

AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE VARIATION IN SOUTH ASIAN TALK SHOWS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the sociolinguistic variation in two South Asian celebrity talk shows, *Koffee with Karan* (Indian) and *Tonite with HSY* (Pakistan). Talk shows provide a semi-natural conversational environment where speakers continuously adjust their linguistic choices according to social context, audience expectations, and identity performance. The study deals with the key features of sociolinguistic inquiry, including patterns of code-switching between English/Hindi, lexical choices, style shifting, discourse markers and level of formality in addresser forms. The study uses a qualitative method and adopts Labov's framework of language variation. This study contributes to sociolinguistics, media discourse analysis, and South Asian language studies. Data is collected from selected episodes from both shows, revealing that English language functions as a linguistic capital, while Urdu and Hindi languages contribute to cultural identity construction. Selected episodes from these shows are analyzed to examine how guests and hosts negotiate social identity, prestige, and power relations through language use. Additionally, hosts play a significant role in shaping linguistic style through questioning patterns and interactional control. The finding of this analysis show that both celebrities reflect their own cultural variation, and switching in the utterance is not random; it is systematic, conditioned by social factors such as celebrity status, interactional contexts, and professional identity. Switching between languages does not merely emerge as a bilingual practice but also as a symbolic resource for constructing modernity, intimacy, authority and humor. Code switching also reveals similarities and differences between Pakistani and Indian media discourse in representing elite urban speech styles.

Keywords: Language variation, code switching, South Asian, talk shows, identity.

1 INTRODUCTION

Language is a complex structured system of communication; it is not a uniform or neutral system used by human beings to convey emotions, ideas, thoughts information, and even intentions. According to Labov (1972), language varies systematically, not randomly, according to social factors such as class, age, gender, and context. As sociolinguistic is a field concerned with these

patterns of language variation, how speakers use linguistic resources to construct identity, and how they communicate according to social setting, formal or informal, understanding how linguistic choices show social identities and power relations. South Asia is characterized by widespread bilingualism and post-colonial linguistic hierarchies that offer a rich context for

investigating language variation. In multilingual societies, people who know more than one language often manifest through code-switching, code-mixing where speakers communicate or alternate between two languages with in a single utterance. In South Asian societies, English plays a significant role; it occupies a particular position as a legacy of colonialism. Switching between languages indicates prestige, education, and upward mobility, particularly among the urban elite (Kachru, 1938). In every field of life, language plays a major role, like medicine, law, administration, journalism also in media context, English is often mixed with indigenous languages such as Urdu and Hindi producing distinctive bilingual speech styles that reflect both local identity and global affiliation. Most probably celebrity talk shows provide an ideal picture for observing the patterns, as they feature spontaneous yet socially meaning full interaction among elite speakers in a public setting. Talk shows provide a site for naturally observing language occurrence it shows how spontaneous interaction with public reflect language variation. Language use in South Asia, talk shows emerged as influential platforms where public figures, media personality's celebrities negotiate prestige, social positioning, and identity.

Televised interviews provide a conversational space where speakers naturally adjust the way they speak depending on the audience, the sensitivity of the topic, and the connection with the other participants. Not like the scripted dramas who are not natural adopting speaking way or strictly formal programs, these shows give a flexible site for spontaneous interaction. In these shows, hosts and guests smoothly move between informal and formal language, share experiences, express emotions openly, use humor. Because of this, this study provides an ideal site for sociolinguistic study. The study focuses on two popular South Asian celebrity talk shows: Koffee with Karan (Indian) and Tonite with HSY (Pakistan), both programs are best for observing phenomena of code switching, as these are featured film and television celebrities-based shows who regularly engage in English Urdu and Hindi code-switching but differ in cultural context, media context, and

linguistic norms. While in Pakistani show, Urdu often incorporates alongside English with in relatively formal yet intimate conversational style. On the other hand, Koffee with Karan reflects Indian urban environment categorized by widespread English usage mixed with Hindi expression.

These shows offer naturally occurring spoken data that allows for a systematic sociolinguistic analysis of language variation across national, gendered and social dimensions. This study draws on language variation examine how linguistic choices vary according to social setting, variables rather on stylistic features. By comparing India and Pakistan talk shows, present research contributes to the growing body of study on South Asian Englishes and bilingual media discourse. This study is grounded on theoretical foundation of linguistic variation by William Labov. Adopting this framework expands traditional sociolinguistic inquiry beyond everyday conversation into facilitated communication. Study aims to show that code switching and language change in diverse setting are not indicators of linguistic deficiency rather it reflects socially meaning and culturally embedded structures of elite bilingualism. Lexical choice made by hosts and guests contribute to the construction of humor, prestige, intimacy authenticity within televised interaction. Through a comparative approach, the study highlights how language operates as a maker of identity, class and gender with in contemporary South Asian media and also strengthen its contribution in share historical, cultural and linguistic connections, although their media industries mark different linguistic norms and social hierarchies. Investigating similarities and differences enables study of how media cultures influence language practices among urban elite.

