In this sense, the language becomes a symbol to negotiate their position between local identity and a global one. Another aspect that shows up is the existence of social sensitivity toward code-mixing. Students are aware that the use of English can be judged by others, but this awareness does not affect sensitively in the way how they perceive themselves as bilinguals or in their feeling of global belonging.

This shows us that linguistic identity of young people is relatively stable and is not determined easily from the social pressure. Also, we can notice that the feeling of global belonging is closely related to the use of English as a mean to express themselves, not simply as pride in bilingualism. This suggests that global identity is not built only on the basis of knowing the language, but on the active way how it is used for communication to create connections and express them. For students who speak English language as a mean to fully express themselves in a more clear way, code-mixing becomes an integral part of their personal identity. In conclusion, code-mixing among Albanian bilingual university students should not be seen as threat for the national identity or weakening of the language, but as a reflection of new social realities that are coming. It represents a dynamic practice combined with global and local elements, creating hybrid identities that characterize the new generations.

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