How Code-Switching Affects Communications in the Indian Workplace

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Abstract

Multilingual interactions between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds are constantly occurring, especially in today's globalised society Code switching occurs when a speaker alternates between two or more languages or language varieties, in the context of a single conversation or situation. Milroy and Muyksen (1995) mentioned that code-switching is "the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation". This research is to gather and understand the information on code-switching and its effect in Indian workplaces as many Indians are bilingual with the capability of understanding more than one language. Code-switching occurs because at least one speaker wishes to redefine the interaction by moving it to a different social arena. It enables people to connect to one another and create a common bond where people can shed mutual similarities, helping in positive culture and boosts morale. The purpose of this paper is to explore the prevalence of code-switching in Indian workplaces and its various effects on professional communication, identity formation, workplace hierarchy, and team collaboration. We will also examine how code-switching can be both a resource for effective communication and a challenge for organisational cohesion.

Keywords: Multilingual, Linguistic, Communication, Corporate, Code-switching.

1. Introduction

Code switching is the process wherein a speaker switches between two or more languages during interaction with the other speaker. These alterations are generally made to influence the relationship between the speakers, suggesting that they share identities based on similar linguistic histories. The earliest recorded use of the term "code-switching" in print was published in 1953, in a chapter by Roman Jackson in Results Conf. Anthropologists & linguists, written with C. F. Voegelin, T. A. Sebeok, and C. Lévi-Strauss, as time progressed in the 1950s many scholars began considering code-switching to be a substandard use of the Languages, but as time progressed people and scholars began to accept this as a natural product of bilingual and multilingual language use. Code-switching is divided into three types: intra-sentential, inter-sentential, extra-sentential. Intra-sentential: Intra sentential code switching is a type of language switching that happens in the middle of a sentence, without interruption.

Inter-sentential: A linguistic phenomenon where a speaker switches between languages within a single sentence.

Extra-sentential: The insertion of a tag phrase from one language into a sentence in the other language.

Code switching in India.

In the Indian context, where linguistic diversity is a defining feature, code-switching becomes a crucial aspect of daily life discourse. Code-switching enables individuals to navigate the multilingual web of India, reflecting the intricate interplay of languages in various social, cultural, and educational settings. Grammar which is considered the backbone of a language is now being neglected. Rather, we combine or use code-switching to enunciate our point across to the other speaker. We use Hinglish with great pride for example," *Maine kal ek meeting attend kia*"(I attended a meeting yesterday) and similarly seen in Karnataka where people Code-switch between Kannada and English for example,"*nimma car illi park maduvudu sadhyavilla* ."(you are not allowed to park your car here).Code switching serves as a lens through which to examine cognitive, social and psychological aspects of the person.

Code switching in Corporate:

Researchers have seen language use and language switching between colleagues as well as customer/employee communications. One of the most famous research articles written about this topic was by Wodak, Krzyżanowski and Forchtner (2012) wherein he analysed the communication that occurs in European Union institutions mainly multilingual practices, the studies find that although there is a deep sense of power in communication, this power can be overcomed, specifically as a result of the multilingualism. Now when it comes into the Indian corporate sector there has not been any research specifically done hence this research paper. As a larger number of MNCS set up offices in the country the number of people who knew english was slowly increasing and slowly landing India to be the largest speaking population, due to this many people had to adopt English alongside their own native language which lead to code switching, hence when these individuals get jobs this eventually leads to code-switching prevalent in the Indian corporate sector.

2. Literature Review

There have been research papers on code-switching and its cultural impact like Thomas, Suneeta. "Code-Switching in Spoken Indian English: A Case Study of Sociopolitical Talk." Journal wherein the writer of this research talks about the influence of media on code-switching in the Indian culture for this they researched different Indian tv shows to better understand the medium of code-switching. De Socarraz-Novoa, A. (2015). Code-switching in a multilingual workplace which talks about code switching in the workplace and the principles that affect the reason for the community to code switch. While these talk about code switching and their effect on culture and the reasons as to why individuals code switch they do not give us a complete picture as to why code switching is prevalent in the corporate and to what degree it affects the management at the workplace. This paper will cover the degree the code-switching affects the management as well as the reasons as to why individuals prefer to code-switch at their respective workplace.

3. Research Methodology

In this paper, in order to analyse the role that code switching plays in the Indian corporate sector, a questionnaire containing 11 questions, the questionnaire was presented in the form of a google form which was then circulated to a group of individuals varying from senior management all the way to junior level management. Some key questions to tackle the theory of code switching and its prevalence in the Indian corporate sector.