1.1 Research Objectives:

- To examine how social context, including setting and formality affects code-switching.
- To look into the connection between code switching and power relations among characters.
- To examine how code-switching in broad coast speech measures social identity and status.

1.2 Research Questions:

1. How does code-switch functions as a variable in selected shows within Labovian variationism framework?
2. How does code switching vary across different social contexts and levels of formality?
3. How does code-switching happen across interactions involving power irregularities among characters' relations?

2 Literature Review

Language variation is one of the central areas of sociolinguistic, because language is deeply link with the society. People change their way of speech according to conversational roles and setting. Research has established that language variation is systematic and socially constructed. Foundational work of Labov (1972) reflects that linguistic variation associates with social variables such as gender, class and mainly context. This idea shifted the linguistic idealized analysis away and introduce real life language use. These concepts support televised discourse because the participants of the talk shows are aware of camera and public at the same time they try to maintain conversational spontaneity. With the passage of time the research expands from everyday conversation to media discourse, where different digital platforms provide contemporary site for linguistic analyses.

2.1 Language, Identity and Social Meaning

Language performs multiple functions; it not only provides information or is used for communication but also constructs identity. According to Eckert (Eckert,2000), Language variation not only shows demographic differences but also reflects identity performance and social practices. Moreover (Cameron, 1992) argue that language is shaped by social ideologies and power relations. Particularly, media institutions reflect cultural expectations regarding class, gender, age, and other social factors. In South Asia, contextual English has been studied as a postcolonial and prestige language. English was conceptualized in India as a part of the "Outer Circle," emphasizing its legitimacy as a localized variety rather than a deficient form (Kachru, 1938) More likely arguments has been extended to Pakistani English,

which also have its distinct developed language patterns (Rahman, 1990).

2.2 Code-Switching and Multilingual Communities

In multilingual communities' code-switching has been a major focus of sociolinguistic. It argued that it's a social practice shaped by speech communities rather than random alternation (Gumperz, 1982).Myers-Scotton (1993) argues language codes change; as the social setting or conversational role changes. English in the South Asia context symbolizes prestige and globalization, while vernacular languages show intimacy and cultural identity. Research on bilingual communities' shows that switching between languages is not random mixing but a meaningful strategy. Further studies show that in multilingual regions code-switching is common such as in South Asia where more than two languages coexist. Media discourse has increasingly attracted sociolinguistic obsession due to its role in shaping linguistic norms. Studies on talk shows reflect broader societal structures of language use, especially among elite speakers (Bell, 1991). Television celebrity shows provide a large number of opportunities for to semi spontaneous speech where speakers construct identity with in socially visible settings. Various studies are conduct that focus on code switching feature of bilingualism communities from diverse lenses a few find reasons of why speakers switch (Situmorang, 2023). A few focus on how code-switching functions in communication its process and the consequences of its occurrence (Kanwal, 2020).

2.3 Gender and Conversational Style

A significant attention is grab by gender in sociolinguistic. Jennifer Coates explains that conversational exercise reflects great gender ideologies, within societies. Earlier studies on television interviews show that female participants often encouraged to talk about emotions, friendship and personal life while on the other hand, it is expected for male guest to talk about social life, professionalism, and these differences show discourse markers.

2.4 Media Discourse

Media is an important field because it shapes how people communicate and think. Talk shows are the places where diverse factors connect like language, identity, and entertainment. Most of early studies focuses on political, gender, or critical discourse analysis. A study focusses on political talk show to investigate code switching patterns in diverse social setting to discover what motivate them to switch (Thomas, 2021) . A loop of research focuses on types of code switching to emphasis which type are used the most and what's the reason behind it (Meniang, 2023). Susan Reichelt investigates the fictional television series to examine the sociolinguistic construction of characters. The findings of the study show that fictional media shows real language variation and identity (Reichelt, 2018). Similarly (Rahman & Rahman, 2021) revealed that speakers mix languages strategically to maintain cohesion, to clearly convey ideas and make discussion more engaging. Language hybridization is also not random; it performs various functions in media platforms. Study on television discourse has investigated the authenticity of spoken language in media. AL-Surmi (2022) investigates television programs, reflect natural conversational features, that offer useful material for sociolinguistic. In addition, Al Anssari & Hadi (2021) analyze an American Tv show from a pragmatic lens; that shows discourse is rich with real life conversation.

