



Urdu–Hindi Language Interaction: A Study of Borrowings and Code-Switching

Muhammad Ali Raza

Abstract

Urdu and Hindi share a deep historical, structural, and cultural relationship rooted in the Indo-Aryan linguistic tradition. Despite their divergence in script, formal registers, and lexical preferences, everyday communication across South Asia reveals extensive interaction between the two languages. This study examines the dynamics of lexical borrowing and code-switching between Urdu and Hindi, focusing on sociolinguistic contexts such as media, education, and digital communication. Using secondary linguistic data and sociolinguistic literature, the paper highlights how political history, identity formation, and globalization influence language mixing. The findings suggest that Urdu–Hindi interaction is not merely linguistic convergence but a reflection of shared cultural space, evolving identities, and communicative pragmatism.

Keywords: Urdu, Hindi, Code-switching, Lexical borrowing, Sociolinguistics, Language contact, South Asia, Bilingualism

Department of English & Linguistics, University of Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan

Email: maraza@uok.edu.pk



INTRODUCTION

Language contact is a central phenomenon in sociolinguistics, particularly in multilingual societies. Urdu and Hindi present one of the most prominent examples of closely related languages shaped by shared grammar but differentiated by script, vocabulary sources, and socio-political histories. While Urdu draws heavily on Persian and Arabic, Hindi incorporates Sanskrit-based lexicon; however, spoken varieties often overlap extensively. In contemporary South Asia, mass media, Bollywood cinema, cross-border digital platforms, and migration have intensified interaction between the two languages. This article explores how borrowing and code-switching function as natural outcomes of bilingual competence and cultural proximity rather than linguistic erosion.

Historical Roots of Urdu–Hindi

Contact

Urdu and Hindi originate from **Khari Boli**, a dialect of the Indo-Aryan language family that developed in the Delhi and Upper Gangetic plains between the 12th and 16th centuries. This common linguistic base emerged through sustained interaction among local vernaculars, Persian-speaking elites, and Arabic influences introduced via Islamic scholarship. During the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods, Khari Boli evolved into a lingua franca used for administration, trade, and literary expression, laying the foundation for what would later be recognized as Urdu and Hindi. Court patronage played a decisive role in shaping linguistic differentiation. Urdu flourished in Mughal courts under strong Persian cultural influence, adopting the Perso-Arabic script and incorporating extensive

Persian and Arabic vocabulary, particularly in formal and literary registers. In contrast, Hindi increasingly aligned with Sanskrit traditions, especially during the 18th and 19th centuries, when Hindu reform movements emphasized Sanskritization as a marker of cultural and religious identity. British colonial language policies further institutionalized this divide by recognizing Hindi and Urdu as separate languages for administrative and educational purposes, reinforcing script-based and lexical distinctions. Despite this formal separation, mutual intelligibility at the spoken level remained largely intact. Everyday communication continued to rely on shared grammar, syntax, and core vocabulary, especially among non-elite speakers. This historical coexistence explains why contemporary Urdu–Hindi interaction is characterized by fluid code-switching and borrowing, reflecting a shared linguistic heritage that predates modern political and ideological boundaries.

Lexical Borrowing between Urdu and Hindi

Lexical borrowing between Urdu and Hindi is a long-standing and continuous process that reflects their shared communicative space and overlapping speaker communities. In everyday speech, both languages draw from a common pool of vocabulary that transcends formal linguistic boundaries. Hindi frequently incorporates Perso-Arabic words such as *duniya* (world), *khayal* (thought), *zaroorat* (need), and *insaan* (human) through sustained contact with Urdu in popular culture, urban interaction, and historical usage. These borrowings are especially prominent in informal registers, cinema, television dialogue, and interpersonal communication, where clarity and emotional expressiveness take precedence over linguistic purity. Conversely, Urdu has increasingly absorbed



Sanskrit-derived and modern Hindi vocabulary, particularly in domains shaped by education, science, administration, and mass media. Words such as *vidyalay* (school), *samaj* (society), *vikas* (development), and *swasthya* (health) are now commonly understood by Urdu speakers, especially younger and educated populations. This process has been accelerated by exposure to Indian media, digital platforms, and cross-border communication, where lexical choices are guided by accessibility and audience reach rather than strict adherence to classical norms. Importantly, lexical borrowing between Urdu and Hindi is not random but functionally motivated. Speakers select words that best serve communicative efficiency, social identity, and contextual appropriateness. While formal registers may still reflect ideological preferences for Persianized Urdu or Sanskritized Hindi, everyday usage reveals a pragmatic blending of lexical resources. This mutual borrowing underscores the resilience of a shared linguistic heritage and demonstrates how language contact adapts to changing sociocultural and communicative needs.