Objectives:

1. Explore code-switching patterns and dynamics in Indian corporates.
2. Investigate the benefits and challenges associated with code-switching in Indian corporate.
3. To use the given data and identify the main reasons as to why individuals code-switch.
4. Understand how comfortable people are while code-switching.

Highlighting the key questions and the overall results of those questions to understand the usage of code-switching.

What is your position within the firm/workplace?

21 responses

- Top level management
- Middle level management
- Lower level management
- Prefer not to answer
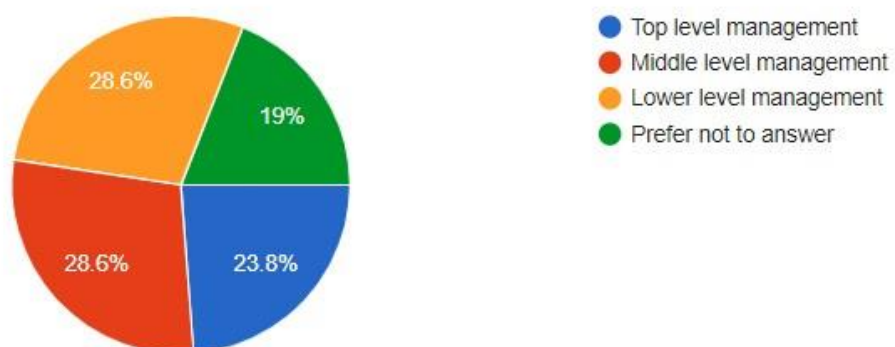
The initial question asked about the position of the employees within their firm and there was a well distribution of top level, middle level, lower level management with this in mind our other questions helped us understand more about how and when people code-switch.

Do you feel the need to adjust your language or communication style depending on who you are talking to at work?
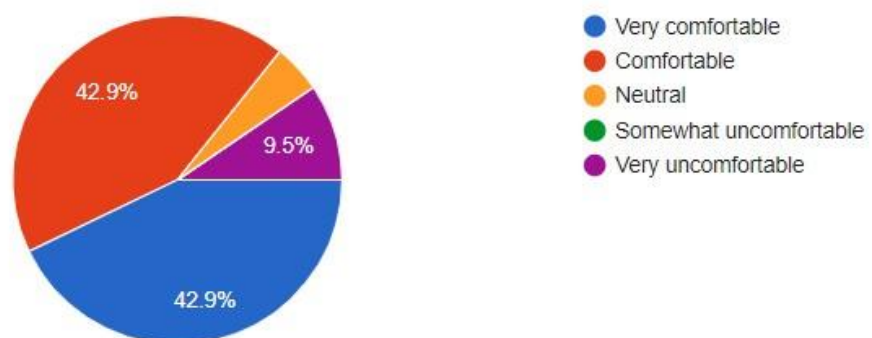
21 responses
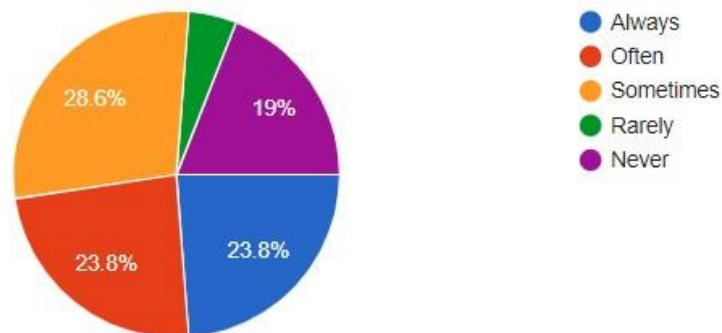
The follow-up question wanted to know if people needed to adjust their communication style depending on who they were talking to at work to which majority of the people either have to do it occasionally or do it on a frequent basis.

Do you feel comfortable switching between languages in professional settings?
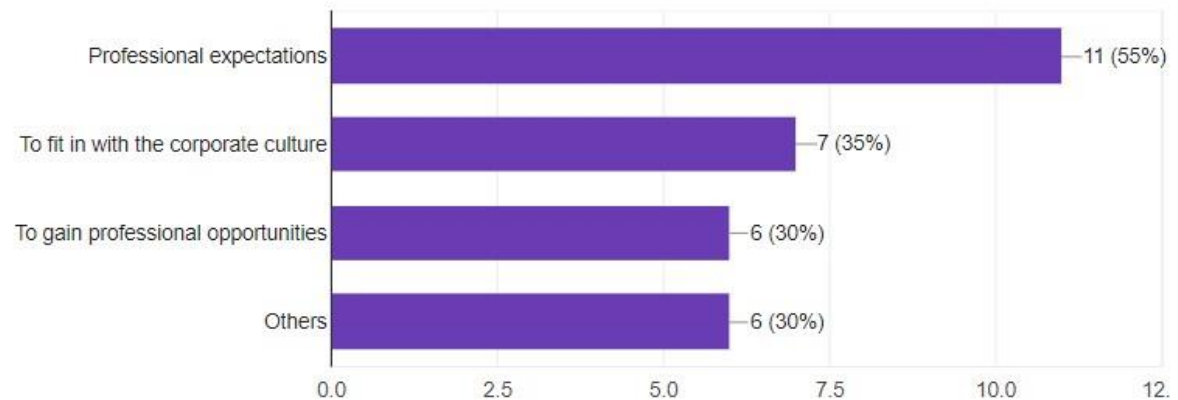
21 responses