2.5 Research Gap

Although, researchers have conducted many studies on code-switching but a comparative study of Pakistani and Indian shows remains limited. Existing studies focuses on one national context, while some do discourse analysis and pragmatic analysis. This study fills the gap of comparative variation of sociolinguistic analysis bilingual language use in India and Pakistani celebrity talk shows.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach for sociolinguistic analysis. The study focuses on identifying language variation and code switching in two South Asian celebrity talk shows. This study is grounded in the variationist

sociolinguistic frame work proposed by William Labov (1972), who observe how variations, in language is systematically related to social factors. A qualitative design is suitable because researcher aims to examine naturally occurring spoken language; to interpret how linguistic choices vary according to social variables such as social class. How code-switching functions as a sociolinguistic variable in selected television shows treat switching as a systematic linguistic variable shaped by social context rather than random bilingual behavior. A comparative research approach is adopted to observe differences and similarities in language use between Pakistani and Indian media contexts. The analysis of the study focuses on how speakers change linguistic patterns according to social identity, conversational role, and interactional setting.

3.1 Data Collection

Data for this study is publicly available televised talk shows on you tube which provide spontaneous, semi, formal conversational interaction among elite bilingual speakers. Data is drawn from selected episodes of selected shows *Tonite with HSY* (Pakistani English- Urdu) and *Koffee with Karan* (Indian English-Hindi) as these shows invite highly demanding celebrities who frequently engage in code switching and language mixing making them ideal for sociolinguistic investigation. A purposive sampling technique was used to select episodes that are linguistically rich and representative of gender and generational diversity,

Selected Episodes

Koffee with Karan: Season: 8 episode 1 Deepika Padukone, and Ranveer Singh

Tonite with HSY: Season: 4 Episode 4 Mahira khan and Hamza Ali Abbasi

3.2 Theoretical Analysis

The analysis is grounded in core sociolinguistic based lens of William Labovs language variation to examine how linguistic choices vary according to gender, age and social status this directly fits TV shows where speakers shift codes depending on interlocutor, power relations setting. According to

Labov (1972), speakers choose variants depending on social context, not by accident. Same speakers vary language according to situation, audiences, topic and identity. Speakers shift codes depending on interlocutor, power relations, settings, or emotional intensity. Data is analyzed by transcribed and coded. The analysis proceeded in three stages

- **Identification Stage:** Language variation and code switching were identified in the transcripts.
- **Coding Stage:** Linguistic features were coded according to established categories,
- **Interpretation Stage:** Patterns were interpreted using sociolinguistic theory, focusing on social meaning, not pragmatic intention.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

All data used in this research is publicly available and involves media personalities, eliminating concerns of privacy or informed consent.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents a comparative analysis of selected episodes from *Koffee with Karan*, an Indian talk show, and *Tonite with HSY* a Pakistani show. The analysis focuses on observable linguistic variation, particularly code-switching patterns, lexical choices, gender-based variation, and style shifting among elite bilingual speakers.

4.1 Linguistic Environment of Elite Talk Shows

Both talk shows operate within an elite, English-dominant media space, yet they remain embedded in local linguistic ecologies. Both hosts, Karan Johar and Hassan Sheheryar Yasin are themselves highly fluent bilingual speakers who control the flow of conversation and establish linguistic norms for the interaction. English functions as the default or unmarked code; Hindi and Urdu appear as an embedded or alternating code. These talk shows can be categorized as high-status bilingual interactional settings where speakers possess symbolic capital associated with English proficiency. However, the presence of Urdu and Hindi indicates that elite bilingualism in South Asia does not require linguistic purity; instead, it thrives on hybridity. Across both shows speakers

consistently move along a linguistic continuum, ranging from habitually to fully clausal code-switching. This variation aligns with Labov's (1972) claim that language variation is not random but correlates with social context, speaker role, and audience design.

4.2 Frequency and Distribution

Code switching is a defining feature of both talk shows, though its frequency and form differ in Indian and Pakistani contexts. In Indian talk show, code-switching occurs frequently but is often brief and stylized, usually involving short Hindi phrases embedded within English sentences. While in contrast, *Tonite with HSY* shows a higher proportion of intra-sentential and inter-sentential switching, stretches appearing alongside English discourse. For example, in Indian show *Koffee with Karan*, speakers often utter:

- That was a memorable movement of life *honestly bhariy*
- So, I decided she is the one, *ma pehly he chapel rakh deta hu*.