Code-Switching in Spoken and Media Discourse

Code-switching between Urdu and Hindi is a pervasive feature of everyday communication, particularly in informal spoken interactions and mass media contexts. In multilingual urban settings, speakers frequently alternate between the two languages within a single conversation or even a single sentence, often without conscious awareness. This fluid switching is facilitated by the high degree of grammatical similarity and shared core vocabulary, allowing speakers to move seamlessly between

linguistic forms while maintaining mutual intelligibility. In casual speech, code-switching serves pragmatic functions such as signaling familiarity, softening statements, or emphasizing emotional nuance. Media discourse plays a crucial role in normalizing and popularizing Urdu–Hindi code-switching. Television dramas, talk shows, and especially films—most notably Bollywood cinema—routinely employ a hybrid linguistic register that blends Urdu and Hindi elements. Dialogues are crafted to appeal to diverse audiences across national and linguistic boundaries, using Urdu expressions for emotional depth and poetic effect, while Hindi structures often provide narrative clarity. This media-driven hybridity reinforces code-switching as a socially acceptable and even prestigious communicative strategy. On digital platforms, code-switching has become even more pronounced. Social media posts, comments, memes, and online videos commonly use mixed Urdu–Hindi vocabulary written in Roman script, further dissolving script-based distinctions. In these spaces, code-switching functions as a marker of modern identity, youth culture, and transnational belonging. Overall, code-switching in Urdu and Hindi discourse reflects not linguistic confusion but communicative competence, demonstrating speakers' ability to strategically draw on multiple linguistic resources to express meaning, identity, and social alignment effectively.

Sociopolitical and Identity Dimensions

In South Asia, language choice is deeply intertwined with questions of national identity, religion, and political ideology, particularly in the case of Urdu and Hindi. Following the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, Urdu became closely associated with Muslim identity and Pakistani nationhood, while Hindi was promoted as a symbol of



Hindu identity and Indian nationalism. State policies, educational curricula, and official language planning in both countries reinforced this ideological divide, often portraying the two languages as distinct and oppositional despite their shared linguistic foundation. As a result, language became a powerful marker of belonging, loyalty, and cultural affiliation. However, everyday linguistic practices frequently challenge these rigid political constructions. In daily interactions, media consumption, and popular culture, speakers often prioritize communicative effectiveness and shared understanding over ideological purity. The widespread use of mixed Urdu–Hindi registers in films, television, music, and digital spaces demonstrates the persistence of a shared cultural continuum that transcends national borders. These practices reveal that linguistic identity is not fixed but negotiated, allowing individuals to express multiple social identities simultaneously—national, religious, regional, and generational. Moreover, younger generations increasingly view Urdu and Hindi as flexible resources rather than symbols of political opposition. Exposure to cross-border media and online platforms has weakened strict language boundaries, encouraging hybrid forms of expression that reflect cosmopolitan and transnational identities. Thus, while sociopolitical narratives continue to emphasize separation, actual language use illustrates convergence and continuity, underscoring the resilience of shared linguistic heritage in shaping identity across South Asia.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly disagree	4	10.0	10.3	10.3
	moderately disagree	3	7.5	7.7	17.9
	slightly disagree	2	5.0	5.1	23.1
	slightly agree	3	7.5	7.7	30.8
	moderately agree	11	27.5	28.2	59.0
	strongly agree	16	40.0	41.0	100.0
	Total	39	97.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	2.5		
Total		40	100.0		

80% participants in Table 4 believe that TV commercial with code switching at

Globalization and Digital Communication

Globalization and the rapid expansion of digital communication have significantly intensified interaction between Urdu and Hindi, reshaping traditional patterns of language use. Online platforms such as social media, video-sharing applications, messaging services, and blogs provide informal, transnational spaces where linguistic norms are less regulated. In these environments, users frequently employ **Roman script** instead of Nastaliq or Devanagari, effectively removing script as a barrier between the two languages. This shift has facilitated greater lexical exchange and encouraged a shared written form that is accessible to speakers across Pakistan, India, and the global South Asian diaspora.

Digital bilingualism has given rise to hybrid linguistic practices in which Urdu and Hindi elements are freely combined with English, producing fluid multilingual expressions. Younger users, in particular, adopt these mixed forms to signal modernity, creativity, and global belonging. Memes, hashtags, comments, and short-form videos often feature blended vocabulary and syntax, reflecting communicative efficiency rather than adherence to standardized language norms. These practices contribute to the emergence of new registers that function effectively within digital culture but may not align with traditional literary standards.

Importantly, digital communication has democratized language use by shifting authority away from institutions such as academia and state language bodies toward



everyday users. As a result, Urdu–Hindi interaction online reflects lived linguistic realities rather than prescriptive ideals. This evolving digital landscape highlights how globalization not only sustains but amplifies linguistic convergence, ensuring that Urdu and Hindi continue to influence one another in innovative and socially meaningful ways.

Summary

The interaction between Urdu and Hindi demonstrates that language boundaries are fluid rather than fixed. Lexical borrowing and code-switching are not signs of linguistic decline but adaptive strategies shaped by social context, identity, and communicative efficiency. In Pakistan and India alike, speakers navigate multiple linguistic resources to construct meaning in dynamic ways. Understanding Urdu–Hindi interaction offers broader insights into bilingualism, language contact, and the sociocultural forces shaping modern communication in South Asia.

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