This question is to know the comfort level of people switching languages during a professional setting.

What factors contribute to your decision to code-switch?

20 responses

For others please specify.

6 responses

Effective communication

For effective communication in the specific situation and persons involved

To ensure communication

Language is connecting key as a human it helps us to understand as a person and work together better

Internal conversations versus external such as with clients
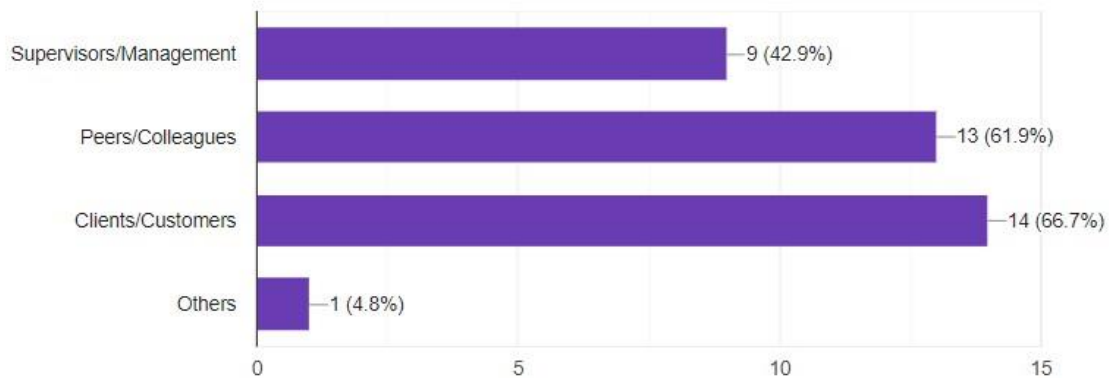
Actually there is no such need

This questions answers the factors or reasons to one's decision to code-switch and have given them four options with others being the user specifying their reason.

Which group or individuals do you often find yourself code switching the most? [Copy]
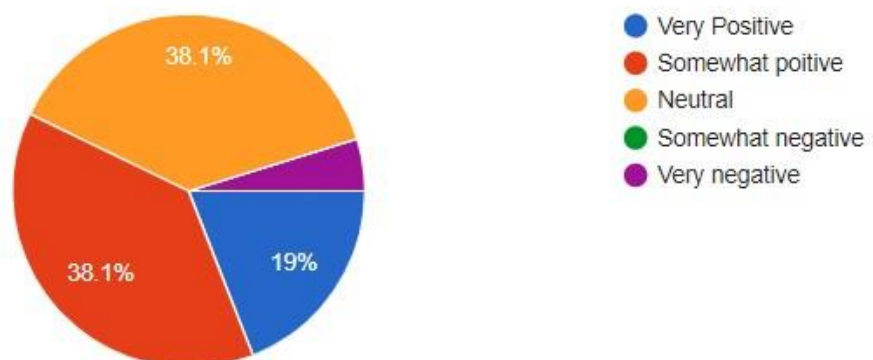
21 responses

Who primarily engages in code-switching in the corporate sector?

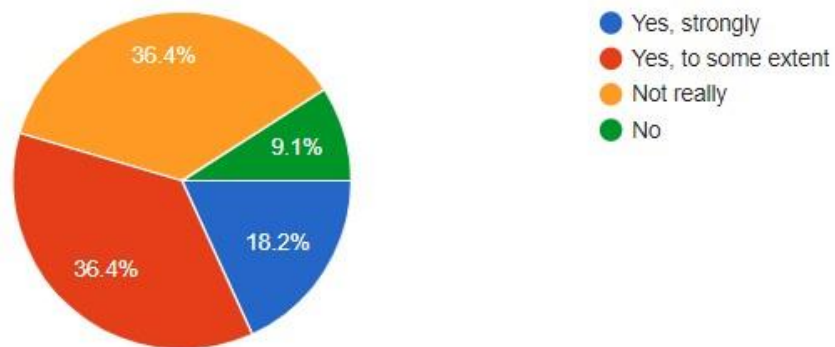Do you think code-switching has a positive or negative effect on your works performance?