This utterance is produced while both guests were asked about their new beginning of life when they started to marry with each other in that period. Their tone becomes more casual and emotional; guest over warmly by shows their emotions. And the host himself also cannot control his emotions when he said, '*Ma he chapel rakh deta hu*, the gender-based variation can begin to be clearly seen as both the host and Ranveer Singh talk, and the female guest supports them. "When Ranveer said; *chapel rakh deta hu* and the element of prestige was clearly seen when host ironically said; what do you mean by chapel so, Deepika support and said" book me" in advance than shows echoes with laughter's.

While Pakistani shows like *Tonite with HSY* are structurally more extended?

- So, they called me and said'; "You got the part, *mazy ke baat* you got the part literally; I can't believe *Yee sb hova*.
- I still feel it a dream; I don't know why it's just happened. Mahira khan, while sharing the most iconic moments of her life. She uses gendered language

like tag questions and changed her language according to her settings. Before the utterance, she was quite smoothly using a normal and a formal tone but a sudden shift into informality has been observed clearly, when she said they called, me and said; you got the part, her tone became emotional and informal while interacting with interlocutor and then she said; *mazy ke baat* by switching

between the sentence it that reflects she made this choice to reflect her identity and prestige. In addition, she said "I can't believe *yee sb hova*," these patterns indicate that the English language dominates both programs; Urdu enjoys greater structural flexibility in Pakistani elite media discourse as shown in the following table.

Table 1: Contexts and Functions of Code Switching

Context	Language choice	Function
Professional discussion	English	Identity construction
Personal memories	Urdu	Emotional alignment
Humor	mixed	Viewers engagement

Table 2: Labov's Language Variation

Model	Description	Koffee with Karan	Tonite with HSY
Abstract	Speaker wants listener attention	Over multiple times <i>uffffffff tum log</i>	Yes, I am at <i>Humsafar ke liye Bombay thi</i>
Orientation	Set the scene and provide more context	And she wears white chicken <i>Kari like Sadighi ke Murat</i>	Finally said yes to Raees and <i>suddenly pta chla</i> he was outside
Complicating actions	Main body	You know it feels <i>like mera dil ka peat</i>	I have something good to tell you <i>Muja lgta</i>
Resolution	End of story	<i>Tera package to ma hu</i>	So, the man next to me show me <i>dusra chera</i>
Evaluation	Addition to story	<i>Kya ab tum competes kro gee</i>	I speak my mind because I realize <i>mtlb</i>
Coda	Summary of the narrative	Nice to meet you <i>yaar</i>	She made me realize I am very <i>raw jo mind ma aya kr diya</i>

As the selected framework focuses on language variation and code switching that is systematic and not random, table 2 shows how these models interpret their code-switching patterns and how when speakers of different regions talk in a formal shows, get in formal in the form of a personal questions about their life and guests pick these minor clues and totally change their professional

language to sound more casual by changing their lexical choices and gendered variation is more clearly seen often in the both shows. In both shows, hosts have asked questions from both guests but the males have dominated in conversation while females waited for their turn quietly. Code switching is also clearly seen in their conversation as both shows, reflect how celebrities

do code switching to show prestige and modernity and use their local language a few times to construct identity.

As in the table 2, the section of abstract Indian show, an utterance *over multiple times* is being said at the starting of the show to grab the attention of the listeners and also with this utterance, the phrase, *uffffffff* that sounds iconic *tum log*, it's not random, the host uses this to show a connection, a relation of closeness with the audience, while on the other hand, in HSY show when he asked Mahira about her famous project and Mahira said "yes, *mein Humsafar ke promotion ka liye*" *Bombay thi* it is also indicated that Mahira wants to connect with host and wants to grab the attention of viewers, it also designates a gendered based conversation as she uses more pauses and smooth accent in her utterance. In these shows, orientation of Labov's framework got the real attention, like in Koffee with Karan, Ranveer Singh gave a new content and talked about his love life that is the real scene of attention, he said at that spot "she wears chicken Kari" switching between the utterance and wanted to make a connection with the viewers by saying, "I decided *ye he hai wo, aur mera dil pigal gya*" "That type of conversation where English language always dominates for prestige and Urdu switching to show his cultural touch.

4.3 Language Variation

Both shows share an elite lexical set; their word choices, their accent, confidence, all reflect variation. Often Karan uses words like iconic, that's fabulous, while on other show, the host HSY, picking of highly impressive lexis's is impressive, this type of words and frequent changes in his accents according to situation and connectivity, these word patterns depict global professionalism and media identity. Local variation, also clearly seen when, in Karan's show, he said; what can we say? that what sort of word can it be, like..... *tharki* the word *tharki* is pure local and cultural, as he wants to find any word but could not. It shows the intensity of his emotions. HSY, while talking about Hamza Ali Abbasi's career uses the term "*jadu*" (you are the great person of resolution here) he also shows a

local touch, a cultural flavor. Such lexical items remain untranslated, indicating lexical nativization rather than borrowing lexical nativization due to lexical gaps.

The analysis of both studies indicates the Labov's principle of language variation: that switching is not random; it is socially conditioned by social factors. Use of English language, demonstrates global modernity, professional engagement, prestige and education, while Urdu/Hindi conveys emotional and cultural belonging. This aligns with Labov's (1972) framework that linguistic variation carries social norms and group affiliation. Findings also expose, that mostly style shifting across both shows reflects informal and formal linguistic styles. It describes how participants adjust speech patterns depending on conversational topic and interactional atmosphere. Participants shift their language when talking about their achievements, professional life or serious discussion, it encourages them to be more formal. While when, they talk about their experiences, personal life, they show humor and relaxed informal style of speech. This pattern of speech demonstrates Labov's claim of attention to speech where speakers consciously or unconsciously switch between codes depending on audience awareness.

4.4 Comparative Findings

The findings of the present study support sociolinguistic research that claims language variation depends on social context and situation. By using Labov's (1972) framework, the current study shows that language choices in South Asia are influenced by social factors such as conversational roles, identity, prestige and audience awareness. Similarity in findings have been found regarding previous studies in sociolinguistic that strongly corresponds with the work of Gumperz (1982), who claims that speakers use code-switching to convey social meanings. While in the present study, participants in both shows switch between English and Urdu/Hindi languages to express prestige, intimacy, emotional relation, and prestige. Gumperz also observed that switching between languages, functions as contextualization rather than a sign of linguistic

competence. In addition, in the current study, findings reflect cultural differences, language variation and gender-based language which specifies lexical diversity. Lexical choices of “*Namaste* and *Aslam-o- Alikum*” at the beginning of the show provide cultural flavor and also indicates a systematic structure before calling their guests. Hosts show a relation of closeness with their viewers, in both shows, formal questioning of hosts indicates an interactional shift towards informal conversation and guests switch their style from informal to informal as they see topic sensitivity, conversational tone, and personal life. While code-switching patterns are different in both shows, as Indian show reflects Hindi as minor switching like they all use the prestigious language, highly English-dominate conversation, and a few lexes of Hindi. While in *Tonite with HSY*, the show reflects a balanced version of both languages; the host uses both languages in a smooth way which enhance their connectivity with their viewers. Gendered based linguistic variation is transparently seen in both shows, as female guests’ show a higher frequency of expressive adjectives and more emotional switching this aligns with Labov’s finding that women often lead in stylistic variation. Male guests maintain longer English stretches in both shows leading linguistic accommodation, as they actively model bilingual behavior. These findings also correspond with Gumperz and Tannen (1979) that difference in speech patterns reflects broader sociocultural norms rather than biological distinctions. Comparative study reflects important cultural differences between both media discourses. In *Tonite with HSY*, the use of address forms and balanced bilingual speech shows cultural norms emphasizing courtesy and respect. On the other hand, *Karan’s* show promotes informality, rapid interaction, leading English discourse belong to urban multicultural identity. Although, the present study is different from previous studies because it uses Labov’s framework to analyze celebrity talk shows on television as generally, variationists focus on daily conversations and natural speech patterns, while the present research applies this framework on media communication, It also offers a South Asian comparative

perspective which has received limited attention in sociolinguistic research.

5. Conclusion

The sociolinguistic analysis demonstrates that language variation in *Koffee with Karan* (Indian) and *Tonite with HSY* (Pakistan) talk shows is systematic, socially conditioned, and culturally embedded phenomena. Code switching operates as a stable feature of elite South Asian media discourse, reflecting broader sociolinguistic spaces of social structures, class, gender and identity. The study reflects that language variation is an essential resource for social meaning-making in multilingual societies and is essential for ongoing negotiations between modernity and traditional context. By extending Labovian variations theory (1972), in media discourse, it contributes to show sociolinguistic enquiry beyond traditional community-based research settings. This discussion reveals that televised communication does not merely entertain viewers; but they also shape contemporary linguistic norms and social identities across South Asia. Moreover, the present study provides a comparative sociolinguistic analysis of code-switching and language variation in South Asian shows and several directions remain open for future research.

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