21 responses

This explores whether code-switching has a positive or negative impact on performance.

Do you feel that you are expected to code-switch to fit within your organization's culture?
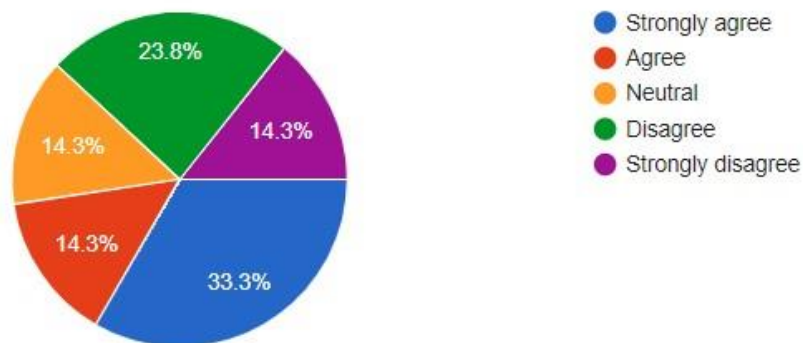
22 responses

This question gathers data on people's thoughts regarding the necessity of code-switching within their organization's culture.

Do you think code-switching affects your career advancement within the company?

21 responses

The final question asks whether or not code-switching affects one's advancement of career within their company.

4. Discussions

This research narrowed down the reasons why individuals code-switch, which are as follows:
situation, face saving, expression of raw emotion, Compartmentalization of work and private life.
Face saving: face saving is when polite language is used more than just societal nicety but instead a way that acknowledges other identities and so saves face. Face is the conception of self that each person displays interaction with others. When analysing the research, it was found that individuals when communicating about something that they do not want other people to hear or listen to, typically change languages in order to save the other person or reputation in the conversation.

Expression of raw emotion:
Raw emotions refers to an individual's instinctual reaction to a particular situation specifically focusing on verbal displays as a way of communicating. Typically, in corporate culture there are a lot of high stress situations which lead to individuals expressing out their raw emotions typically using their own native language as a vessel to communicate said information, for example:

Boss: *Our stock price has fallen by 3%.*
Employee: "*Damnit yar*".

Here it is seen that in this high stress situation the employee code-switches between Hindi and English to vent out frustrations hence showing that code switching is also used as an expression of raw emotion in the corporate world.

Compartmentalization of work and private life:
Code-switching of words, phrases or conversation, in general, constantly took place between the participants. Patterns appeared when participants would communicate about work and their private life. An in-depth interview was conducted with an individual who chose to remain anonymous, wherein they gave their insights about how they code-switch on a daily basis between English and Hindi in order to differentiate personal life and work life mainly stating that they communicate their work in English while talk about their personal life mostly in Hindi and code-switching between the two in order to handle the given situation. He also mentioned that code-switching allows an organisation to feel more human and authentic thereby allowing for better teamwork and collaboration.

Situation related switching:
Another major reason as to why individuals code-switched was revealed when an interview of a business owner in Bangalore was conducted, who also wishes to be anonymous he mentioned how although English is a very prevailing language many people still prefer to use native language with a hint of English vocabulary which results Hinglish (hybrid language. Hinglish (हिंगलिश) is a language that combines words from the English language with those of South Asia), Kanglish (Kanglish is a mix of Kannada and English, and is a macaronic language that has been developing since the mid-1990s) etc, another important factor they mentioned was that they would switch languages based on the situation they were in and what the client or customer is comfortable with. They also mentioned that on average they switch between 6 to 7 languages daily to accommodate situations and client requests, but all major and important communication is done in English. This interview visualises another reason as to why individuals code-switch.

5. Limitations

The great language diversity that exists in India makes it difficult for conclusions about code-switching in the corporate sector to be universally applicable. The incidence and patterns of code-switching may vary greatly due to the number of languages and dialects that are spoken in various communities and areas. Cultural distinctiveness becomes apparent as an additional important factor to take into account, since the existing study might not fully reflect the variety of cultural effects influencing code-switching

behaviours. To fully understand the many intricacies of cultural norms and expectations that contribute to the dynamic nature of code-switching in India, more research is necessary.

6. Conclusion

The study reveals that code-switching in the Indian corporate sector is a rich linguistic diversity to accommodate for the three meanings that arose from studying these participants illustrate unspoken norms of when code-switching should or should not occur. It appears to be significant in relation to the aspect of personal relationships within the workplace as well as high stress situations where at times participants prefer to code switch to their native languages to communicate their point across.

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